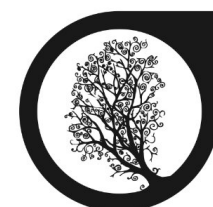




AWAKEN COMMUNITY

2024 - 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Pastors' Report



Micah Witham, Lead Pastor

As I look back on this past year I am astonished at how much it has been marked by both struggle and thriving. It began with Awaken being involuntarily removed from our denominational home of 13 years. We advocated for space within the ECC that we believed was consistent with its history and theology. Space that was centered set and not bounded set that required uniformity on scriptural interpretations and doctrinal positions. We did so because we believed that a church that was not polarized by difference would be good news in a world that is increasingly polarized. Unfortunately that ended with us being removed as a congregation.

As we studied the book of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of the wall and the city by the people of God, we found comfort and encouragement that God's people had been here before.

As I looked around the tree that we call Awaken this past fall I saw fruit laden branches. New people coming to find our community, relationships deepened through learning labs, life groups, serving on any number of volunteer teams, the efforts of the garden, and the fall retreat. Despite a broader denominational home to belong to, Awaken grew in its sense of clarity and identity in the kind of church that we wanted to be together and deepened our missional partnerships with organizations we believe in. Christmas Eve of 2023 saw the most people in the history of our church (850) gathering to celebrate the coming of Christ into the world in the person of Jesus. A night I will not soon forget.

In the new year, as winter seemed to never come, we were informed that our lease would not be renewed in the place that we have come to call home for the past 9 years. If I'm honest, that felt like salt in an open wound for me and I'm still learning to surrender my feelings of anger and resentment daily to God towards those who made that decision. I learned of this news while in Phoenix with 8 other ECC pastors and former pastors trying to discern a way forward for us who felt ecclesologically homeless. As I write this report today, I am one day removed from a meeting with the leadership from Redeemer Lutheran Church where we agreed to move forward together to create a space for Awaken & Redeemer to exist together in one building for this next season. One day it appears to be a famine and the next day it appears to be a feast of God's provision. While there is still much to be worked out, I'm grateful for way in which God is clearly out ahead of us inviting us to trust and follow the Spirit's nudges.

This spring, as we anticipated the future of Awaken, we as leaders felt like our current financial reality and participation of those who call Awaken home was not sustainable into our future. We were honest and tried to communicate the realities we were seeing in a winsome and clear way, and you all have stepped up and stepped into a level of generosity I have never seen in the history of our church. This year has included the highlights of starting a confirmation program & an Urban Camino along with the prep for a true Camino pilgrimage this fall, the birth of 2 babies in the Daniel's family, the addition of Art Morrow, Halle Hanson, and Vanessa Lucius. It has included the teaching series of our formational targets, advent and the journeys of Christmas, 1 John and epiphany, lent and what it means to listen to the voice of God, leaving a "corner" and practicing generosity, and now wells and fences to close out the year. For these and so many other things, I am grateful beyond words.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as one of the pastors at Awaken and may we be found faithful following the risen Jesus by his Spirit as She leads us into the future.



Jenna Daniels, Executive Pastor

My annual report this year is unique because I was away for so much of the year on parental leave. My time with Caden has been one of the best parts of my life and you all gave me that gift. In my absence, Art Morrow stepped in as an interim executive director and Cathy supported care. I'm so grateful to everyone for this time away.

Now having returned, I've spent much of my time catching up with staff, core, PAT and many of you. I have returned with a lot of energy and passion towards this community and all that is in front of us.

Staff – Halle Hanson, Art Morrow, and Vanessa Lucius (Interim Arts Director) joined our staff team this year! They have been such critical value adds in light of my absence and hiring for the Music & Arts position. Though the staff navigated much of this year without me, I have returned to a really solid team that is passionate about this community. I have been reminded just how much I enjoy collaborating with these people in our work and life.

Care - Care at Awaken is held by so many different people: life groups, leaders, staff, volunteers, and all of you. We made some significant to our benevolence fund this year. The benevolence fund committee (Eva Rodelius, Danny Langseth, Troy Groves, myself, and now Art Morrow) identified some gaps in our process and made changes to address those. Historically this fund was primarily available to those who call Awaken home, but we have expanded fund use to those who don't call Awaken home. We have many more ideas for this fund so this is just the start of it!

Heather Crawford continued to lead the Practical Care Team and take on more care related things with my absence. I know that many of you have had the privilege of interacting with Heather. She is the real deal and so are those who are a part of the care team. Katherine Scipioni has continued to lead the Prayer Team this year. She has led Prayers of the People and we've gotten to hear from lots of new voices, Katherine and her team meet every other Monday to faithfully held you and our community in prayer over this year. I'm so grateful for the people who lead in this community.



Staff Reports



Cathy Solomon, Director of Community Life

We've had a really warm and welcoming experience in arriving at Awaken between our encounters at the service with members of the staff and the community.

After our first visit, my wife said she felt like she was "breathing easy" at Awaken and didn't feel the same stresses or anxieties she felt in other places.

After my first visit, I felt compelled to come back.

Attending the last two services, I feel very called by the open and progressive nature of Awaken.

I visited in person yesterday and attended the LGBTQ lunch after church. People were very warm and so I'm interested in learning more about Awaken.

These are a sampling of comments that have been shared with me over the past year describing what people experience as they discover Awaken. (:

Connections - People continue to find their way to Awaken through word of mouth, Google searches, Reddit posts and MPR coverage. Since the beginning of the year we have had a 20% increase in Connect Cards. Micah, Jenna and I have the delight of meeting with folks over a beverage of choice to hear their stories and share a connection to Awaken. The Discover Awaken Booth Team not only provides a warm welcome as people gather on Sunday mornings but stepped into the added responsibility of helping people find a place to sit as our gatherings fill to capacity. Over the past year we have had over 120 people attend Discover Awaken to meet the staff and receive an introduction to our history, mission, vision and values as well as hearing next steps for getting involved.

Life Groups - At Awaken, life groups are one of the ways to experience belonging in our faith community. Typically groups meet twice a month and focus time processing the current sermon series and sharing about life. Currently there are 15 life groups, 5 of which are open to additional people, and 3 ready to start.

Partnership - Last fall we welcomed 12 new Partners to Awaken and 24 just completed the spring Partnership class.

Community Life Events - Our BIG events were bigger than ever! The fun-filled fall retreat hosted 133 families, couples and individuals. At the retreat pickleball was a huge hit along with time for conversations and teaching. Prom was a great night of mingling and dance with 150, a higher attendance than last year. Guess Who's Coming to Dinner typically has 45-50 people sharing connection and conversation over a meal at the host's homes. I love the Sunday mornings after, when people who participated come in with big smiles and share what a great time they had.

Affinity Groups - This new category of ways-to-connect has blossomed this past year as people in our community have stepped up to lead connection opportunities around shared stage-of-life, interest, identity and values. Currently we have 8 such groups:

- Monday's with Micah
- Board Games led by Troy & Meleah Miller
- Queer Community led by Josh & Cass Ely
- Second Half of Life led by Krista O'Connor
- Coffee & Conversations led by John & Peggy Denham
- 20/30's Somethings led by Christina Efteland and Becca Benson
- Moms of Littles led by Heidi Akpaette and Sara Spang
- Stay at Home Parents led by Sara Spang



All in all, our community is alive and well with multiple ways to connect and grow deeper in faith.

Halle Hanson, Director of Music and Arts

This last fall, I was honored to accept the position of Director of Music here at Awaken. The last 8 months have been filled with internal growth and lots of learning for me. I am deeply grateful for this place and the opportunity to help lead such an incredible community. Up until the end of April, I had been stewarding the Artist community alongside our Interim Director of Arts, Vanessa Lucius who has just stepped down to welcome her third child into the world! It has been such a gift to work alongside her as our Artist community continues to flourish.

Musically- speaking, this last year we had the beloved Christmas Eve choir back and had an Easter Sunday choir both facilitated by our lovely Michelle Whalen. These choirs have been a great opportunity to gather and create something beautiful together. A new practice this year was our theme song in Lent. For our Listening series during Lent, we played the same song in place of Communion every week which provided space for a different kind of meditative posture and moment to reflect on the season.

The Artist community—wow. The way this community holds space for one another is beautiful. It continues to be a safe space to create, be vulnerable, and bring all that you are. Even in the relatively short time that I have been on staff here, I have watched the artist community expand so much and it has been so fun watching friendships grow both inside and outside of Awaken's walls. We've continued to meet for our monthly mingles and our seasonal book studies. This last year we read *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmer, *Why I Wake Early*, a collection of poems by Mary Oliver, *Anam Cara* by John O'Donohue, and *How To Do Nothing* by Jenny Odell. Vastly different books and discussions each time, but each rich, meaningful, and thought provoking.

A new addition we had this year was an event Vanessa and I held during Advent called *Awake in the Waiting*. It was a night of songs and readings to focus on the more contemplative piece of Advent and to intentionally slow down in a season that typically feels hurried. We also have recently introduced *Paint and Sips* taught by Alyssa Whetstone, who has a way of making watercolor painting feel approachable and fun! Last fall we joined Art House North for *The Artist Disposition* this last fall led by our wonderful Melody Olson and we are looking forward to our first ever Artist Retreat: Summer Edition coming up in July!

I'm so thankful to all of our volunteers that bring their gifts and help to create meaningful experiences and inviting spaces; both on Sundays and at Artist community gatherings.



Sara Spang, Kids Community Director

It's hard to believe that I've been here two years now and as we approach the end of another school year, it's been fun to reflect back and see how we've grown as a ministry and a community!

- We added more than 30 new volunteers who work with infants all the way up to 5th grade
- We've grown to maximum capacity in many of the rooms we use on Sunday mornings
- We have welcomed new families from all over the metro area
- We started an affinity group for stay at home parents
- We continue to see families forming connections and friendships through our monthly get togethers (Pack n' Play and Kids Community lunches)
- We added another vehicle to communicate with parents through a parent group on our new app
- Our kids had the opportunity to learn some new songs with Mr. Z and get a chance to share them with our congregation in the gatherings on Sunday mornings
- We offered 5 new Camp Create summer classes led by artists and creative members of our community

As we look to the future and our transition to a new building, we are excited to have room to grow and develop more opportunities for our kids and families at Awaken!



~~Trevor Daniels, Director of Youth and Tech~~

Maria Heim, Youth Group Student Extraordinaire

With Trevor gone on parental leave, I have taken the responsibility of writing the report for the Youth Group this year. The Awaken Youth Group has been going strong. With the addition of a new confirmation program for high school students, as well as regular high school and middle school gatherings, we have had a busy year. A team of wonderful youth leaders including Katie, Laura, Allie, Daniel, Sarah, Erik, Nathan, and Elle has made this year incredible. These people all stepped up (more than usual) to fill in for Trevor when his child was born. All in all this year has been chock-full of adventures and fun for the youth group. The Winter Retreat was a huge hit, again. The whole group journeyed up north to a beautiful camp called Adventurous Christians. As a group we created amazing memories and a multitude of inside jokes that are still talked about today. There was even a new twist this year with a live action clue mystery game that lasted the whole weekend, which I won.

A new confirmation program was also introduced this year, led by Pastor Micah. This has been an incredible experience for high school students to make a purposeful commitment to grow in their faith. As for the middle school students, gatherings are still centered around fun games and new friendships. I have had the privilege to be involved in the high school, middle school and confirmation programs and have gotten to see all the fun and growth that happened this year. We are looking forward to another great year of youth group and are very grateful for all of the support parents and members of the church have given us!



Erik Lindstrom, Office Manager

As we wrap up this year at Awaken, I am also wrapping up my first year on staff. It's been an interesting year to join the staff. There were multiple staff changes throughout the year as the team grew, and Jenna and Trevor passed like ships in the night on their respective parental leaves. It's been a time where versatility has been so important. It has been a pleasure to work with a team that holds so much trust for each other and is always willing to step up to help with whatever is needed. I am also so thankful for the many people at Awaken who gave their time to make it all possible. From the rotating band members who covered during the absence of a Music Director, to Art and Vanessa who joined the staff to help during staff transitions and parental leaves, to the team of youth group volunteers who continue to plan youth group each week so Trevor has time away with his family. There's far too many to name, but I'm so thankful for everyone who has given time, learned new things, and helped continue to move Awaken forward.

My first task in my role as Office Manager was to learn our database and do some organization and cleanup. One year later, we're 6 weeks out from the launch of an app, a refreshed website, a new giving platform, and multiple changes to our internal systems to set us up for success both in the short term and in the long term. This kind of work is never ending, but I'm proud of what we've done to improve communications and provide new tools for folks to engage and connect in the community.

A large part of my job at Awaken involves organization and communication of all the things. From our regular rhythm of offerings, to preparing the Awaken Weekly, to Sunday announcements, social media posts, registrations, and more. This year, we've seen several new Affinity Groups begin and start adding their individual events into this revolving door of activities and communications. It was clear that the systems we used to organize this information just wouldn't cut it moving forward. Since then, we've built a more robust database that can scale to track this information across all the areas it's needed, making sure you always know what is happening at Awaken.

Looking forward into the next year, there are some significant changes on the horizon. We know that, one way or another, we are going to be gathering in a different space next spring. While there are a lot of unknowns that come with that, there are a few things we do know. We know that our systems need to be mobile and adaptable. We know that versatility will continue to be necessary. Most importantly, we know that Awaken is a lot more than the walls of our current building. We will continue to gather, continue to host opportunities to connect and to serve, and continue to be Awaken in all the ways it matters.



Art Morrow, Interim Executive Director

While serving an interim role to help cover Pastor Jenna's parental leave, it was such a blessing to work with our staff and volunteers! One highlight was that my service coincided with an interim leadership role by Vanessa Lucius, who led our Arts Community during this programming cycle after Melody Olson transitioned to her counseling practice. I really admire Vanessa's creativity, warmth, and organization.

On the pastoral care front, with Pastor Jenna on leave it was a blessing to team with Cathy Solomon (Director of Community Life) and Core Team members Heather Crawford (Practical Care), and Katherine Scipioni (Prayer Team). I deeply admire their ministries of service, care, and prayer.

In the finance area, we made a couple of database changes, including for giving and payroll. Database changes always require a lot of work. I felt grateful to serve under the oversight of Awaken Treasurer, Danny Langseth, and to team with Erik Lindstrom and Ron Ahmann in the giving database transition. This required a lot of extra work for Erik in his Office Manager role and for Ron as the volunteer leader of our Counting Team and donations analytics. They went above and beyond in this database change, and I feel grateful for their efforts.

Finally, I want to thank Pastor Micah, Pastor Jenna, and the Pastoral Advisory Team for inviting me into this interim role. Awaken is so blessed with leadership who live into our values!



Board Reports



Kate Peterson, Pastoral Advisory Team Chair

We are grateful for another year in the journey of Awaken...

In Spring '23 we geared up for the annual meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church and faced the charge of being out of harmony with the denomination. Our involuntary dismissal from the ECC launched a season of grief, loss and the question of what's next? In the wake of our engagement with the denomination, the Advisory Team committed to a period of rest and pause, rather than rushing to find a new denominational home. This decision left us with the much needed margin to refocus internally, and the outcomes of that investment left some big highlights, including Pastor Micah's Formational Targets series, and the allocation of discretionary funds to missional partners and grant recipients at Christmas.

Financially, we are in a healthy place! We thank God for abundant resources to bless our community and ministry partners, provide for staff well and prepare for the coming year of significant investment. Givers old and new, you have generously responded to the invitation to participate financially in the mission and values of Awaken. Because of this we have had record giving numbers countless months this year. Now, we have the opportunity to expand our staff team and we are excited to formally add Art Morrow to oversee finances, HR and development in July.

A major curveball came at the beginning of February when we learned our lease at 506 View Street would not be renewed. Staff and PAT are working hard to pursue a new home for worship that can accommodate the needs and critical mass of our church. We are praying for a timely solution that also addresses the existing space and accessibility limitations of our beloved building. Meanwhile, Awaken continues to grow. Sunday attendance has increased substantially and Easter services brought 795 of us together.

Thank you for partnering with us through all the joys and unique circumstances of this year and in all that is unknown of Awaken's next chapter.



Proposed Pastoral Advisory Team Members

The nominating committee of Kate Peterson, Susan Kephart, Mike Donley and Micah Witham enthusiastically recommend Cory Ehlebracht and Eva Rodelius to serve a three year term on the Pastoral Advisory Team filling the seats that Danny Langseth and Donna Albinson leave vacant. Collectively we express our deepest gratitude and thanks to Danny and Donna for serving six years on the board and bless them as they rest from the hard work of the past six years.

Eva Rodelius

I am Eva Rodelius and I live in Roseville with my husband Luke Buer and our two boys, 3 and 5. I have been attending Awaken for 12 years. I'm excited for this season of change at Awaken and I am honored to be a part of it.

Cory Ehlebracht

I am Cory Ehlebracht, and I am married to Emily Ehlebracht. We have two children (Molly and Alex) and live in the West 7th neighborhood of St. Paul. We began attending Awaken in 2017, and we have loved the teaching, values, heart, passion, and authenticity of this community. I am excited and honored to be nominated for the PATeam, and I look forward to serving the church community and working alongside Awaken's amazing leadership as we navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead.



Danny Langseth, Treasurer of the Pastoral Advisory Team

FY2024 Current Year Financial Overview

Maybe it's recency bias with Micah's sermon series, but there's one word I feel best captures Awaken's financial picture for our 2024 fiscal year, and that's "generosity." As I look up & down our financial documents, I see it from top to bottom, and want to celebrate that with you:

Giving - We built a bold budget for this fiscal year, including a 20% budgeted increase in giving. Even in a challenging economy, we sensed a congregation with energy & excitement for our growing ministry and have invited you into generosity, including by supporting Awaken. First, I want to celebrate participation – 51 individuals & families have made their first gift to Awaken since the beginning of 2024! Second, we have seen superlative giving numbers this year – nearly every month has been a record-high-for-that-month – and we are on track to deliver the budgeted 20% growth in giving on the year. Thank you for your tremendous generosity to support this ministry.

Staffing - With increased giving, we were able to make big changes in our staffing model this last year. Three of our staff roles were expanded to be full-time positions and we welcomed three new staff members in part-time roles as well. As we've grown our staff, we've also continued to reevaluate & expand our benefits packages, and were able to support both Jenna & Trevor with generous parental leave support as they welcomed new children. Your financial support has allowed us to support our staff.

Missional Support - This last fiscal year was a banner year of support for missional partners, both new & existing. First, we were glad to continue our support for existing missional partners, including Ain Dah Yung, Every Meal, and others. Second and notably, at Christmastime we invited the congregation to submit proposals for missional grants. We were overwhelmed with numerous proposals and were able to write checks for over \$80,000 to MN Council of Churches, Inheritance Fund, Joint Religious Legislative Coalition, Jonathan House, Wildflyer Coffee, The Christian Closet, Urban Village, Upstream Arts, Wilderness Well, and Volunteers of America – Amicus. Amazing, generous support for mission partners, made possible by your gifts to Awaken.

Thank you so much for all of your generosity to Awaken – it's allowing for our ministry, our staff, and missional partnerships to flourish.



FY2025 Proposed Budget

There will be some big changes ahead for Awaken in our 2025 fiscal year, which also means change in approach for our budget. A budget always represents a point-in-time-best-guess for what we think the next year holds – writing today in May of 2024, there is still lots we do not know about next fiscal year, notably as we transition to a new building. We've built a budget that best represents what we know today & builds cushions to prepare for the unknowns that lie ahead. Next year's budget includes four notable changes from previous years:

Net Positive Income - We are budgeting for \$1M of gifts next year (a 20% increase to FY2024) and \$930K in expenses (an 11% increase to FY2024). Both of those represent appreciable step-changes from this last fiscal year and a continuation of the generosity we've seen this spring. But more significantly, we're intentionally budgeting for a net positive income. With big unknowns ahead, most notably the building & denomination, we want to be prepared in a strong cash position. Though we are not planning to purchase a building next year, we do consider that it may be possible in the next 2-5 years and want to begin preparing more intentionally for this. A net positive income budget will help us prepare for these specific and unknown possibilities ahead.

Building - We will share more details at the annual meeting, but have budgeted for building expenses to align very closely to this last fiscal year – notice the "Utilities & Admin" row below. This is based on best assumptions & estimates, but may vary depending on final negotiations & decisions. We will keep the congregation updated if our projected building expenses will deviate meaningfully from this picture. While ongoing expenses will look similar to our current space, we do anticipate that moving to a new home will come with meaningful expenses to move & make a new space our own. In a previous season Awaken had set aside funds to a reserve account for church planting – we will tap into those funds to plant ourselves in the new building.

Staff - The biggest change within our staffing model is that the Pastoral Advisory Team has offered a long-term position to Art Morrow, who has been covering for Jenna while she was on parental leave. Art has brought a wealth of executive experience, support for operations, HR, financial management, and congregational engagement. He adds a lot to the team and we are thrilled to keep him on staff. Beyond extending Art there are no significant changes to staffing currently planned for next year. We will offer cost of living type raises to all staff members, same as every year, and will also continue to evaluate the needs of our staffing model as we transition to our new church home.

Denomination - While part of the ECC, we committed 6% of tithes & offerings as support back to the denomination & Northwest Conference. As mentioned above, we put that support on pause while our status with the denomination was in question and released those earmarked funds for missional purposes this last December. As we continue in our season of denominational limbo, the Pastoral Advisory Team has decided to continue earmarking 5% of tithes & offering to a denominational fund. Looking forward, we would like to re-affiliate with a denomination, and this fund will ensure we have the flexibility to consider any range of decisions. Additionally, we have updated our budget categories to provide clearer visibility to what's being used for denominational purposes.

While there are unknowns in the season ahead, there's so much energy & momentum at our back. As Micah has charged, we are welcoming everyone that calls Awaken their home to join in supporting a significant ministry season ahead.



FY2025 Proposed Budget Cont.

General Fund FY2025 Budget			
	FY2024	FY2025	Var
Total Income	\$837,555	\$1,002,700	20%
Tithes/Offerings	\$833,033	\$996,700	20%
Other Income	\$4,522	\$6,000	33%
Total Expenses	\$837,661	\$931,780	11%
Utilities & Admin	\$138,501	\$134,599	-3%
Staff	\$545,774	\$608,852	12%
Congregation	\$68,501	\$88,659	29%
Missions	\$40,257	\$49,835	24%
Denomination	\$44,628	\$49,835	12%
Total Net	(\$106)	\$70,920	





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