Christ Lutheran
CHURCH

2026 ANNUAL REPORT

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2026

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2026 Congregational Meeting

Christ Lutheran Church, Valparaiso, IN
November 8, 2026
"Because of you, this Church changes lives!"

Agenda

1. Opening Prayer
2. Year in Review
3. 2026 Church Council Acknowledgments
4. 2027 Church Council Nominees & Election
5. Closing Prayer

Proposed Rules of Assembly

1. Each speech from the floor on all resolutions and motions will be limited to 3 minutes.
2. A member who has spoken on the pending question(s) may not move the previous question(s). *(Someone cannot comment on a proposal and, at the same time, call for an end to others' comments. Calling for an end to debate must be their first and only comment.)*
3. A motion to end debate by moving the previous question shall apply only to the immediately preceding motion. *(It's not appropriate to call for an end to all comment on all issues or agenda items, only the topic currently under consideration.)*
4. A motion to end debate on all matters on the floor or more than the immediately pending question is not in order. *(See above; it is important that we are able to get through all agenda items.)*
5. Any recount must be ordered by a majority vote before the end of the assembly at which the voting result was announced. *(In the case of a recount request, it should be submitted during the Annual Meeting itself)*

Baptized Members:	467 in 234 households
Confirmed Members:	393 in 225 households
Voting Members:	328 in 190 households

Quorum: **33** voting members

MEMBERSHIP STATISTIC FOR 2026

Members received	Members removed	Pastoral Acts
Baptisms: 4	By death: 1	Funerals: 1
Adult Baptism: 0	Moved/Transfers: 29	Students confirmed: 2
Affirmation of Faith/Transfers: 15		

September 23,2026

Christ Lutheran Church
Valparaiso, IN

Audit Committee Report

This year, Chris and Julie Walda, who are affiliated with the Synod, conducted a Best Practice Review. On August 28, they performed a thorough examination of our source documents and provided recommendations for improvement. The Audit Committee reviewed the report and concurred with its findings and recommendations. The report is attached.

Recommendations:

1. Create a use policy for church issued debit cards for church employees and LLP as outlined in the report.
2. Look into the suggested payroll service of Brotherhood Works (Payroll & HR Platform - Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Company)
3. Look at reviewing the treasurers roles and responsibilities.

Respectfully submitted by:
Brian Boedeker
Scott Casbon

September 10, 2026

Christ Lutheran Church
Valparaiso Indiana

Independent Accountant's Report

The objectives related to the procedures performed for Christ Lutheran Church financial books, records and operations include a determination that:

- Appropriate procedures are in place governing key financial operations and are followed;
- Proper segregation of duties is in place for key financial transactions and are not being circumvented;
- General ledger balances are appropriately reconciled to their underlying assets (i.e., bank statements) and liabilities (i.e., accounts payable) in a timely and accurate manner;
- Assets are properly classified in line with the donors' intentions;
- The Sunday (or special) offering is handled and counted appropriately;
- Monies generated and expenses incurred as a result of a special event are accounted for and can be traced back to the general ledger;
- Expenses are appropriately approved and supported by the appropriate documentation;
- Personal identity information is properly safeguarded both in system and paper form;
- Controls over the payroll process are in place and operating as intended;

While we did not find any areas of major concern, we would like to make suggestions in the following areas.

CASH RECEIPTS

Offering is collected and counted by teams after the church service and taken to the bank for deposit. Electronic giving is offered through Christ's giving software Subsplash. The church secretary opens mail and logs any donations. They are then placed in a lockbox and included in the Sunday deposit. The financial secretary enters both plate and electronic donations into Subsplash to credit donors.

We selected ten Sundays and traced the amounts from the offering count sheets to the bank statements and the general ledger. We found the process is working as intended.

Recommendation

No recommendation needed. Keep up the good work.

CASH DISBURSEMENTS

The church has done a good job reducing the number of checks written each month. All utilities are automatically withdrawn and debit cards are used for day-to-day transactions.

We judgmentally selected transactions from the fiscal year and traced them from the general ledger to the receipt and authorization. All transactions were well documented and authorized.

Debit Cards

Several employees use a debit card for online transactions and some in-person purchases. The use of debit cards is an efficient way of conducting business and does not subject the employee to utilize their own funds to be reimbursed at a later date.

Employees are required to submit an original receipt to the bookkeeper. The receipt is verified to the banking transaction. Each card has a dollar limit on purchases.

Recommendation

We recommend that each card holder be given a copy of a use policy for debit cards. The policy should outline what type of purchases are acceptable, the requirement to submit an original receipt in a timely manner, the responsibilities for use – no personal transactions, what to do if that happens, who to notify in case of fraud/lost card. Each card holder should be asked to sign an acknowledgement of receiving the policy and agrees to adhere to the document.

PAYROLL

Payroll for the church employees and the preschool employees is processed using PayrollMate software. The software creates payroll information, but the bookkeeper creates the direct deposit from the online banking, pays the employment taxes, and processes and files the quarterly and annual returns.

A review of the quarterly 941 returns and the annual W-3 return found a discrepancy with the declared federal wages. Clergy salary is often confusing when completing these returns and their omission on the Form 941 is a common error.

Recommendations

We recommend that Christ consider using Brotherhood Works as a full-service payroll processor. This service is provided through Brotherhood Mutual, located in Indiana, and specializes in church payroll. They are a low-cost option and will relieve the accountant from the time needed to log into different systems to pay employees, transfer funds from LLP to the church, pay taxes and file returns.

Bank Reconciliation

The church accountant performs the monthly bank reconciliation for both the church and preschool through the Blackbaud accounting software. We reviewed the church and preschool for the fiscal year and found they were completed accurately and timely.

We did note one small issue with the report that the software produces. It does not list checks outstanding as of the reconciliation date. This is not a critical issue but would help anyone reviewing the report to see if there are checks that have been outstanding more than 60 days.

Recommendations

No need for a recommendation. Nice work.

TREASURER DUTIES

To better equip congregations with the skill set needed for the accounting tasks, many are reevaluating the constitutional role of the Treasurer. Christ Lutheran employs a part-time bookkeeper to handle the day-to-day responsibilities, therefore the Treasurer role needs to shift. The current treasurer is new to the position and consulted with us about the best practices in this role.

Recommendations

We recommend that the treasurer views her role in accordance with oversight of the accounting records. This involves a review of the bank statements, ensuring that unusual transactions do not occur without explanation: a review of the payroll system to account for the annual salary and benefits adjustments are properly recorded; and prepares the

monthly reporting to the congregation's council and can adequately answer any questions or address concerns.

LITTLE LAMB PRESCHOOL

Little Lamb is maintained on a separate general ledger and bank accounts from the church operations. Tuition is collected electronically and checks or cash only on an exception basis.

The director has a debit card which is used to buy supplies and other items used in the daily operation. Where payments are needed the director sends a check request to the church accountant who issues the check.

The Little Lamb payroll is processed with the church employees. The bookkeeper initiates a bank transfer from the preschool checking account to reimburse the church for their share.

Recommendations

We recommend that the preschool director also be given a copy of the debit card policy as recommended above.

We recommend that the preschool employee payroll is also processed using Ministry Works, as recommended above. Their system would allow for the preschool employee payroll to be properly deducted from the preschool checking account.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with you.

Sincerely,

Chris Walda & Julie Walda

Report of the Senior Pastor 2026
Rev. Tim Knauff, Jr.

Thinking back over this year, it is striking to me how many times, and in how many ways, we came together when we were needed. Most recently of course is the Sheltered in Grace roofing appeal: the base goal was to repair the roof at an expected cost of about $100,000; you gathered over $200,000 for the project. Not only did you protect the Sanctuary you love, but you made a commitment to reduce our mortgage payments, freeing resources for ministry. As I write this I can hear the roofers at work!

Or remember when the terrible derecho hit and neighbors were without power, without houses, with terrific damage and debris. In the office we had the privilege of fielding your phone calls, your emails, your offers of hands, hard work, financial support, generators, food, and more. You showed up for each other, for our community, for our region.

You also showed up for Little Lamb Preschool families and members of the congregation. Little Lamb scholarships help families attend and, crucially, stay in our preschool when bumps in the road hit. Similarly your generosity to our congregation's Steiner Fund, Social Ministry emphases, and our discretionary "help" fund have mean that when people call, when our beloveds are hurting and scared, we can step up.

Above all you show up for each other every Sunday morning, every potluck, every activity, every class, every group. Through Stephen Ministry and Faith Formation Hour gatherings, through Priscilla Circle and Choir and Circle, Quilting and Braille Ministry, you show up shoulder-to-shoulder and heart-toheart, supporting and caring for each other in remarkable, tangible ways. This is what makes this congregation such a blessing: here we are seen, here we look forward to hearing from each other, here we are welcomed and always interested in meeting new friends and hearing new stories. You come together and show up for each other and it makes a difference.

Thank you for the part you play in the living, breathing, serving, hugging, heart-beating body of Christ here. It is a gift and privilege to serve alongside our talented, dedicated team, and a gift and privilege to be one of your pastors.

In God's amazing grace,

-Pastor Tim

Annual Report to the Congregation - Pastor Erica Gibson-Even

We have been together in ministry for 15 years! In the beginning of November 2011, I joined the CLC staff as Interim Associate Pastor. In no particular order, here are 15 things I thank God for in our time together!

1. It is a blessing to step into an ever-flowing stream of faith. One of the richest blessings of pastoral ministry is the opportunity to be a part of something so much bigger than ourselves - I'm grateful for the legacy of faith that shaped CLC through all the decades since its beginning.
2. I'm grateful for the generosity of this congregation in sharing their lives with me as a pastor. It is a deep privilege to be a part of the joys and sorrows of your lives, and to see God at work in and through you.
3. 15 years together has allowed me to be a part of the confirmation of young adults who were babies born just after I arrived at CLC, baptize the great-grandchildren of founding members who I have buried, perform marriages of young adults whose confirmation I participated in, and be alongside so many children and adults as we grow together in faith. A joy!
4. One of the best things I tell folks about CLC is that this is a community full of folks who are keen to hear the Gospel - the good news that in Jesus, God's grace is always first and last in our lives and world. I celebrate when in different settings, our youth notice if that Gospel isn't getting priority. I'm humbled by the thoughtful attention to the preached Word in our congregation, and grateful for the ways we listen together for grace.
5. A sense of openness and humor that allows us to try new things. We are willing to be playful, to take worship seriously but not take ourselves too seriously, to allow for experiments, for new ministries to arise and others to conclude with grace.
6. Care - we are at our best when we are a community that does our best to love one another, from moments of Sunday morning connection to investment in Stephen Ministry and delivering Caring Meals.
7. From my first season of getting to know Christ Lutheran, I have been grateful for the congregation's commitment to service and loving our neighbor. Supporting LWR with quilts and kits, our season of hosting the Men's Overnight Shelter, growing together in the Sacred Ground program on race and faith, welcoming and supporting a refugee family - God has been at work in our midst, and keeps calling us to new ventures!
8. Music - I love to sing with you! Whether it's our familiar Holden Evening Prayer, chanting the Lord's Prayer a capella, old favorite hymns or one of the many excellent new ones I love to inflict on you, there is something precious about singing together, and the gift of enough seasons alongside one another to be able to pick out familiar voices from across the sanctuary.
9. The staff team that I'm blessed to be a part of is one that works collaboratively and with mutual respect and encouragement. This is not a given in any work environment - so it's a reflection of the hopes and expectations of our congregation - thank you!

10. When I came to CLC, I was the first woman called to serve as a settled pastor here. That can often be a rocky season in the life of a congregation and a pastor, when our hopes for who we want to be run headlong into decades of habit. We all had some adjusting to do, but from the get-go I knew there was a solid commitment from the congregation and many faithful leaders to support and pray for my ministry. I've since heard stories from folks who have joined CLC over the decades - some who joined just after we began because women could serve as leaders on Church Council, some who joined when their baby girl was born and they wanted to be in a church body where she could grow into whatever calling God gave her, and some who have joined because they can now be a part of a faith community with a woman pastor. It has very little to do with *me* as a pastor, but a whole lot to do with how we understand God's call and our faithfulness, and I am proud to be part of such a community!
11. Similarly, I rejoice in the growing sense of welcome that is a part of our particular gift and calling as a congregation. In the last 15 years, we have welcomed children to God's table, and to be more widely integrated into the life of the congregation. Young folks who are engaged in the life of the church have a whole fleet of adults who not only love and pray for them from a distance but also know them well and help them be full participants in the life of the congregation. And in recent years, the Deepening our Welcome process has made us into a place where that Grace we treasure is spoken clearly for all our siblings. As I pastor I have fielded "am I welcome here?" questions from our LGBTQ neighbors in this congregation and in previous ones - where once I had to answer only "well, you won't hear hate from the pulpit," I now get to say, again and again, "Yes!!"
12. The kindness and care our family has experienced at CLC. Many children of clergy have some pretty rough stories about the way congregations have treated them, either with expectations of perfection or dragging them into hurtful church politics. I'm so grateful that our children have had the opportunity to grow in a church that is caring and invested in the lives of all its young people!
13. I'm grateful for the encouragement and support I've received from our congregation, again and again. Beginning with the rough interim season, folks have stepped up to be partners in ministry.
14. We have borne with one another in love. Every pastor and every congregation bring their own unique strengths and struggles - I'm grateful for all the ways we've been equipped to be gracious with one another!
15. We have been learning how to all pull together. In challenging seasons, we've increasingly faced the challenges together rather than turning to pick at one another - through difficult interim days and staff transitions, a global pandemic, financial challenges and a constantly changing society, God has been at work helping us to pray and laugh and hope together.

Thank you for 15 years of walking together in following Jesus! God has been so faithful to us and I am keen to see what new callings and gifts will meet us in the coming year.

Christ Lutheran Church – 2026 President Report
Bill Iltzsche

It has been an inspiration and a privilege to work along with the Church Council this year as we have had to find remedies to major congregational concerns. It has been a pleasure to serve in this capacity.

Because of changes to the makeup of our membership during and after COVID, CLC faced a serious financial problem in 2025, forcing us to make hard decisions concerning our budget. Council members and financial staff also had to do some creative maneuvers to insure our bills would get paid. Thanks to God's help and the success of the 2025 stewardship drive, and to the generosity of the congregation and their change in giving patterns, we came through our difficulties and started 2026 off on a high note.

Then came March, and the problem of our sanctuary roof. Through long hours of discussion and ideas, the council came up with our stewardship drive, "Sheltered in Grace", a bold plan to go above and beyond the immediate need by using anything pledged over $120,000 to go towards mortgage principle reduction. Again, many thanks to the congregation for coming through on this vital drive.

Among other items of note:

- We have returned to synod tithing at 3% of our budget, with high hopes of increasing that amount further.
- Money budgeted for social ministry is back to normal.
- The Endowment Committee was able to make grants available for the first time this year.
- We have joined a group of nine county churches in the faith-based "We Make Indiana" group in support of affordable housing.
- Though we no longer host the homeless men in our community, we continue to show our support for the Daybreak shelter as individuals.

I urge you to read all the committee reports for the year, and you will learn more about what this church is accomplishing for our members, our community, and the world as we continue to walk in Christ's footsteps.

Submitted with blessings to you all,
Bill Iltzsche, CLC Council President

2026 Little Lamb Preschool Annual Report

CHRISTIAN MISSION STATEMENT

Little Lamb Preschool, in union with Christ Lutheran Church, serves God by shepherding God's children as we nurture the whole child in partnership with families.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

We are a Christian preschool whose goal is to provide excellence in education and a loving, safe learning environment for every child. Based on the philosophy that young children learn best through play, we provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for them to explore, make discoveries, and learn respect for themselves and others. We firmly believe that all children are wonderful gifts from God to be cherished and nurtured. In collaboration with families, we encourage and support children to learn and grow socially, emotionally, academically, physically, and spiritually.

BOARD MEMBERS

Our hardworking, committed LLP Board members include Cailey Flora, Chairperson; Traci Coil, Vice-Chair; Kelli Ciesinski, Secretary; Heather Budnik, Treasurer, Kerstin Koch, Laura Peart, and Vickie Copeland.

LITTLE LAMB STAFF

Our excellent, dedicated staff includes Teri Coplan, Colleen Vatthauer, Cheryl Mulder, Abbey Vavrik, Lisa Church (teachers), Dani Dziedzinski, Mallory Raab, Renee Shiplov, and Trinity Winars (teaching assistants), and Laura Venstrom (Director).

After long careers here at Little Lamb, this year we celebrated with Jen Gottlieb and Mary Comstock as they moved into retirement. We are so grateful for their many years of ministry with us.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

God (as always) has blessed Little Lamb Preschool with an unbelievably dedicated and hardworking team and wonderful families. We currently have 9 energetic and joyous classes. Each age level is busy learning, growing, and forming relationships. The children and every LLP team member bring joy into the school day. **LLP has 113 students attending** within four classrooms. We offer two 5-sessions per week, four 3-sessions per week, and three 2-sessions per week classes. This year we are planning on continuing our very popular Extended Day program -Lunch Bunch. It begins in January and runs through May. The students experience lunch at school, provided by Valpo Schools Nutrition. Our developmentally appropriate curriculum is updated on an ongoing basis following guidelines from Indiana's Foundations for Early Learning Standards, Creative Curriculum, NAEYC Accreditation Standards, and a partnership with community Kindergarten teachers. Children attend Chapel Time weekly and participate in daily classroom devotions. We plan to offer a week-long STEAM camp during the summer. We are employing a family engagement tool called ***brightwheel.*** It is an app to increase communication between school/teacher/parent. We have two large fundraisers per year to help us meet our financial obligations. We host an all-school carnival in the fall and an art show and breakfast in the early spring. These are whole family events that reach well beyond our walls of CLC and host around 350 people. **LLP is an NAEYC** (National Association for the Education of Young Children) **accredited+ preschool, a Level 4 *Paths to QUALITY* school** (Indiana's rating system for Early Childhood Centers) **and a member of the ELEA** (Evangelical Lutheran Education Association). In the fall of 2026, we were approved for On My Way Pre-K funding from the State of Indiana to provide funding for students in need who are enrolled in our pre-k or Young Fives classes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We appreciate the CLC Staff supporting us through music experiences (Brian), Chapel and Program Openings and staff support activities (Pastor Tim and Pastor Erica), scheduling (Jenny), finances (Heather) and continual property maintenance (Milan). We thank congregation members who helped our LLP ministry and those who support us in prayer and encouragement. We especially thank all that have financially donated to our school by providing equipment, memorial gifts, scholarships, monetary gifts, and educational materials. Your help reaffirms our church and school's commitment to providing an excellent Christian early childhood education. We are grateful to be included in prayers in worship at CLC monthly, and we pray for you all in chapel, as well!

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

We continually strive to improve the quality of our program, while maintaining its respected reputation, by meeting the educational, social and spiritual needs of our students, their families, our congregation, and community. LLP is maintaining Level 4 *Paths to QUALITY* school and our NAEYC Accreditation (Accreditation + rating). during the 2026-2027 school year. We will reapply for accreditation later this school year. We are also participating in a cohort with VCS and local preschools to bolster relationship between preschools and the Valparaiso Community Elementary Schools.
Little Lamb will turn 40 at the start of the 2027-28 school year, so plans are beginning to celebrate the incredible impact this ministry has had and will continue to have for years to come, God willing!

Little Lamb Preschool is very thankful to be a ministry of CLC and an outreach to the Valparaiso Community.

Respectfully Submitted,

Laura Venstrom, Director

Christian Education Annual Report 2026

SUNDAY SCHOOL

• We had Sunday School for our children PreK-4th grade. Teachers teamed up and provided lessons for 3 groups: PreK-Kindergarten, 1st/2nd grades, and 3rd/4th grades.

• We integrated an opening program for Sunday School. Every Sunday, the children met in the Little Lamb Annex to sing songs, be silly, and pray together before going to their classrooms for lessons.

• We are integrating memory work passages and church liturgy into this time for the 2025-2026 school year. We had a Sunday School Christmas Program and a cookie reception during The Faith Formation hour in December 2025.

FAITH FORMATION

• We provided a 2-week program for the congregation on the book The Anxious Generation by Jonathon Haidt during Faith Formation hour on March 1st and 8th . We discussed how technology effects our families and young people. We had good discussions and provided helpful resources.

SUMMER PROGRAMING

• We hosted 3 "Family Faith Gatherings" throughout the summer

• The June 14th activity – A potluck service was held after church. There was a bible story and families worked on a college depicting a nature scene before and after the meal.

• The June 28th activity was held at Sunset Hills. The families met after church and brought a lunch. There was a bible story and a service project of families pulling weeds in the Sunset Hills gardens.

• The July 12th activity was held after the service. The congregation learned about the CLC Bioswales and had a chance to add to the nature colleges.

Christian Growth 2026

This congregation is so blessed by the dedicated members who serve as part of the Christian Growth Committee! The mandate of the Christian Growth Committee is ***"implementing programs and activities to increase the spiritual growth of the members of the congregation".***

Bread Breakers, led by Amy Knauff

Bread Breaker groups spend time together sharing meals and fellowship throughout the year usually rotating hosting, using the church hall or going out to eat as a group. There were many groups that met throughout the 2025 - 2026 season. Our '26 - 27' kick off took place on Sunday, September 27th..

Caring Meals, led by Amy Knauff

The Caring Meals ministry uses www.takethemameal.com to line up meal providers with the meal receivers. There are numerous volunteers on the caring meals mailing list. Meals are provided to families due to illness or injury, death of a loved one, birth of a baby, or some other difficult time. Since the last annual report, CLC provided meals to different households throughout the year for various reasons.

Referrals can be made through the church office or one of the pastors. If you would like to be added to the mailing list for this ministry, contact Amy Knauff @ 219-242-7448 or amyknauff@gmail.com.

The Retreat Planning Committee, led by Pastor Erica

The church retreat was held February 20th - 22nd. 2026 at Lindenwood Retreat Center. Planning for 2027 has already begun so think about joining us ... fun is had by all!

Faith Formation Hour

Our Faith Formation Hour occurs weekly from 9:20 am-10:20 am on Sunday mornings. An ongoing Bible study continues with Dave Keammerer in room 120.

A variety of presentations about different ministries we support, issues of interest, book studies, Bible studies and intergenerational topics and sessions, which are scheduled in the church hall and other rooms as needed each week. Details are in the weekly scribe, eNews and on the website. We also work with Pastor Tim to host "Getting To Know CLC" the new member class during this time throughout the year.If you have ideas for programs or studies you would enjoy, please Pastor Erica through the church office.

Grief Group, led by Cheryl Slack

Christ Lutheran Church offers a Grief Support Group every other week on Wednesdays from 9:30 - 11 am in the Conference Room. (209) with dates listed weekly in the Scribe.

The group serves adults who have experienced a loss of a spouse, parent, child, friend, or neighbor. The group is facilitated by Cheryl Slack, a Stephen Minister. You may contact her at 219-241-0677 or cdslack56@gmail.com or one of the pastors if you have any questions and the upcoming dates when they meet for the rest of the year. There are currently 8-10 regular individuals who attend the grief group with plenty of space for additional persons. .

Funeral Meal Ministry, led by Marilyn McGawn

The purpose of the Funeral Meal Ministry is to offer church families a time of fellowship and sharing with a meal or light refreshments following the funeral, memorial service or celebration of life for their loved one. In the past year meals were served for two funerals, for approximately 200 guests and volunteers. The families involved were most appreciative and let the volunteers know how meaningful this ministry was for them.

Thanks to the countless volunteers who provide food and/or help serve at the funeral meals. We would certainly welcome more volunteers who would like to be involved in this ministry. Contact Jen Bias in the church office if you would like to be added to the volunteer list.

Stephen Ministry, led by Dr. Tim Knauff

Stephen Ministry offers highly confidential support and encouragement for folks who are suffering or facing issues, both inside and outside our congregation. At this point, we have e Leaders one being new and 11 active Stephen Ministers for a total of 16 who are available. During the past year we averaged 12 - 18 Care Receivers. CLC takes responsibility to train the new Stephen Minister for our network. There are currently seven in the class that includes 4 from our congregation. Our well-trained and caring Ministers are ready to walk with you for a variety of different concerns. Over the years, Stephen Ministry has supported those facing divorce/separation, adoption or pregnancy issues; retirement concerns, depression, loss of job, loss of spouse, anxiety, loss of faith; people feeling isolated or lost and many for. To find a Stephen Minister contact either one of our pastors at 219-462-6660 or by finding one of our Stephen Ministers who wear the blue name tags.

Christ Caring Visitors, led by Holly Knauff and Beth Coburn

Christ Caring Visitors are CLC members that meet monthly with our members who live in Assisted Living Facilities and who are homebound, reminding them they are an important part of the Family of God at CLC. Currently there are 11 CLC members serving in this ministry who see 18 residents or homebound CLC family members. Each pair of visitors brings smiles, conversation, prayer, Holy Communion and flowers from the bioswales. Please let us know if you would like to become a Christ Caring Visitor, or if you know a member that would like a visit. You may contact the church office, Holly Knauff @ hknauff@gmail.com or Beth Coburn @ bethmarie.coburn@gmail.com for more information.

Hospitality and Outreach
2026

Members:
Sally Ecklund-Baker, Jacquie Chevalier, Judy Chevalier, Ellen Swayne, Lucas Ecklund-Baker

The team has been providing treats at the welcome center throughout the school year. Sign ups are appreciated as well as any extra goodies that can be left in the fridge.

We are sending welcome cards to visitors that have signed the guest book.

Last holiday season we collected 105 coloring books and 50 boxes of crayons that were distributed to Family House and Hilltop.

We hosted a Lent Dinner with help from others in the congregation.

We advertised our Easter Services in Valpo Neighbors Magazine again this year.

Mission Bears continue to find homes and give comfort. We had many bears registered and will continue this mission with bears for baptism.

We are looking for others to join the committee. Please reach out if you are interested in helping plan or volunteer.

Thank you,

Sally Ecklund-Baker
Hospitality and Outreach

Property Committee Annual Report to Council 2026

Committee members: Gregg Copeland (chair), Milan Coburn (property manager) Scott Schnabel, Paul Conover, Betty Luckett, Tony Reinhold, Ed Seykowski.

The property Committee manages a budget of almost $200,000 to maintain and enhance our facility and grounds as our church continues to grow and serve the community in many new ways. This includes salaries for our Property Manager, Custodians, and building attendants. Our budget also supports utilities, repairs and upkeep, and Major expense projects. As the buildings and grounds are ageing many mechanical systems have reached their normal life span and need replacement such as, HVAC equipment, roofing, flooring and parking lot pavement. As costs continue to rise, we have implemented several energy saving programs and strive to manage a schedule of expected repairs and replacement to control when and where the congregation's funds are spent.

We would also like to thank all of the many people who volunteer their time to support the many ministries of the church that work with property and are responsible for the upkeep and beautification of everything from, circle garden, bioswale garden group, flower planters in and around the church, to Alter guild and so many others.

Some of the many projects that we have completed this year are:

- Dedication of the new circle garden in the front of the church.
- Popcorn fest setup and teardown of food concession fund raiser to benefit our youth group ministry.
- Accepted proposal and signed contract to replace sanctuary roof (job scheduled to begin October 5th)
- Completed the Sheltered in Grace fund raising program (Thanks to the Congregation for pledging more than $215,000. For the roof project and to help pay down the mortgage principle).
- Installed the final 8 replacement windows in LLP (all windows and trim replaced)
- Reconfigure walls and doorways in music and choir rooms and recarpet both.
- Completed annual lawn weed control, tree and shrub pruning, removed several damaged ornamental trees.
- Completed fire inspection, extinguisher inspection, and corrected several deficiencies noted on previous inspection.
- Replaced condenser fan motor on HVAC unit (east gathering space)
- Replaced underground wiring on east bank of parking lot lights. (rodent damage in light pole bases)
- Completed work on six LLP classroom doors to bring them up to current fire code.
- Build out of a new office for the Youth Director.

- Troubleshooting and repair of security and fire alarm systems.
- Remodeled underused room to be new space for Youth to meet.
- Work on creating a new proposed budget for council approval.
- Had parking lot patching and seal coating done.
- Planning and getting proposals to replace one HVAC unit over gathering space, (one each year for the next five years).

Social Ministry and Mission Committee

Annual Report 2026

Committee Members: Diana Iltzsche; Bill Iltzsche; Lisa Owen; Irene Adams; Tim Sutherland; Kathy Sutherland; Kathy Lundstrom; Tony Reinhold; Karen Seykowski; Becky Fry; Adam Gibson, Wanda Rogers, Katie Sirko; Phyllis Schroeder; Anna Stewar (Chair)t; Mary Michna; Pastor Tim Knauff (pastoral representative)

The work of the committee is to offer our church family opportunities to learn about, support, and volunteer with organizations working on hunger, housing, homelessness and mission, with an added focus on social justice around diversity. Monthly emphases fall under these areas and provide giving and in many cases volunteer opportunities. Each of these organizations–ranging from local, regional, national, to international organizations–is a line item in the Social Ministry and Mission budget, as well as receiving designated giving from CLC members.

The list below describes, for each month, the ministries to which we invite the CLC family's attention, increasing awareness of opportunities to serve with our time, prayers, and resources.

This listing provides Financial Giving and Volunteer Opportunities - within NWI community, ELCA IK Synod, and internationally - resulting in Giving of $25,000+, from Congregational Budget and over-and-above Offerings.

- **January** = *Hunger/Housing*: First Contact Christian Resources & Mike Steiner Fund
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC members welcome to volunteer at Meals on Wheels and First Contact
- Volunteer Opportunities: Advocacy/Writing letters via BFW, ELCA Advocacy, and 5calls.org

- **February** = *Hunger/Poverty*: Hilltop Neighborhood House/Food Pantry & Refugee Family support
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC takes leadership/provides volunteers for Hilltop Soups Fundraiser
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC members walk alongside Valpo family transitioning to life in the U.S.

- **March** = *Mission/Diversity*: Lutheran Diaconal Association
- Volunteer Opportunities: Host Diaconal Sunday and Deaconesses are servant leaders in Valpo/beyond

- **April** = *Homeless/Housing*: Co-Action (formerly Housing Opportunities)
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC members volunteer at Co-Action (incl. 2 serve on Board)

- **May** = *Mission/Diversity*: LGBTQ Outreach of Porter County & Reconciling in Christ
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC Booths and volunteers at NWI Pride events

- **June** = *Hunger/Housing*: Food Banks of Northwest Indiana & Project Neighbors
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC food donations to P.C. Food Pantries & volunteers for Project Neigh.

- **July** = *Mission/Diversity*: ELCA G.M./Arusha Hosp.-Tanzania & AMOS Med. Mission Trip-Guatemala
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC provide supplies for AMOS Mission Trip & ARC Blood Donations

- **August** = *Mission/Diversity*: Global Refuge (formerly LIRS) & Lutheran Braille Ministries
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC hosts vols. to create Braille Bibles and other publications

- **September** = *Mission/Diversity:* Compass Int'l Family Prog. & Proj. Neigh. Freedom Recovery Fund
- Volunteer Opportunities: Pack Away Hunger event in Crown Point & Compass volunteers
- Volunteer Opportunities: Proj. Neighbors vol. days and service on NWI African Amer. Alliance Board

- **October** = *Hunger/Poverty*: ELCA World Hunger/Luth. Disaster Response & Lutheran World Relief
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC LWR Truckload Ingathering Site incl. CLC Quilts/Care Kits/School Kits

- **November** = *Homeless/Housing*: Daybreak Center (formerly N.C. Men's Shelter) & Gabriel's Horn
- Volunteer Opportunities: CLC members can volunteer at new Daybreak (prepare meals/serve meals)

- **December** = *Mission/Diversity*: Bethel Lutheran Gary (ELCA Urban Ministry) incl. Bethel/CLC Partnership
- Volunteer Opportunities: Interfaith Action Network, We Make Indiana (L.C./P.C.), Worship at the Lake

In addition, the committee has been working or supporting the following:

- We continue to help with Hilltop's annual soup supper fundraiser each spring; this year's was "very successful" and held on March 3, 2026 in the Porter County Expo Center. We no longer host because the size of the event become too large, but we still help/support.

- Partnership with Bethel Lutheran – clean up event in May – had to cancel annual outdoor worship and picnic this August (would have been our sixth) due to extensive damage and ongoing issues following the August 11th derecho in the area.
  One example: A group of about 20-30 of us (including CLC members and several additional groups), helped out with tree and debris removal Aug 29, 2026 in the Pulaski neighborhood of Gary. Various CLC members volunteered across Lake County in the storm's aftermath.

- Steiner Fund. Our social ministry fund to help CLC members opened the year with a balance of $21,789.97. Our social ministry emphasis brought in a total income of $1655.43. We dispersed $5,068.44 to CLC members in need (including impacted from the Derecho storm). The balance at the end of October is $18,376.96.

- Efforts to support diversity and justice in our communities include working with the Interfaith Action Network, We Make Indiana, and Northwest Indiana African American Alliance. These groups provided numerous events/forums addressing social justice.

- CLC members provided a welcoming presence at regional Pride events and a CLC Rainbow "Parents" group has been meeting once per month on Thursday evenings at CLC (most recent was Sept. 23).

- We hosted three blood drives in 2025 (June, August, December planned). Also Feb 24th (~40 units collected), June 15th (49 units collected), August 18th (48 units collected), next scheduled for Dec 14th. [Previous December, in 2025, netted 43 units.]

- CLC continues to host the Lutheran World Relief in-gathering each October, welcoming and receiving donations from congregations across the state. On October 17, we loaded a semi-trailer coming from Fort Wayne, and it left Christ Lutheran close to full–the fullest we can recall from recent memory.
    - Signedup Volunteers helped with paperwork, provided bake goods, moved boxes. Several of our 2026 CLC goals for quilts, kits (baby care, fabric, personal care, school), and aluminum can recycling were met. Ingathering totals were quilts 2067 (246 from CLC), Pers. Care Kits 1106 (408 CLC), Baby Care Kits 342 (CLC 315), School Kits 1444 (CLC 140), and Fabric Kits (40 (CLC 40). Sunday School kids and youth assembled 140 kits on Oct. 4. Our quilts were recently offered for sale for a $50 donation.

- Our campus is used by Lutheran Braille Workers, who compile Braille Bibles at CLC.

- Multiple CLC members have become very involved with We Make Indiana, which has a chapter in Porter County. Monthly meetings for WMI-Porter County have been held at CLC throughout 2026 (CLC's in-kind contribution to this chapter of the organization). The Interfaith Action Network–of which CLC is an active member–has formally affiliated with We Make Indiana to help facilitate a Lake County branch. Interfaith Action Network continues to use its own name and to host organizational events as well.

- Indiana-Kentucky synod of the ELCA. Upcoming regional meetings including Breakout Sessions relating to social ministry (Oct. 24 in South Bend).

- AMOS fundraising, collecting supplies, and sewing baby blankets continues, with a trip planned in early November to Guatemala and Honduras

- Civil Rights Pilgrimage History trip, upcoming in February 2027.

- Daybreak: Continuing opportunity for SMM members to vol./observe while helping to serve a meal (to help us know how to be more helpful to Daybreak).

- Deaconess Erin Brown visited our congregation in July to share about her current ministry through the ELCA, working in South America.

- Continued support for refugee family & ELCA IN-KY synod activities such as "Know Your Rights" event, Compass IFC fundraising event.

- CLC Endowment applications for various projects – The Fund accrued around $6800 in the past year and these dollars supported 5 grant proposals and recipients, and some of these projects are social ministry related.

- Derecho response / support. See elsewhere in this report under Bethel Lutheran Partnerships and Steiner Fund how CLC helped with storm responses in our congregation, Valparaiso, and NWI Region. The Council is discussing a potential return of an emergency response fund in the budget (for future unforeseen emergencies.

- Early in 2026 restoration of monthly emphasis contributions occurred in the CLC budget

- In October the Committee approached Worship and Arts Committee about potential purchase and display of an art piece of John Lentz entitled "Jesus Christ: Liberator". The Committee also participated in the 2-Sunday Mission Fair.

Respectfully submitted,
Anna Stewart, Church Council representative, as well as Tim Sutherland and Lisa Owens

CLC Stewardship Committee
Annual Report

"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" ~ 1 Peter 3:15

This verse inspired the Stewardship Committee this past year as the committee often talks about hope: how do we find it, how do we create it, and how do we foster it in others. I always come out of Stewardship meetings with a tremendous sense of hope. What a gift from God hope is! And we have plenty of places in our church to find hope.

For example, this past Spring, we completed the *Dare to Disciple!* Annual Appeal. In total, we had 109 statements of intent (SOIs), out of 205 total givers. Fifty-nine percent of givers had increased their SOIs commitments, while twenty-seven givers reported no change, nine givers reported a decrease, and nine givers indicating no exact amount, but participated in the appeal. This level of commitment and SOIs contribution is fantastic, but our SOIs were only part of the appeal with the congregation also asked to personally dare yourself to do something more for God this year. This "Dare Jar" is still in the Gathering Space and it is filled with our congregation's commitments and challenges. This gives me hope every time I pass it!

We also had several speakers as part of *Dare to Disciple!*, including Karl Schmitt, who spoke about Daring to live in Community; Becky Fry, who spoke about Daring to love and serve our neighbors; and Erin Schmidgall, who spoke about Daring to share Joy and Hope. These speakers gave me and many others hope with their words!

Last Fall, we also hosted our third annual Chili Cook-off. We have 42 attendees, including several visitors who wanted to sample our congregation's best chili recipes. This friendly competition includes prizes for best chili, spiciest chili, kids' choice, and best side dish. We plan to continue this tradition and hope more will come to sample some of our congregation's cooking talents.

As we look ahead to what Stewardship hopes to do this year, we are planning to shift our next Annual Appeal to Fall 2027. This is mainly due to our successful Sheltered in Grace, our special appeal to repair our roof and reduce our mortgage principal. We hope that the congregation can celebrate this incredible accomplishment very soon!

Stewardship continues to aim for inspiring members to do more for Christ – both the savior and the church. Yet that can take many forms. There is plenty of evidence that this church shows up when God comes calling. If you feel like God is calling you to do more or to do something different, we are happy to help you find the best place for your talents and time.

I am so thankful for this congregation's generosity in time, talent, and resources. We are blessed to have so many, doing so much, spreading hope. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

~Jonathan Bull, Stewardship Committee Chair

Worship & the Arts

2026 Annual Report

- Spring & summer of 2026 youth and members of the congregation were invited to provide special music for our worship services.

- **Easter Sunday** included brass quartet, timpani, the Sanctuary Choir & the Celebration Ringers Handbell Ensemble

- The 4 pm service on **Christmas Eve** highlighted an 'Intergenerational Orchestra', which included both youth and adults of the congregation

- Lenten services provided *Holden Evening Prayer* with members of the sanctuary choir as music leaders

- Worship in the park – planned for August 16th – was canceled due to the aftermath of the derecho storm

- Music Program:
    - Sanctuary members: currently 30 members
    - Celebration Ringers: 11 members
    - Treble Makers Handchime choir:
        - May not happen this season due to low attendance and lack of interest
    - Renovations to the Music Room and Handbell Room was completed in August of 2026; it has been well received and appreciated by all those who use the space.
        - Thank you to Milan Coburn for his work on removing one wall and creating 2 rehearsal spaces with easy access.
    - In place of a Youth Handbell Ensemble (due to lack of interest), various youth will be invited periodically to participate as instrumentalists and provide music for Sunday worship services.

Christ Lutheran YOUTH

Youth Ministry - Annual Report 2026

Year in Review

2026 has been a year of transition, growth, listening, and learning for CLC Youth Ministry. Karina Barlow began serving as Youth Leader in January, and one of the most important things learned this year is that successful youth ministry begins with listening to our young people.

As we have worked together throughout the year, our youth have become increasingly comfortable sharing what is working, what isn't, and what they want their ministry to look like. They are bringing friends, developing stronger relationships with one another, and beginning to take greater ownership of the community we are building together.

Our goal continues to be creating a place where young people can have fun and build friendships, while also giving them a safe and welcoming space to ask difficult questions, explore their faith, and discover what it means to be part of the life of the church.

Programming Updates

Circle – 9th–12th Grade
Our weekly Circle gatherings resumed in August, with consistent attendance of approximately 12–15 youth. Each Sunday evening begins with dinner together, followed by a game and time for conversation. Discussion topics rotate between questions submitted by the youth and conversations centered on the Scripture readings heard in worship that morning.

This format developed with significant input from our youth representatives. After some trial and error early in the year, we listened to what our youth told us they wanted from Circle and adjusted accordingly. That willingness to communicate has become one of the strengths of the group. Our youth are comfortable telling us what is and isn't working, bringing friends, developing close friendships, and helping shape Circle into a ministry that belongs to them.
We also enjoyed opportunities simply to be together this year. We held an outdoor movie night at CLC during the summer, with more than half of our Circle youth attending. A planned pool party was disrupted by the derecho and its aftermath, but instead of canceling, we relocated to a movie night at Karina's house. Nearly all of Circle attended, while parents gathered upstairs for their own game night.
We also ended the previous program year with a Senior Night honoring our two graduating seniors—with games, at their request!
Going forward, we hope to build on this foundation with additional social events, guest speakers, service opportunities, and deeper conversations about faith.

Fusion – 5th–7th Grade
Fusion continues its journey through our Bible Survey curriculum, with this year's lessons focusing on the New Testament.

One significant change this fall was moving our 8th graders into their own dedicated Confirmation class during Formation Hour, making Fusion specifically a 5th–7th grade ministry. We welcomed 15 students in grades 5–7 on our first Sunday of the new program year. This group tends to be a little quieter than our older youth, but they have shown themselves to be focused and engaged participants.

We are grateful to have two adult teachers, as well as a high school senior volunteering with Fusion. Recruiting additional adult volunteers remains a priority so that we can return to a team-teaching model and consistently have two adults serving together.

Confirmation – 8th Grade

In August, we celebrated two young people as they affirmed their baptisms and completed their Confirmation journey. Both demonstrated tremendous commitment to the process. Despite plenty of scheduling challenges, they continued to show up and give us their time. They completed meaningful service projects—some of which are still continuing—and wrote thoughtful faith statements.

We are especially grateful for the wonderful mentors who walked alongside them throughout their Confirmation journey.

Our next Confirmation class began during Lent with six students, each paired with a mentor. This fall, we made a significant change to the program by giving 8th-grade Confirmation its own class during Sunday Formation Hour.

Finding a weekday meeting time that worked with increasingly demanding student schedules was difficult, and we also wanted to address the decline in Formation Hour participation that has historically occurred among our 8th graders. Meeting on Sunday mornings gives these students a space specifically designed for where they are in their faith journey while making participation more accessible for families already attending worship.

Using the Lutheran Confirmation portion of our curriculum, we will focus this year on the history of Lutheranism and what it means to live a Lutheran life. Karina will serve as the primary teacher, with support from Pastor Tim as he is available, and our Confirmation mentors will rotate into the classroom throughout the year.

This group is energetic, comfortable with one another, and loves to talk! One of our goals is to channel that energy into deeper conversation—helping them become comfortable asking meaningful questions about faith, listening to one another, and preparing for the more discussion-based environment they will eventually encounter in Circle.

Retreats, Camp & Fellowship

In February, four carloads of CLC youth and adult chaperones traveled to Quake in Wisconsin Dells. Approximately 20 middle- and high-school youth participated, along with five adult chaperones. The weekend included worship, speakers, music, small-group activities, recreation, and plenty of opportunities to build relationships. By all accounts, it was a wonderful weekend for our youth.

Five CLC youth also attended Confirmation Camp at Lutherwald this summer. Camp took place shortly after a major storm, which created some unexpected challenges, but our youth and leaders adapted and were able to participate in the week together.

As we plan for the coming year, we are exploring additional retreat and summer camp opportunities that may provide greater flexibility and additional options for our youth and families.

Fundraising & Congregational Support

Fundraising continued to be an important—and fun—part of youth ministry this year.

Our Easter Sunday Bake Sale was an incredible demonstration of congregational generosity. Members donated enough baked goods to fill four tables, which we offered between services and following the final service for free-will donations. By the end of the morning, we had sold nearly everything.

Trivia Night in April was another highlight. We sold out all ten tables, welcoming both CLC members and guests from outside our congregation, and raised more than $1,500 for youth travel and camp scholarships. Our youth played an important role in the evening, serving dinner, refilling table snacks, and helping throughout the event.

Special thanks go to Amy Knauff for co-organizing Trivia Night, Heather Abbring for helping secure donations from Family Express, the Budnick family for creating the trivia questions, and the Venstrom family for serving as our emcees. It was a genuinely fun evening made possible by many hands.

September brought another Popcorn Fest and another tremendous volunteer effort. This year's booth featured Italian sausage, with a crew setting up Friday evening, volunteers working shifts throughout Saturday, and another crew returning for teardown Saturday night. Our youth worked alongside adults throughout the day as they were able.

The booth raised more than $1,300, and the congregation helped us turn our remaining food into an additional fundraising opportunity the following Sunday, contributing approximately another $500 through free-will donations. Special thanks go to Denise Matagos for developing the menu and Kris Albers for organizing the operation of the booth.

Our annual Silent Auction will return this fall, with Amy Knauff already working to secure donations. Youth will help promote the auction and contact our winning bidders.

Funds raised through these events help offset the cost of camps, retreats, trips, and other youth experiences, including preparations for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering. Our hope is to continue reducing the financial burden on families and to make these opportunities accessible to every young person who wants to participate.

Looking Ahead

As we look toward 2027, one of our biggest priorities is helping our youth recognize that they don't simply belong to a youth program, they belong to Christ Lutheran Church.

We want to create more opportunities for young people to participate throughout the life of the congregation, whether that means serving as lectors, assisting with Communion, learning to help in the tech booth, participating in service projects, or finding other ways to contribute their gifts. Several of our youth are already serving as lectors, and we hope to see that participation continue to grow.

We also hope to expand Circle with more social events, service opportunities, guest speakers, and deeper faith conversations. Recruiting additional adult volunteers remains another important goal across our programs.
Planning is also beginning for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering. Interest among our youth is high, and we are exploring opportunities to partner with other congregations as we navigate the planning process and prepare for this experience together.

Our eight-member Youth Board—six adults and two youth representatives—continues to meet monthly and communicate regularly between meetings. Board members and Circle parents have also generously provided transportation, volunteer hours, and countless other forms of support throughout the year.

Every Sunday evening, volunteers provide dinner for our Circle youth. Every fundraiser depends upon people donating food, money, supplies, and time. Our Confirmation students have adults willing to walk alongside them as mentors. Our programs have teachers, drivers, chaperones, organizers, and people willing to show up whenever something needs to be done.

Thank you.

Whether you donated baked goods, made a free-will donation, provided a meal, worked a Popcorn Fest shift, donated an auction item, drove a carload of kids, taught a class, mentored a Confirmand, or simply showed up to support our youth, your generosity communicates something important to our young people; they matter to this congregation.

Perhaps what I am most proud of this year cannot be measured by attendance or dollars raised. Our youth are increasingly comfortable being themselves, speaking honestly about what is and isn't working, inviting friends into the group, and taking ownership of the community we are building together.

Circle has changed because we have listened to one another, adjusted when something wasn't working, and figured out together what we want this ministry to be. There is still plenty of room to grow, but I am proud that we are building something our young people feel belongs to them.

Our youth are not simply the future of Christ Lutheran Church. They are part of the church right now.