

2025 Annual Report of the Congregation



Bethany Lutheran Church

15 West 14th Street

Spencer, Iowa 51301

(712) 262-2327

January 18, 2026

- 1. Call to order – Council President Russ Wright**
- 2. Opening Prayer - Pastor Erma Wolf**
- 3. Additions/Approval of the Agenda**
- 4. Review/approval of Minutes of the January 19, 2025 Annual Meeting - Discussion?**
Motion by: _____ **Second by:** _____ **Discussion/Voice Vote**
- 5. Review/Approval of the 2025 Annual Reports of Committees**
Motion by: _____ **Second by:** _____ **Discussion/Voice Vote**
- 6. Unfinished business**
- 7. New business:**
 - A. Approval of proposed budget – Treasurer Sandi Schmidt**
Motion by: _____ **Second by:** _____ **Discussion/Voice Vote**
 - B. Completion/approval of Ballot of Nominees for 2026 and beyond**
Motion by: _____ **Second by:** _____ **Discussion/Voice Vote**
- 8. Closing prayer - Pastor Erma Wolf**
- 9. Announcement of Council Installation - March 1, 2026**
- 10. Adjournment - Council President Russ Wright**

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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Annual Meeting Minutes

January 19, 2025 – 10:15 AM via Zoom® and in-person

Present: Bethany Lutheran Church Members. 33 in person at Bethany, 4 via Zoom ®

The meeting was called to order by President, Russ Wright.

Pastor Erma Wolf gave the opening prayer.

Additions/Approval of the Agenda: President Russ Wright asked if there were any additions to the agenda. There were no additions, agenda was approved.

Review/approval of minutes from the January 21st, 2024 Annual Meeting – No additions or corrections were noted. Motion to approve by Kent Baker, second by Denise Kramer Tolzmann. There was no discussion. Motion carried.

Review/Approval of 2024 Annual Reports of Committees: Motion to approve by Kent Baker, Second by Kristin Bensen. There was no discussion. Motion carried.

Unfinished Business – No unfinished business was presented.

New Business:

Approval of Proposed Budget – Treasurer Sandi Schmidt reviewed the treasurer's report and proposed budget for 2025. Sandi noted that Sunday giving is down. Factors include the flood and lost members. Total revenues include funds collected for the "Magic of Christmas" and the flood relief fund. The only change to the Proposed Budget for 2025 was a \$5,000.00 increase to Churchwide Relations. This increase comes after a request from St. Luke's Home and Services for \$10,000.00 from member churches. The heating and cooling systems at St. Luke are very old and showing signs of needing replacement. President Russ Wright asked if there was any discussion. Hearing none, a motion was made by Francis Hiemstra to approve the Treasurer's Report, second by Mary Marske. There was no further discussion. Motion carried.

Completion/approval of Ballot of Nominees for council for 2025 and beyond – Nominations for three positions (3-year terms) on the board are Candy Huber, Sue Metcalf, Jacquelin (Jaci) Schrier, and Russ Wright. President Wright asked if there were any nominations from the floor. Hearing none ballots were passed out. Ballots were collected and counted. Candy Huber, Sue Metcalf, and Russ Wright were elected to 3-year terms.

Nominees for Ministry Team Chairpersons are, Candy Huber-Stewardship, Sue Metcalf-Evangelism, and Russ Wright- Fellowship. All chairpersons are to be elected for 3-year terms expiring in 2028. President Wright asked for nominations from the floor. Hearing none a motion

was made by Francis Hiemstra to approve the slate of nominees, second by Kent Banker. President Wright asked for discussion. Hearing none the slate of nominees was approved as presented.

President Wright asked for volunteers (2 are needed) to attend Synod Assembly as voting members. (Sioux City, June 13-14th, 2025). Sue Boblit and Kristin Bensen volunteered to attend.

Closing Prayer by Pastor Erma Wolf.

It was announced that Council installation will be Sunday, March 2, 2025.

Motion to adjourn by Randy Phillips, second by Sandi Schmidt. Motion carried.

2025 ANNUAL REPORT FOR BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH SPENCER, IA 51301

ANNUAL MEETING: JANUARY 18, 2026 – 10:15 AM

CHURCH COUNCIL & MINISTRY TEAM CHAIRS

Terms expire in January of the respective year listed

CHURCH COUNCIL

Position	Name	Term Expires
Council—Fellowship	Russ Wright, President	2028
Council – Properties	Paul Wick, Vice-President (resigned Nov 2025)	2026
Council – Secretary	Sue Boblit	2026
Council – Treasurer	Sandi Schmidt	2027
Council – Education & Youth	Randy Phillips	2027
Council – Evangelism	Sue Metcalf	2028
Council – Faith in Action	Shannon McAllister (resigned Dec 2025)	2027
Council – Stewardship	Candy Huber	2028
Council – Worship & Music	Denise Tolzmann	2026

MINISTRY TEAMS CHAIRPERSONS

Position	Name	Term Expires
Education & Youth	Sue Boblit	2026
Evangelism	Sue Metcalf	2028
Faith in Action	Shannon McAllister (resigned Dec 2025)	2027
Fellowship	Russ Wright	2028
Properties	Randy Phillips	2027
Stewardship/Finance	Candy Huber	2028
Worship and Music	Denise Tolzmann	2026
Financial Recorder	Connie Heien	Appointed

MINISTRY STAFF

Music Director ----- Elina Leander Ozolins
Custodian ----- Erick Phillips
Parish Secretary ----- Elizabeth Essick

2025 STATISTICS

Worship Services:

Average weekly attendance and online viewing: 127

Ministerial Acts:

Baptisms: 8

Confirmations: 1

Burials: 8

Marriages: 0

Membership:

Members transferred out: 5

Members received: 6

Baptized Membership: 1,344

Confirmed Membership: 976

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee for the Annual Meeting held January 2026 included:
Sue Boblit, Russ Wright, and Sandi Schmidt

The nominees for three-year terms on Bethany's Council include:

COUNCIL: (3 at-large positions)

SECRETARY:

MINISTRY TEAMS CHAIRPERSONS: (may or not be on Council)

Candy Huber – Faith in Action (3-year term to expire 2028)
_____ Education & Youth
_____ Stewardship
_____ Worship and Music

WESTERN IOWA SYNOD 2026 ASSEMBLY VOTING MEMBER: (Sergeant Bluff-April 17-18, 2026))

2026 NOMINATING COMMITTEE:

Executive Committee

The nominees listed above have agreed to be on the ballot. Other nominations are being sought during the Annual Meeting. Members are encouraged to please consider serving. A big 'thank you' to all who have helped, and will help us, fill these needs of Bethany.

BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

12/31/2025

FUND BALANCES

General Fund	\$166,637.00
Memorial Fund	\$38,488.70
Scholarship Fund	\$4,741.59
Campership Fund	\$9,596.22
Seminary Fund	\$33,299.48
Building/Properties Fund	\$294,727.72
Rental Property Fund	\$16,780.89
Thrivent Choice Dollars	\$21,056.08
CrossOver Fund	\$89,737.30
TOTAL FUND BALANCES	\$675,064.98

LIABILITIES

Deposits on Rental Houses	\$1,650.00
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BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

Revenues Collected

	2023	2024	2025
Sunday Offering:			
Envelopes	285,811	246,195	252,119
Loose Offering	3,334	1,397	2,188
Sunday School	0	0	0
Total Sunday Offering	<u>289,145</u>	<u>247,592</u>	<u>254,307</u>
Other Offering:			
Lenten Offering	993	1,160	386
Easter Offering	580	395	110
Thanksgiving Offering	42	202	132
Christmas Offering	3,386	5,501	3,353
World Missions	110	0	1,000
Local Missions	<u>7,275</u>	<u>343,400</u>	<u>1,865</u>
Total Other Offering	12,386	350,658	6,846
Other Receipts:			
Use of Church	825	1,110	150
Interest Income	<u>475</u>	<u>1,895</u>	<u>2,311</u>
Total Other Receipts	1,300	3,005	2,461
TOTAL REVENUES COLLECTED	<u>302,831</u>	<u>601,255</u>	<u>263,614</u>

Bethany Lutheran Church

2026 Proposed Budget

	2026 Budget	2025 Budget	2025 Actual
Board of Churchwide Relations	17,500	13,150	23,402
Board of Faith in Action	5,000	5,000	7,148
Board of Evangelism	1,000	500	830
Board of Stewardship	1,500	1,500	979
Board of Youth & Family Ministry	500	500	0
Board of Mutual Ministry	11,100	11,100	10,051
Board of Worship and Music	8,800	8,800	8,825
Board of Parish Education	6,500	2,000	4,771
Board of Properties	50,000	50,000	52,327
Board of Fellowship	600	600	140
Human Resources Committee	99,240	159,510	91,115
Technology Committee	2,500	2,000	1,196
Council Discretionary	500	500	100
Pastor Discretionary	500	500	0
Totals	<u>\$205,240</u>	<u>\$255,660</u>	<u>\$200,884</u>

Bethany Lutheran Church 2026 Proposed Narrative Budget

Churchwide:

ELCA Mission Support	\$5,500
St. Luke Chaplain Fund	\$5,000
Bible Camp Ministry	\$5,500
Synod Expenses	\$1,500

TOTAL: \$17,500

Faith in Action:

Room at the Table	\$2,500
Food Pantry/Upper DM	\$1,500
Other Faith in Action	\$1,000

TOTAL: \$5,000

Evangelism:

Advertising/Signage/Recruitment	TOTAL: \$1,000
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Stewardship:

Offering Envelopes	\$1,200
Pledge Drive & Banking Expense	\$300

TOTAL: \$1,500

Youth & Family

Youth Outings/Events	TOTAL: \$500
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Mutual Ministry:

Equipment maintenance	\$6,100
Office Supplies	\$1,400
Postage	\$1,000
Telephone/Cell Phone	\$2,600

TOTAL: \$11,100

Worship & Music:

Music Director Discretionary	\$800
Organ & Piano Tuning	\$900
Bulletins, Inserts, Devotionals	\$1,100
Licenses for Projection	\$1,900
Worship Expenses	\$1,600
Maintenance Contract/Video & Sound	\$2,500

TOTAL: \$8,800

Fellowship: TOTAL: \$600

Parish Education:

Sunday School	\$3,600
Confirmation	\$2,200
Day Camp (Bible School)	\$200
Events (Rally Day/Xmas Program)	\$200
Milestone Ministries	\$300

TOTAL: \$6,500

Properties:

Utilities	\$18,000
Insurance	\$18,000
Custodial expenses	\$2,000
Repairs and Maintenance	\$12,000

TOTAL: \$50,000

Human Resources

Staff Salaries:	\$75,000
Staff Benefits:	\$14,640
Staff Travel:	\$2,400
Staff Substitutes:	\$1,200
Workshops/Continuing Education	\$1,200
Payroll Taxes:	\$4,800

TOTAL: \$99,240

Technology: TOTAL: \$2,500

Council Discretionary: TOTAL: \$500

Pastor Discretionary: TOTAL: \$500

GRAND TOTAL: \$205,240

STAFF REPORTS

PASTOR'S REPORT

Pulpit supply has been provided by retired ministers Rev. Erma Wolf, Rev. Bev Wolfe, and Rev. Deb Mechler, and lay leaders Judy Hiemstra and Denise Kramer Tolzmann.

MUSIC DIRECTOR'S REPORT

See – Worship and Music Team Report

From the Church Council President ...

We are now one year past a catastrophic flood that hit our community. There are still people who are in the process of rebuilding their homes and grieving loss, we continue to pray for them.

We are very blessed to have Pastor Erma Wolf leading us each Sunday in worship. We also continue to pray for our Call Committee and for their work to find a new pastor for us in the future. Remember that God does test us in many ways...patience and prayer.

I still believe we as a congregation with amazing people can accomplish many things working together. Our focus is still forward thinking and moving forward!

I encourage everyone to read all other reports to know what we have done this past year and also to talk to anyone on Council if you have a question. We serve to serve you.

Russ Wright
Council President

2025 MINISTRY TEAM REPORTS

FELLOWSHIP

Many thanks to those who faithfully feed us – coffee, doughnuts, and other goodies - on Sunday mornings! Thank you – Dale and Sandi Witt, Sandi and Kirby Schmidt, Bethany and the Burns Family, Carol Anderson, Jill Meyer, Judy and Francis Hiemstra, Cindy Heiter, Mary Hugen, and others.

FAITH IN ACTION

January - We hosted a Blanketed in Faith event on January 23rd – We served a light meal of chili and chicken noodle soup, along with crackers, relish tray, and bars. We followed by cutting and tying fleece blankets. We will share with the community. We were able to tie about 15 blankets; it is a fun gathering.

February – Everyone one of all ages were invited to join in a game night and potluck on February 23rd. People were asked to bring their favorite games, puzzles or even a craft if they wanted. Everyone brought a dish to share; it was a fun time watching the older members interact with the younger ones. It was a great break from the chilly winter.

May –During the month of May we again had the baby bottle fund raiser for Cherish House.

June – June 14th was Flagfest weekend, we had one parade entry this year, had fun handing out candy along the parade route. Bethany members welcomed the community to watch the parade from our lawn, there were free cookies, snacks, and water for all to enjoy. Wonderful time showing the hospitality of Bethany.

October – In October Faith in Action joined with the Women of Bethany and several other Bethany members to plan for Christmas at Bethany.

November – We continued planning for Christmas at Bethany and some of us gathered a couple of days to make lefse. Always a fun time!

December – Christmas at Bethany was held on December 13th from 11:00 to 2:00. It was a fun day hosting members of the community at Bethany. We had our Scandinavian tearoom, with lots of delicious Scandinavian treats. A pulled pork lunch was served in the basement, along with a bake sale. Both were well attended. This year we brought back the Nativities in the sanctuary. We had many nativities from different countries. Denise Kramer Tolzmann set up another display of her nativities in the former Pastor's office, which she opened for visitors to view. It was a wonderful day, after our expenses we were able to send \$1600.00 to Lutheran Lakeside Camp for their "For Every Season Campaign."

Faith in Action Team meets on the second Tuesday of every month at 4:00 PM. All are welcome to attend. We look for ways to be involved in the community, would love to have more join us.

Respectfully submitted by Sue Boblit

EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Rally Day – Rally Day was held on September 21, 2025. Bibles were handed out to third grade students. We had an outdoor scavenger hunt and enjoyed treats during fellowship.

Bethany Scholarship – We awarded a scholarship this year to Zia Fiedler. Zia will be attending DMACC, majoring in Veterinary Technology. Best Wishes to Zia.

Sunday Kidz Time – Kidz Time meets every Sunday (except for holidays). We are excited to welcome back the ministry team from Lutheran Lakeside Camp. They will be leading Kidz Time, and have children message a couple of times a month. There may be music also!

Confirmation classes – We had one confirmand this year, Brecken Johnson was confirmed on Reformation Sunday. Blessings to Brecken on his confirmation. 7th and 8th grade confirmation classes began in October; we were excited to hire Lynn Egesdal to lead confirmation this year. Confirmation classes are on Wednesday evenings from 6 PM to 7 PM, on the first and third Wednesday of the month Lynn also leads youth group.

First Communion – The 4th and 5th grade students attended First Communion classes led by Pastor Deb Mechler. On Maundy Thursday, nine 4th and 5th grade students received their first communion.

Easter Egg Hunt - Following worship on Easter Sunday, all were invited to join in an Easter Egg Hunt on the church lawn. We also had fun blowing bubbles. It was a fun time. Thanks to the volunteers who helped with the Easter Eggs.

VBS- In July we once again partnered with First Congregational Church to host VBS. The theme for this year was Christmas in July, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given” Isaiah 9:6. We had over 60 kids in attendance this year, along with many of the youth from First Congregational and Bethany who served as helpers. This is a 3-day event, with activities for kids to sign up for the first 2 days. Activities include baking, fishing, tie dye, games, and wind chimes. On the final day we had a family picnic, at Oneota Lodge. The Clay County Naturalist Bri Blom led the kids in activities. We had about 150 parents and kids in attendance. We served taco in a bag and decorated sugar cookies for dessert. It was a fun time! Thank you to all Bethany members who volunteered to help, an event like this takes a lot of people, and we couldn’t do it without you. This is a great partnership, and we hope to do it again in 2025.

Respectfully submitted by Sue Boblit

STEWARDSHIP

Dear Members and Friends of Bethany Lutheran Church,

Since taking on the role of Stewardship Committee chairperson in February 2025, I have witnessed firsthand a community living out a powerful truth: **true stewardship is the faithful management of the gifts God entrusts to us—our time, our talents, and our resources.**

This year, rather than focusing on a traditional financial campaign, we chose to focus our energy on this broader, deeper meaning. The result has been an inspiring demonstration of our congregation's generous spirit, proving that every weekly offering, every hour volunteered, and every prayer lifted is a vital contribution to Christ's work in our community and beyond.

Defined by Service: Our Outreach Impact

Our identity as Bethany Lutheran is defined by our commitment to serve those in need. This past year, your collective efforts powered significant outreach initiatives. We celebrate your generous support of the following programs:

- **Western Iowa Synod:** Providing critical monthly operational support.
- **Lakeside Lutheran Capital Campaign:** Investing in the future of our youth ministry and retreat center.
- **UDMO Food Pantry:** Contributing both financial assistance and physical donations to combat food insecurity locally.
- **Room At The Table:** Partnering with Spencer Schools to provide milk to young elementary students.
- **St. Luke Lutheran Home:** Offering financial contributions as needed and, crucially, volunteering for special events to spend time with residents.
- **Kidugala Seminary Scholarships:** Assisting two seminary students with their tuition, helping to raise up the next generation of spiritual leaders abroad.
- **Special Disaster Relief:** Responding quickly to the immediate needs of the California Fires and South Texas Flood Relief efforts.

The Foundation of Our Mission

While we did not conduct a formal giving drive, we offer profound thanks for your **steady weekly and monthly giving**. Your consistent offerings are the foundation that ensures our lights stay on, our staff is supported, and our core ministries continue to thrive. We celebrate a year where Bethany's stewardship was truly defined by **hands-on service and focused charitable giving**.

Thank you for your continued commitment to our shared life in Christ.

Respectfully submitted, Candy Huber

PROPERTIES REPORT

Every year, while writing a properties report, it's important to acknowledge the efforts and hard work required by so many for the constant beautification and upkeep of Bethany Lutheran Church. We do contract snow removal and critical projects that require professionals, but we need to recognize the silent relentless labor of love from so many members here at Bethany that contribute their time and talent. You may not always be properly thanked for your time and talent but make no mistake, we do notice.

We are grateful and appreciative for our Custodian, Erick Phillips, for his hard work keeping our building clean, sanitized and orderly. If you are lucky enough, you might hear Erick singing in the hallways.

We are also very thankful for the many hands that spend countless hours on our landscaping and beautification. Pruning, weeding, mowing, and watering all those colorful flowers and shrubs. It's very hard work. Orchestrated efforts allow us to enjoy a symphony of colors throughout the spring, summer and fall.

Some of our major projects in 2025 were:

- 1.) Electrical main service upgrade: Much of our main electrical service had become old and difficult to replace or repair. It is work that none of us will see, but behind the scenes, there was a huge undertaking. We're grateful for the expertise of Tyler Johnson Electric for his knowledge and willingness to work with us through this electrical upgrade.
- 2.) In conjunction with the major electrical upgrade, we took advantage of having a Certified Electrician in house, so we set in motion a plan to replace (also) another antiquated system. Our lighting system in the sanctuary served us well. After 35 years of use, electronic parts were also becoming difficult to find or duplicate. We hired RDI and Johnson Electric to work together to engineer a lighting system that would replace the old system. It was incorporated inside the visual/audio booth for easy accessibility. The project went well, and the lighting transition was a great success. "Let there be light!"

Looking ahead, we remain committed to ongoing improvements and attentive care of our facilities, always striving to create a welcoming environment for members and visitors alike. As we move forward, your continued support, whether through volunteering, sharing ideas, or simply encouraging one another, makes all the difference. Together, we can ensure Bethany Lutheran Church remains a vibrant and well-cared-for space for years to come.

Respectfully submitted by Randy Phillips

EVANGELISM COMMITTEE

At its simplest, evangelism is the act of sharing "good news". In Christianity it refers to the practice of sharing the Gospel. According to the Bible (Matthew 28:19) Jesus commanded his followers to "go make disciples of all nations ". This can be done in many different ways: Sharing one's own life story and how faith has made a difference. Sharing the " good news " through acts of charity and kindness. Sharing on social media. As such, Evangelism overlaps many of the Council positions:

Faith in Action takes Bethany into the community with Flagfest, Grand Meander, Christmas at Bethany, fleece blankets, etc.

With Worship and Music we always try to connect with visitors to Bethany. I read the book 52 Churches in 52 Weeks by Peter Dehaan. This is a great resource to help your church be truly welcoming to visitors. Inactive members were contacted. On July 13, 6 new members were welcomed into Bethany.

Shannon McAllister gave a report that Upper Des Moines (UDMO) could use more help so our giving to them was increased. We felt a special affinity to the people in Texas after their horrific flood. A donation was sent to their Synod for flood relief. Fresh Start Market generously gave us coupons and those were distributed to people in need.

A big thank you to the Properties team. When they had the lift here to replace lights , they also replenished our flock of doves.

We can all practice evangelism. It's as simple as welcoming a visitor or an act of kindness.

Respectfully submitted by Sue Metcalf

WORSHIP AND MUSIC REPORT

January 1, 2026

It has been my privilege and honor to plan for the vast majority of Bethany's worship services since the Spencer Flood (June 22, 2024), working and brain storming with the Rev. Erma Wolf in those hours following weekly fellowship time. I have learned so much from her and from my studies.

Traditional lectionary readings are the basis for the planning (Year A began November 20, 2025 with Advent I) with the addition of music and words to support the theme of the day and readings. We strive for a combination of traditional hymns and more contemporary songs in worship planning, utilizing both the (cranberry) EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP hymnal and the (blue/violet) ALL CREATION SINGS hymnal, which tends to have more contemporary works. And, we have utilized various worship order settings (the front of the hymnal!) throughout the year. Every church and every minister have their own models for worship planning; this is what has been happening at Bethany in the past 18+ months. In addition to providing meaningful worship, it is my hope that there has been some continuity in those services because of the belief that that continuity, in this time of transition for Bethany the church, brings comfort, reassurance, and stability for her members.

Once an outline for a service has been finalized, it is forwarded to the office secretary and to the church musician for their inputs. The secretary sets up and prints the weekly bulletin, PowerPoint® worship support, and PowerPoint® announcements. I usually proof-read the bulletin prior to printing and, on Saturdays, ensure that all is setup for Sunday morning's service. Elina (pianist/organist) selects special music for the worship services which generally includes – prelude, postlude, communion and offering music. (more on special music follows)

A huge project in the past eighteen plus months has been the reporting/utilization of copywritten music materials by Bethany. Because we live-stream our worship services and because we use a lot of contemporary music (vs. 'older' music, or music in the "public domain"), Bethany utilizes a couple of companies that specialize in licensing music. By reporting, composers/authors and publishing companies are remunerated for their work. That is a "justice issue". And, it's the law!

You may have noticed the fine print at the bottom of each song's title slide on Sundays. That tells the world we're trying to keep it legal. The consequences of copyright infringement? – financial penalties, attorneys' fees, and imprisonment. Kudos to the Council, Elizabeth, and Elina for understanding the efforts to keep Bethany from legal jeopardy.

When Pastor Erma is unavailable for worship, we have turned to retired rostered ministers (Rev. Deb Mechler, Rev. Bev Wolff) and lay leaders (Judy Hiemstra and Denise) to lead worship. Thank you to these ladies for bringing the word of God.

A number of special worship services have been held at Bethany –

Epiphany - green bulletins for liturgical color; kits to chalk doorway)

Ash Wednesday – imposition of ashes

Lent 2025 – meal; met around cross in dining room for meditations provided by Judy and Denise; added sticks to the cross; squirrels – things that distract us from Jesus

Holy Week – cantata on Palm Sunday with First Congo and the waving of palms; Maundy Thursday (First Communion led by Pastor Erma and Pastor Deb; students gifted with small wooden chalice), Good Friday, and Easter worship services

New members were received at worship on July 13, 2025.

Pastor Jennifer Henry returned to Bethany Lutheran Church on July 27th for a special summer worship service that included a blessing/sending of Deacon Lynn Egesdal and Denise Kramer Tolzmann prior to their travels to Tanzania to visit companion synod/congregations and more.

That companionship relationship was celebrated October 5th when Denise returned from Tanzania and told stories and shared slides of her travel experiences on Companion Synod Sunday. Bethany was acknowledged for participating in companionship – walking "hatua kwa hatua" – these past twenty years!

Advent wrapped up the calendar year and began a new liturgical year. A special part of Sunday worship was the families who participated in the lighting of the Advent wreath. Many thanks to them all! Wednesday evenings' midweek Advent worship followed confirmation class (taught by

Deacon Lynn) and a meal (soup or pizza); worship utilized the Holden Evening Prayer® service. We were elated to have the participation of the confirmation students and different worship leaders each week. Thanks go out to – Rev Deb Mechler, Dr. Bill Bensen, Sandi Schmidt, Pastor Erma Wolf, and Deacon Lynn Egesdal.

It was fun to see the many people and joy of Christmas Eve at Bethany. The only thing not traditional about the service led by Pastor Erma was the switch from wax candles to battery-operated candles. Worshippers were encouraged to take the candle home to remind them to take the light of Jesus out into the world.

Many thanks to those who provide special music throughout the year to enhance our worship experience! Bethany's Bells ringers include Sandi Schmidt, Deb Mechler, Kristin, Bill and Hannah Bensen. Deb also provides piano music both as solos and duets. We really appreciate that Elina makes beautiful use of our grand piano and the organ. And, we all look forward to the 'snowbirds' return when we hear their chorus. Thanks, too, to Mary Hugen for playing the flute.

Worship/Music also monitors volunteer sign-up for worship. It takes many hands to provide meaningful worship – from sound technicians to the persons who run the PowerPoint® slides and the camera for live-streaming broadcasts. There are greeters and ushers and readers and acolytes. And, many accolades to Bethany's Altar Guild who faithfully prepare for communion and ensure the environment is set with banners and paraments. Kudos to all members who participate and willingly volunteer! We can never thank one another enough for active participation in this family of God – any one's absence diminishes us all. To that end, photo thank you cards were mailed almost quarterly to worship volunteers and other volunteers.

Other activities I personally have been involved in this past year include: home/hospital/care facility visitations; Bible and theology studies; boundaries training; Christian Women Speaks radio program; conference meetings, and organizing BFFFFs. Additionally, while attending the Western Iowa Synod Assembly, I was elected to the Synod Council and, at their first meeting, was elected to the Executive Committee. I am also a co-chair of the Western Iowa Synod's Companion Synod Network. Finally, I've done pulpit supply at Bethany, St Luke's, and other congregations.

I thank you all for the trust placed in me and the honor of planning and leading your worship services. I cherish the time spent in study and preparation, especially the time spent in learning with Pastor Erma. There's no way I can begin to thank her enough for what she has meant to Bethany – and me - over the past eighteen months.

My prayer now is that Bethany will strive to plan and envision a new future for the church and her community. How will she minister to a world and community that desperately needs to hear God's word? How will she minister in new ways in light of a much smaller pool of rostered persons? How can Bethany better utilize lay leadership?

Bethany Lutheran Church is always in my prayers!

Denise Kramer Tolzmann
Worship & Music Ministry

2025 OTHER COMMITTEES & MINISTRIES REPORTS

Bethany Extended Ministries Endowment

The purpose of the Bethany Extended Ministries Endowment (BEME) is to extend the mission outreach of Bethany Lutheran Church apart from the general operating budget of the congregation. Endowment funds differ from annual giving because, as a permanent fund, endowment disbursements come only from interest or dividends when available. Gifts to the Endowment will continue to give for years to come and will extend God's work within our church and community.

Gifts to the endowment can be **specified** for a special ministry, such as one which is specified for prison ministries. A **named** endowment can be designated for the benefactors' recipient choice. For example, one current **named** endowment is for seminary scholarships.

The following distributions were made in 2025.

- Church of Damascus Road - \$500.00
- Halvorson Fund to Luther Seminary - \$750.00
- Lachner Scholarship Fund - \$750.00
- Heindyke Fund – 1,100.00
- Primary Fund – 300.00
- The Primary Fund and Heindyke Funds were combined for a total of \$1,410.00.

And disbursed as follows.

\$400.00 Room at the Table (Milk for kids at Johnson and Fairview Elementary)
\$500.00 to Upper Des Moines
\$500.00 to Room at the Table

The endowment asset balances:

- Farmers Bank checking: \$240.91 as of December 31, 2025.
- ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust: Third Quarter value for 2025 is \$104,000.00.

The endowment fund was created thirteen years ago and has grown after the initial gifts of \$60,000.00.

During the past ten years the endowment has provided a total of \$29,618.00 to various scholarships, seminary scholarships, prison ministry, and local nonprofits. We have been able to give to Room at the Table, Upper Des Moines, Feed the Children, ELCA Disaster programs, ELCA Hunger initiatives, just to name a few.

Respectfully submitted by: Sue Boblit Chair

Committee members include:

Sue Boblit
Dennis Peterson
Sue Riecks
Gary Halverson

Women of Bethany

Mission Statement of the Women of the ELCA

To mobilize women to act boldly on their faith to Jesus Christ.

**The goals of the Women of Bethany are to grow in faith,
support one another and engage in ministry and action.**

Bethany is a member of the St Luke Auxiliary. Carole Peterson and Sue Boblit are representatives from Bethany. We provided bingo prizes and helpers in January and June, this is always a fun event to help with. Also, Sue Boblit, along with other auxiliary members filled the planters with beautiful flowers in May. We hosted the October birthday party, Elina Ozolins and several Bethany members entertained the residents with musical selections, and we brought gifts for those celebrating their birthdays.

To engage in ministry and action the Women of Bethany meet ten times a year for Fun and Fellowship and to work on Lutheran World Relief efforts, in 2025, the women made 57 quilts, and put together 82 school kits, and 5 fabric kits. The kits and quilts are sent to missions in 83 countries. In addition, the Women of Bethany gave \$450.00 to St Luke Auxiliary, and \$250.00 to the Women of Western Iowa for convention offering. We also donated 21 fleece blankets to local charities. The Fun and Fellowship group invites all to attend and help with these worthwhile projects, which benefit our community and the world.

Respectfully submitted by Sue Boblit

Caring Friends

Our Caring Friends ministry is made up of volunteers who make visits to a congregational member who is homebound or in a senior living facility. Our purpose is to extend the walls of Bethany, to be a friend and bring communion to members who are unable to attend church services with us. Those we visit are so appreciative. Please consider joining us in sharing the love of Christ in this way. We meet as a group most months to support and encourage each other.

Respectfully submitted by: Onalee Wright

**Women of Bethany
Treasurer's Report
January 1, 2025 through December 31, 2025**

CHECKING ACCOUNT:

Beginning Balance - January 1, 2025 **\$2,821.50**

Receipts:

Funerals	\$550.00	
Coffee Sales	\$200.00	
Christmas at Bethany	\$2,379.75	
Memorial Donations	\$30.00	
Dividends	\$2.83	
Total Receipts		\$3162.58

Disbursements:

Marla Woelber, coffee	\$147.60	
WISWO Convention Offering	\$250.00	
Sandy Langer, LWR Shipping Costs	\$25.00	
Sue Boblit, reimburse St. Luke activities	\$40.00	
Sandi Schmidt, reimburse for quilt supplies	\$48.00	
Christmas gifts	\$100.00	
VISA – Beehive finish quilt	\$321.00	
Monthly Bank Fee - \$3.99/mo	\$47.88	
Check Charge	\$30.14	
Adjustment to end of year Balance 2024	\$3.00	
St. Luke Auxiliary	\$450.00	
Christmas at Bethany expenses	\$121.59	
Christmas at Bethany Change	\$345.00	
Total		<u>\$1,929.21</u>

Balance in Checkbook- December 31, 2025 **\$ 4,054.87**

Total Women of Bethany Funds **\$ 4,054.87**

Sue Boblit, BLCW Treasurer

2025 GIFTS & MEMORIALS

Balances in Gifts & Memorial Accounts as of December 31, 2025 are as follows:

Imalinyi Tanzania Companion Congregation		
Funds	\$8,681.00	
Parish Nurse	\$798.27	*
Stephen Ministries	\$225.00	*
Caring Friends Ministries	\$65.00	*
Music Program Funds	\$1,641.05	*
The Gathering	\$2,983.00	*
Parish Education	\$2,128.46	*
Youth Fund	\$4,579.03	*
Dishwasher Fund	\$999.79	*
Landscaping	\$1,888.97	
Computer Fund	\$200.00	*
Wedding Fund & Altar Guild	\$274.61	
Archive Room	\$30.00	*
Evangelism	\$1,435.00	*
Men of Bethany (M.O.B.)	\$695.00	*
Undesignated Funds	\$7,264.52	
2024 Flood Fund	\$4,600.00	
TOTAL	\$38,488.70	

no change from prior Year-End*

Total reflects increase of \$13,055
from prior year-end

CALL COMMITTEE REPORT FOR 2025

Dear Friends,

We have just recently celebrated the season of Advent. Advent is a time for preparation, a time for reflection, a time of anticipation and a time of waiting. Waiting for the one to come. For us at Bethany, during this Call process, it may be perceived that we have been living in a season not unlike Advent for over two years. Waiting for a name.

Early in 2025 we believed that the Holy Spirit had led us to a candidate who might be the answer to our prayers. That person was articulate, compassionate, experienced and innovative in his approach to ministry. If there was a downside at all, it was centered on his anticipated retirement in the next three to five years. In the end, the Holy Spirit led him to accept a Call elsewhere. May God bless him and watch over him and his family as they enter into this new phase of their life.

What might be our takeaway from this experience, while disappointing initially, is the realization that there are many excellent ministers out there. They are faithfully serving their current congregations, and have not as yet felt the desire to seek out a new parish in which to serve. This period of waiting is not due to anything we have done. Please be reminded that we are working on God's timeline. Our prayers will be answered when the time is right. Until then, be supportive of each other. Have faith. Remain hopeful. Pray frequently.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bethany Call Committee Members

