

Lord of Life Lutheran Church of Baxter 2026-2027 Annual Report



Our Mission: To inspire a deeper and richer connection to Christ, our community, and each other.

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Church Council and Staff

Staff:

Pastor Erika Nilsen, Senior Pastor
erika.nilsen@lolbaxter.org

Pastor Sarah Marshall, Associate Pastor
sarah.marshall@lolbaxter.org

Anne Laechel, Parish Administrator
anne@lolbaxter.org

Tim Slinger, Youth Ministry Director
tim@lolbaxter.org

Koreann Martin, Music Coordinator
koreann@lolbaxter.org

Ryan Finch, Musician

Cody Ewald, Musician

Kristin Binsfeld, Administrative Assistant
kristin@lolbaxter.org

Karen Erickson, Custodian

Paul Erickson, Custodian

Tyler Jensen, Communications Coordinator
tyler.jensen@lolbaxter.org

Council:

Greg Bennett, President

Jane Peterson, Vice-President

Beth Bastian, Secretary

Eric Davidge, Treasurer

Landon Stoen,
Youth Council Representative

Mission Leaders:

Guy Kelm, Mission Upward

Wendy Adamson, Mission Inward

Jessamyn Foley, Mission Outward

Matt Delaney, Mission Ground

Congregational Meeting Agenda

June 7, 2026 - 10:45 A.M.

1. Call to order - President Greg Bennett
2. Opening prayer and celebrations
3. Attendance
4. Certification of quorum - Secretary Beth Bastian
5. Adoption of Agenda (Verbal Vote) - President Greg Bennett
6. Minutes of Congregational Meeting - June 1, 2025 - Secretary Beth Bastian
7. Presentation and Discussion of Annual Reports - President Greg Bennett
 - a. Barrett Property
8. Presentation of Budget for July 2026 to June 2027 - Treasurer Eric Davidge
 - a. Capital Campaign
 - b. Motion to adopt, discussion, and approval (Verbal Vote)
9. Nominating Committee Report
 - a. Voting on Council members, Nominating Committee & Financial Review Committee (Verbal Vote) - President Greg Bennett
10. Other business
11. Motion to Adjourn - President Greg Bennett
12. Closing Prayer

Congregational Meeting Minutes

Lord of Life Lutheran Church

Annual Congregational Meeting Minutes - June 1, 2025

The Annual Congregational meeting was called to order by President Andy Isackson at 11:01 a.m. Opening prayer was led by Pr. Erika Nilsen, followed by a review of 2024 and 2025 activities, and thanks to the congregation, staff and church council's work over the past year.

Council Secretary Jessamyn Foley certified that a quorum of voting members was present, with 67 voting members in attendance.

MOTION to adopt the June 1, 2025 Annual Congregational Meeting agenda. Motion carried.

MOTION to approve the minutes of the June 2, 2024 Congregational Meeting. Motion by Sonya Nefstead. Second by Val Jones. Motion carried.

Reports

President Andy Isackson shared a summary of the many things that have happened at Lord of Life over the past 12 months, including the departure of Pr. Steven Rye and the start of our Forward Together Capital Campaign. He also gave an update on the status of the Barrett Property and the Discovery Team meetings that will be held over the summer.

Budget Presentation for July 2025 to June 2026

Treasurer Eric Davidge thanked everyone for their support of the Parking Lot campaign, which was completed last summer, and stated that we have received \$914K in pledges toward our Capital Campaign to eliminate the mortgage and take care of several capital expenses, like replacing furnaces and adding air conditioning to the west education wing, replacing the dishwasher in the kitchen and updating the sound system in the Sanctuary.

President Andy Isackson called for a motion to adopt the proposed 2025-2026 budget. Motion by Sue Beck, and second by Landen Stoen. Motion carried.

Nominating Committee Report

The 2025 Nominations Committee submitted the following names for election:

Church Council:

President (1-yr): Greg Bennett

Vice President (1-yr): Jane Peterson

Secretary (1-yr): Beth Bastian

Treasurer (1-yr): Eric Davidge

Mission Inward (2-yr): Wendy Adamson

Mission Outward (2-yr): Jessamyn Foley

Youth (1-yr): Landen Stoen

2026 Synod Assembly

Voting Member (1-yr): Wendy Adamson

2026 Nominating Committee:

Andy Isackson (1-yr)

MOTION to cast a unanimous ballot for all nominated officers and Council members, Synod Assembly voting members and the 2026 Nominating Committee, and to grant the Church Council the authority to fill empty 2026 Nominating Committee member positions, motion by Christopher Foley, second by Val Jones. Motion carried

Other Business

Pastor Erika Nilsen spoke about the past year at Lord of Life and where we will be going in the future. Additional details can be found in her annual report.

Thank you's were expressed to incoming and outgoing Council Members, outgoing Council President Andy Isackson, Pastoral Staff and church staff for their work.

Motion to Adjourn by Wendy Adamson, second by Brian Wallace. Motion carried.
Closing Prayer by Pastor Erika Nilsen.

Anne Laechel, Parish Administrator

Lord of Life Lutheran Church Congregational Meeting Minutes - December 7, 2025

The meeting was called to order at 10:56 a.m. Quorum was attained, with 85 voting members present.

The following motion was moved by Wendy VanMoer and seconded by Howie Bahn.

Motion: To approve the sale of Lord of Life-owned property located at 6005 Oakdale Rd in Baxter MN, known as the Barrett Property, to Thomas Dehn of Thomas Allen Builders for the purchase price of \$250,000, with an additional \$10,000 of earnest money and the contingencies and closing date detailed the Purchase Agreement Counter Offer.

Discussion followed with comments regarding work done on the land and how development will reduce the amount of unimproved in that area. There were questions regarding the contingencies with the offer and the recommendation of our realtor, how much has been paid for property taxes during our ownership, what future assessments we might be responsible for in the future as development in that area increases and whether a delay in selling the land would result in increased profit. Thanksgiving was offered to Frank, Faye and Leroy Barrett for gifting the land to us upon their deaths.

The question was called and a written ballot was distributed.
Results were 78 voting Yes to approve the sale, and 7 voting No. Motion Carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by Anne Laechel, Parish Administrator

January 11, 2026

Brandon, Ashley, Lucy, Jon & Sam Dean
 Andrew, Christen, Briana & Mackenzie Homan
 Skip & Nancy Peterson

May 3, 2026

Alivia Berg
 Lauren Enge
 Caden Johnson
 Ellie Kempf
 Taylor Schmeck

First Communion – April 2, 2026

Joey Anderson, Franki Burton, Thomas Grover, Presley Leonard, Alex Rangen & Quinn Skwira

Confirmation – May 3, 2026

Levi Aadland, Charlie Behr, Alivia Berg, Annie Brown, Raegan Coonfield, Katelyn Ehlert, Lauren Enge, Eric Fordyce, Kasey Hamlin, Briana Homan, Caden Johnson, Elle Kempf, Connor Kostohryz, Gavin Raimann, Claire Rangen, Grace Rangen, Elle Richters, Andrew Rioux, Taylor Schmeck, Michael Smithson, Andi White

President's Report

This past year has been nothing short of exciting. Thanks to the dedication of our members and staff, we have celebrated many memorable accomplishments. Our congregation continues to build on the momentum of our Forward Together campaign.

Through the generosity of our members, the capital campaign has been tremendously successful. With total pledges exceeding \$900,000 over the three-year campaign, we are excited to realize the congregation's vision for our financial future. At the beginning of the campaign, our mortgage balance stood at \$535,000. By the annual meeting in June, that balance will be reduced to under \$200,000. Our goal is to have the mortgage paid off completely by this time next year. With improving cash flow, we will be able to direct even more resources toward our growing ministries.

With the help of an amazing group of volunteers, a Discovery Team was formed to help us reflect on where we have been, where we are today, and where God is leading us in the future. This team worked closely with the congregation to better understand who we are as a church community and what we hope to become. Through their efforts, a job description was developed outlining the role and vision for our Senior Pastor position.

Sunday School is back! The council authorized resources to support another outstanding group of volunteers, led by Koreann Martin, in bringing Sunday School back to LOL. As part

of our continued focus on strengthening youth ministry, the council will continue expanding the Sunday School program in the coming year.

Pastoral transitions were another highlight of this past year. We were excited and honored to welcome Pastor Sarah Marshall as our new part time Associate Pastor. Pastor Sarah will be splitting her time between LOL and Bethlehem Lutheran in Brainerd. She has already been a fantastic addition to our congregation, and we look forward to growing our ministry alongside her.

Working hand in hand this next year will be Senior Pastor Erika and Associate Pastor Sarah. Following an expedited call process, a congregational meeting was held where Pastor Erika was voted in by the congregation to serve as our next Senior Pastor. We are very excited to explore the leadership that she will provide to our church, congregation and the community. We are grateful for God's continued guidance and for the faithful support of our congregation as we move forward together into another year of ministry and growth.

Sincerely,
Greg Bennett

Senior Pastor's Report

I'm not sure where to even begin...

So much has happened in this past year and I thank God for your faithfulness and fierce love of one another, Christ, and both the local and global communities of which we are a part. I have borne witness to your faithfulness and fierce love in so many ways...

- Your presence in worship;
- Your participation in learning and growing;
- Your volunteering to serve in leadership, in fellowship, in worship, children and youth ministry, ministry with community partners, tangible acts of mercy and justice for the neighbor, and love for one another;
- Your generous response to our capital campaign Forward Together
- Your willing participation in the Discovery Conversations that took place over the summer to help bring focus and clarity to Lord of Life's future. AND your willing participation in Life Together Gatherings, fostering community and connection
- Your care for each other
- Your support of our staff – through prayer and encouragement and treats!
- Your relentless love for me and my family in the midst of our loss and your affirmation of me as you extended a call to me to be Lord of Life's senior pastor
- Your desire to grow deeper and richer in your own connections to Christ, community and each other.

And I can see where God's joyful spirit is leading us...

- A growing and vibrant worshipping community
- Engaged participation in small group ministry and connections via our Life Together focus.

- Robust ministry to children, youth and families
- Showing up for one another in difficult times
- Increased volunteering to serve in leadership, in fellowship, in worship, children and youth ministry, ministry with community partners, tangible acts of mercy and justice for the neighbor, and love for one another
- Ongoing generosity through the capital campaign Forward Together to finish up our mortgage, upgrade the sound experience in worship, tend to an aging building, and make ministry more accessible to all.
- Loving support of our staff – through financial resources, prayer, encouragement and a willingness to stretch and grow.

What a privilege it is to serve Lord of Life Lutheran Church! Thank you for your confidence in calling me to be the senior pastor. I am so grateful for the opportunity and blessed to work alongside a wonderful and faith-filled staff, including Pastor Sarah who just joined the Lord of Life staff in December as I was taking time off to be with David. I cannot be more grateful for her steady leadership during a terribly difficult time and for her ongoing excellence and joy in serving. It is such a gift to have her on staff.

This is a place of joy, generosity and genuine love. May we continue to grow deeper and richer in our connections to Christ, community and each other.

Grateful, Pastor Erika

Associate Pastor's Report

Stepping into ministry at Lord of Life in December also came with a great deal of transition. As Pastor Erika stepped out to be where she needed to be with her family and I stepped in, there was deep grace and radical welcome extended to me from this congregation from the very beginning. You welcomed me as I learned routines, figured out patterns, stumbled through names more than once, and learned the rhythms and culture that make Lord of Life who it is. So many of you patiently reminded me of your names, gently helped me understand what needed to happen and where, and offered encouragement along the way. I remain deeply grateful for the kindness, flexibility, and warmth that met me in those first weeks and continue on even now. And perhaps nowhere did I feel that more fully than on Christmas Eve, gathered to celebrate the birth of the Christ child. As candlelight filled the sanctuary and the sounds of “Silent Night” rose around us, there was a holy sense of peace and belonging, a reminder that even in seasons of transition and change and against the darkness of the night, Christ continues to gather us together in light, hope, and love.

This past Lenten season especially felt like a powerful reminder of that truth as we journeyed together through our “All In” theme, remembering again and again that God is all in for us. Through worship, prayer, conversation, service, and life together, we were reminded that God meets us not only in the polished and certain moments of life, but also in the unknowns, the questions, the griefs, the joys, and the growing edges. There was something deeply meaningful about watching this congregation lean into worship, prayer stations, fellowship, service,

and intentional conversation throughout the season. It felt like a community growing deeper roots together.

I have also become increasingly excited about the ways we are beginning to work to strengthen ministries, particularly with younger children and families. There is incredible energy, joy, and possibility in the lives of the children and youth who fill our classrooms, hallways, Sanctuary, Sonshine Room, and summer ministries. Watching kids grow in faith, ask big questions, serve others, and discover that they belong in the family of God is one of the greatest gifts of ministry. I believe deeply that investing in children, youth, and families is not simply about the future of the church, it is about who we are called to be right now as the body of Christ. What does that look like of course is the question, together we need to continue to discern where it is the Spirit is leading and calling us. How do we continue to build up disciples of all ages? How do we continue to grow in our lives of faith from birth to grave for the sake of the world?

At the same time, one of the things we know about ministry is that ministry does not happen alone. We are incredibly blessed with an amazing staff who care deeply about this congregation and the work of God in and through this place and work tirelessly to help nurture the ministries of Lord of Life. Their creativity, compassion, flexibility, and faithfulness are gifts to this community, and I am profoundly grateful to serve alongside them. But we also cannot do this alone.

The church is the people of God living life together. Each of us has gifts. Each of us has passions. Each of us has ways we can help build up the body of Christ and serve our neighbors. As we continue growing into the mission and vision of Lord of Life, we need people willing to step in, serve, lead, encourage, teach, welcome, pray, organize, mentor, sing, cook, visit, listen, and simply show up for one another. If you have ever wondered where your gifts and talents might meet the needs of the world, I would love to help you discover that. Whether it is through worship leadership, children and youth ministry, hospitality, service projects, music, small groups, technology, care ministry, or behind-the-scenes support, there is a place for you here.

As we look ahead, there is a deep sense of hope and excitement for what is to come. There is energy around the ways the Spirit is moving among us and calling us into what's next. As we move toward summer and fall and another year of ministry together, I am excited to continue discerning alongside you how we might grow more deeply rooted and connected, to Christ, to community, and to one another.

The mission of Lord of Life is not simply something we say; it is something we are continuing to live into together. I truly believe the Spirit is still planting seeds, growing roots, and bearing fruit in this place. And while we may not know exactly what the next year will bring, I trust that God is already at work ahead of us, calling us deeper into faith, deeper into community, and deeper into the work of loving and serving the world around us.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of walking alongside you in this season of ministry. It is a gift to serve among you, to learn from you, and to witness the ways God is moving through this community. I cannot wait to see where God leads us next.

Ministry Reports

Inward Ministries (Submitted by Wendy Adamson)

This past year has been one of change and uncertainty for Lord of Life without a senior pastor.

However, many ministries continue to thrive, including LOLLY, Stephen Ministries, Visiting Friends, Men's Breakfast/Fellowship, Martha and Sarah Circles, Women's Bible Study, Funeral Hospitality, Grief Support Group, Prayer Chain, and Prayer Shawl Ministry. Wednesday night suppers were a huge success, thanks to the leadership of Pastor Darrell and dedicated serving teams.

Koreann Martin directed the choir in an amazing Christmas Cantata, including community members and an orchestra.

The Discovery Team, with the guidance of a consultant, led our congregation through a series of meetings to help us discern who we are as a church and our vision for the future. Now that Pastor Erika has been called as our Senior Pastor and Pastor Sarah joined us in December on a half-time basis through a partnership agreement with Bethlehem Lutheran, planning has begun to continue moving FORWARD TOGETHER with new opportunities for small groups, new ministries, and new opportunities to grow in faith and community.

Upward Ministries (Submitted by Guy Kelm)

Upward Ministries has continued to enrich the spiritual growth of our church by supporting the children and youth ministries.

Youth Ministries include Club 56, Middle School Youth Group and Teens Upstream (high school youth)

Children's Ministries has added Club 34 (3rd and 4th graders) continued meeting each month. This ministry was planned out by Guy Kelm and led by parent volunteers. Guy will meet with the parents before next fall to make plans as well as decide if there is a desire for more frequent meetings. Success of this ministry depends on consistent adult volunteers. Summer Ministries will continue through VBS, ServeCAMP and Summer Stretch. Kids Time serves families during Sunday service.

Thank you to Koreann Martin and Cody Ewald for planning and leading Sunday School after service. For this to continue, we will need to employ a children's ministry director, as well as, secure adult volunteers.

A Rummage Sale Ministry has begun to include more members of our congregation with funds being shared with the youth and children's ministries. This ministry would oversee the spring sale and the fall Christmas sale. More volunteers are needed for these sales to continue.

Future goals: To employ a children's ministry director and to develop a method of securing adult volunteers for these children and youth ministries.

As always, our mission is to build a deeper connection with Christ within our church for children, youth and families.

Ground Ministry (Submitted by Matthew Delaney):

Overview

This past year has been a productive and steady one for the care and upkeep of our church grounds. Our focus remained on maintaining a safe, and functional environment for members, visitors, and community partners who use our property throughout the year. Despite aging infrastructure, and rising maintenance costs, we made meaningful progress in both routine upkeep and long-term improvements.

Accomplishments

Landscaping Refresh: Completed seasonal cleanups in spring and fall, trimmed trees and shrubs, and refreshed mulch in key areas around the sanctuary and main entrance.

HVAC Replacements: Replaced the rooftop unit for the sanctuary heating and AC. Also new furnaces and AC for the Sonshine room and east offices.

Columbarium Addition: Worked with the columbarium committee to select a site and complete landscaping for the new Columbarium.

Routine Maintenance

- Weekly lawn mowing and trimming throughout the growing season;
- Fertilizing the lawn;
- Regular trash and brush cleanup around the property;
- Seasonal flower planting and watering; and
- Snowplowing during winter months to ensure safe access to all church entrances and parking areas

Challenges

Electrical Efficiency: New electrical programs and rates require us to carefully monitor energy consumption. It is essential to turn off all non-essential lighting when not in use, with particular attention to the sanctuary theater lights to avoid unnecessary energy waste.

Volunteer Availability: While we had strong help during peak seasons, consistent volunteer turnout remains a challenge for midweek tasks.

Rising Costs: Fuel, landscaping materials, and contractor rates increased, tightening our budget for unplanned repairs.

Volunteer Contributions

Our volunteers continue to be the backbone of our grounds ministry. This year, more than a dozen members contributed time to mowing, trimming, planting, snow shoveling, and general cleanup. Special thanks to:

The mowing team, who rotated weekly duties all summer;
 Youth volunteers, who helped with the spring and fall cleanup; and
 Members who donated plants and mulch, reducing our expenses. Their dedication saved the church hundreds of labor hours and significantly reduced maintenance costs.

Goals for Next Year

Complete Corridor Project: Bids are out for replacement of corridor windows, exterior siding repairs, and addressing drainage issues on the northeast side to prevent future problems.

Fellowship Hall Roof repairs: Bids are out for replacement of shingles and sheathing as necessary on the north side the fellowship hall.

Sanctuary Lighting and Sound Improvements: Continue exploring options to enhance the sanctuary's lighting and sound systems for better performance and experience.

Thank You

Thank you to the congregation, volunteers, council, and especially the Property Team for their invaluable contributions to maintaining and improving our church grounds. Maintaining our property is a shared ministry, and I'm grateful to everyone who contributed time or resources this year. I look forward to building on this progress in the coming year.

Youth Ministry (Submitted by Tim Slinger):

Highlights / Events:

- Summer Programs & High School Mission Trip;
- Milestone Ministries;
- School Year Programming Confirmation, Club 56, Youth Groups, Club 34; and
- Collaborative Ministry Events with Area ELCA Congregations.

Programming by The Numbers:

- Confirmation / Club 56: 75
- Youth Groups: 30
- Summer Ministry: 51
- 5th Grade First Communion: 6
- 9th Graders Confirmed: 18
- High School Senior Recognition: 21

Summer Ministry (Summer Stretch, serveCAMP & High School Mission Trip):

We are currently getting ready to launch our summer programs for this summer, for this report I want to reflect back on last summer's programs. As I do my heart is filled with gratitude! I know I say it every year but I love how these programs truly live out Lord of Life's mission statement, "Connecting to Christ, community & each other."

Connecting to Christ:

I'm sure if you asked those involved it would be different for everyone on what were some of the most impactful experiences throughout the summer. But here is a small glimpse into what

I witnessed as our groups gathered. Connecting to Christ through prayer whether it be in the morning as our day is starting out. Taking a break from the hot summer sun for lunch or at a service site to dive into a devotional together. To a late-night campfire worship during serve-camp or worship to close out the night in Knoxville, Tennessee during our mission trip. It was moments being outside enjoy the summer air and sunshine, surrounded by the beauty of this area or the mountains / rivers while whitewater rafting in Tennessee.

Connecting to Community:

Whether our community was here in the Brainerd Lakes Area or on our mission trip to Knoxville, TN, we were truly blessed to partner with some amazing organizations that are truly making a difference in our community.

Organizations That We Volunteered With:

- Bridges of Hope: Common Goods & Operation Sandwich;
- The Outreach Program of the BLA;
- Confidence Learning Center;
- Northland Arboretum;
- Relationship Safety Alliance;
- MNTLC Creekside Community;
- Sharing Bread Soup Kitchen;
- Nordic Woods Assisted Living;
- Service Projects at Lord of Life;
- Helping Congregational Members; and
- Next Step Ministries.

Connecting to Each Other:

The beauty of summer ministry is we have longer programmed days than what we have during the school year. Throughout the entire time we are connecting with our friends' neighbors and those we meet along the way. Whether it be car rides across town or across the country. Playing our favorite games of 9-square or Romans & Christians. To having meaningful conversations with those we serve alongside or with throughout the summer. It is truly a blessing to be a part of!

We look forward to another great summer this year of Summer Stretch, serveCAMP and our high school mission trip to San Diego! Thank you for your support, being a part of, volunteering with these impactful summer ministries!

School Year Ministry (Milestone Ministries, Wednesday Nights, Youth Groups & More):

Our school year programs just recently wrapped up for the year. It truly is hard to put into words everything that goes on throughout a year and not try to write a chapter book for you all to read but to truly capture what youth ministry looks like here in this place. As I reflect here is what comes to mind.

Wednesday Nights: The Positive Energy That Filled This Space

As you walked into church on Wednesday night you could not help but be greeted by the delicious smells of our weekly Wednesday night meals that filled the space. It truly was a

blessing to offer these weekly for our families, congregational members and community. The conversations around the dinner table, laughter and community that filled that space truly was lifegiving.

Then heading into a time of worship, filled with song, prayer, reflection on God's word and the theme for the night. Every once in a while, interrupted with joyful disruptions or skits. To then be sent out to be a part of confirmation, Club 56 or high school youth group or choir!

There is so much that is covered throughout the year within each program and a lot that is covered that we didn't expect to talk about or cover that day! I am thankful for all the volunteers' parents and those who gathered weekly for small group conversation, faith mentor conversations or youth group!

Middle School Late Night Outs

During the winter months we offered middle school late night out events in collaboration with area ELCA congregations. These happened on Friday nights and each month they were hosted at a different church. Truly an action-packed night where middle schoolers from Lord of Life could connect with their friends from area congregations. Talking about great joy and energy these nights had it all and our youth truly looked forward to them!

Milestone Ministry

First Communion Class: Throughout March our 5th graders gathered for First Communion class which was lead by Pastor Erika and Pastor Sarah. The class enjoyed baking communion bread on their last night which they enjoyed as they received their first communion on Maundy Thursday.

Affirmation of Baptism Service: On Sunday, May 3rd our 9th grade confirmation class affirmed their baptism during the 9:30 am worship service. We had eighteen 9th graders who were confirmed and two who were unable to attend and will be confirmed at a later date. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of their faith journey here at Lord of Life. It was a special day as family, friends and our faith community gathered together.

Senior Recognition: On Sunday, May 17th we celebrated our 2026 high school seniors at Lord of Life with senior recognition. In worship each graduate received a personalized quilt made by the Lord of Life quilters. Thank you to the Lord of Life quilters for providing such a meaningful gift to our seniors!

Thank You Volunteers

A year full of youth ministry programs and opportunities for families; could not happen without your help and support. Over 70 adult volunteers gave of their time and energy to help with one of our programs this year! Thank you just doesn't seem like enough. Know that your presence, your leadership, your support, truly made a positive impact on this place, the ministry programs and all involved.

Thank you for a great year!
Tim Slinger, Youth Director

Visiting Friends Ministry (Submitted by Lolly Kalinoski):

Lord of Life's Visiting Friends Ministry was created in late 2024 by three LOL members who wanted to help Pr. Erika serve partially or fully homebound members of LOL during the time of transition from two pastors to one pastor. The goals of the Visiting Friends Ministry were to help these folks feel connected to their faith family, to know that the LOL congregation cares about them, and to help to alleviate some of their loneliness.

This dedicated and caring team at first numbered 20 Visitors serving 20 Visitees. Currently the team consists of 10 Visitors serving 10 Visitees due to several changing circumstances, but this is still just the right balance for now. The three coordinators will be happy to accept more volunteers to join the team so that help will be available as the changing needs of LOL congregants require.

This ministry requires no specific training, but listening, compassion, and confidentiality are stressed. The frequency and duration of each visit are flexible and depend on the needs of both Visitee and Visitor. Each new Visitor will meet with the coordinators to discuss guidelines and ideas for meeting with the Visitee, then the coordinators will match the Visitor with a Visitee. Pr. Erika refers folks who could benefit from this vibrant ministry to the coordinators, and she is frequently updated on the team's progress.

We, the coordinators, are so encouraged to see the work of the Holy Spirit alive in the Visiting Friends teamwork! We ask that you pray for continued guidance and participation in this rewarding work. As we all know, IT'S GOOD TO BE FAMILY!

If this volunteer position feels right for you, please contact one of us:

Deb Bergstrom, Parish Nurse, 701-678-4053

Bonnie Henningson, 218-851-9163

Lolly Kalinoski, 218-829-8207

Worship Environment Team:

Made up of 13 volunteers, the Worship Environment Team serves every week by taking the lead in setting up Holy Communion before worship and cleaning it up afterwards.

They also ensure the Sanctuary is decorated to match the different seasons of the Church (Blue for Advent, Purple for Lent, White for Easter, etc.)

One special project the group helped with this year was the paper chandeliers assembled throughout Lent that beautified the Sanctuary on Easter Sunday. The Worship Environment Team helped turn hula-hoops, fishing rods, and the Congregation's prayer reflections into dazzling pieces of art!

Also new this year have been the beeswax candles in the sand tables in the Sanctuary. The Worship Environment Team replaced our old candles with these as they are much more ecologically friendly. When the candlesticks are used up, there are no more tin containers that need to be thrown away. Instead, the wax is collected and reused by people to make everything from fire starters to setups for growing edible mushrooms.

Lord of Life Quilters (Submitted by Irene Christofferson):

WE MEET THURSDAY MORNINGS, 9 am to 11:30 or so

This year we made 21 quilts for Lord of Life's graduating seniors. We also made 27 twin-sized quilts to be delivered to Lutheran World Relief or distributed locally.

We continued with our mission of making fund-raising quilts for local charitable organizations. One large quilt will get delivered to Camp Knutson for their August Quilt Auction. Camp Knutson is a summer camp for youth and adults with medical conditions and other identified needs. As in the past, we made one for the Brainerd Chapter of Fishing Has No Boundaries. FHNB is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to assisting disabled individuals through fishing and enjoying the great outdoors. We also made and donated quilts to the Brainerd Senior Center. The Center, known for their Thursday doughnuts, is the community hub dedicated to enriching the lives of mature adults.

Thanks to all who donated their time this year to help with this ministry. The quilters invite interested people to join us. While no sewing skills are required, we do have sewing machines available for use. When we meet on Thursday mornings, we generally put two or three quilts together by laying the backing fabric down, covering it with batting, then placing the quilt top last. The layers are then pinned, tied, and are ready for binding, which can be done at home.

In addition to assembling the quilts, we could use volunteers who would like to layout new quilts using fabric squares we have here at church. So if designing is more your thing, we have room for you, too!

We are always accepting donations of cotton fabric, with the exception of scraps.

Respectfully Submitted,
Irene Christofferson

Micah Group (Submitted by Patricia Dickson):

Seeds of Micah Group were planted about six years ago. About five years ago, sprouts appeared and were named "Micah Group." The group has grown in depth and breadth and service as it has continued to seek to do "what is good." There are currently 73 participants including staff/Council representatives. A Core Leadership Team, now 15 members, meets monthly, always starting meetings with a Land Acknowledgement.

In the past year, Micah Group has served at the Sharing Bread Soup Kitchen first Sundays in August 2025 and February 2026 and managed Lord of Life's 12th Annual Clothing Giveaway, October 5 – 11, 2025, and served two of the Wednesday Night Suppers at Lord of Life.

Micah Group has published 50 editions of "Micah Group Word," a weekly publication with a readership nearing 200 that offers opportunities in Brainerd/Baxter and surrounding communities for learning, advocacy, and action.

Commencing during Covid, there has been ongoing commitment to presence at school board

meetings and additional support of ISD181 and the larger community through collaboration with Lakes Area Justice Table (LAJT). LAJT's current foci are Democracy; Education; Environment; Diversity and Inclusion; Mental and Social Wellbeing; and Housing Security.

Additional collaborations with LAJT table members, The Sowing Room, ISD181, and Indivisible have allowed Micah Group to support staff of the Kitchigami Regional Library System; take an active role in the Cultivating Communities Summit; support and participate in Indigenous People's Day; lead and participate in "One Book One Community: Grow a Heart," a course offered through Community Education; and raise voices for justice and peace locally and regionally.

August of 2025, Micah Group planned a trip for all who were interested, to attend the Mille Lacs 59th Annual Powwow and provided an orientation the week before, "Etiquette, Regalia, Dances," by Michele Berger who also met the group at the Powwow.

September, in addition to setting up a Rally Day table, Micah Group participated in Pride in the Park and the offering of a breakout session at the Cultivating Communities Summit. In October, Micah Group helped with the Indigenous People's Day Celebration.

After Lent, Lord of Life's "All-in for our Neighbors" donations were transported to their destination by Micah Group members. Donations to Northern Neighbors, both material and monetary, are a continuation of this help for immigrants, and Micah Group is overseeing this current collection.

With God's guidance and grace, to be continued . . .

Parish Nurse (Submitted by Deb Bergstrom):

LOLLY which stands for "LOTS OF LIVING LEFT YET" resumed last year, meeting once a month, I along with Peggy Rudkin have so enjoyed leading this program.

We have had very interesting speakers, and we are looking forward to next year which will resume this September. I continue to offer in home footcare, home visits, facilitate 2 grief groups, backdoor readings and presentations.

I am so blessed to be your Parish Nurse. God's blessings to all.

- Deb Bergstrom

Wednesday Women's Bible Study

Lord of Life's Wednesday Women's Bible Study continues to go well for the eight to ten women gathering each week on Zoom to study Scripture.

The group is a chance to take a deeper look at the books of the Bible. In the seven years they have been active, they have tackled nine Books so far, and have just finished their study of Isaiah.

These sessions are not just about learning, but also about fellowship and supporting one

another. At the end of every week, the group takes time to see what is on the minds of one another and pray for them. Every other month, the group meets in-person for fellowship. This summer, the group will meet the last Wednesday of each month at Whipple Beach from 10:30 to 11:30 am for Fellowship. They will resume their studies in the middle of September.

Women of all ages are welcome. Anyone interested in joining the group should contact Carol Rodseth at (218) 838-4396, or Anne Holz at (952) 457-4055.

Columbarium Team

2025 saw a huge milestone after years of work by the Columbarium Team with the installation and opening of Lord of Life's Columbarium.

In July, the space was dedicated and its first residents, Bugs and Eldo Schmidt, were laid to rest in the Columbarium. The gift made by the Schmidt's in their will was instrumental to the addition of this space at Lord of Life.

Since the Columbarium itself was added to the grounds, the Team has still been hard at work to achieve the ultimate vision for the space. Using funds from the Capital Campaign, landscaping pavers were placed around the Columbarium and leading to the parking lot. Throughout the winter, the Team and other volunteers worked to keep the space clear of snow.

This spring, the group has been working with students from Central Lakes College to design and install other landscaping features at the site.

Those with questions about the Columbarium are invited to speak with Team members Val and Steve Jones, and John and Wendy VanMoer. Copies of the agreement for purchasing a niche can be found by contacting Parish Administrator Anne Laechel at anne.laechel@lolbaxter.org.

Music Ministry

Spectacular music has continued to fill Lord of Life this year, regularly featuring the talents of the EveryDaySonDay Band, the Lord of Life Choir, and Koreann, Ryan, Cody and Mark and Deb Swirmicky. Paul Sandberg also began sharing his violin talents here at Lord of Life this year.

This year also featured a number of partnerships with musicians in the wider community to bring their talents to Lord of Life.

In December, the Christmas Cantata was expanded to include not only a choir, but also an orchestra made up of Lord of Life members and musicians from around the Brainerd Lakes Area. Last June brought the Trinity Bell Choir to Lord of Life for a special performance, and the Teen and Adult Challenge Choir once again visited in January.

In the coming year, we will continue to invite members of Lord of Life to share their musical gifts. Those interested should contact Koreann at koreann.martin@lolbaxter.org.

Thursday Men's Fellowship

Men at Lord of Life continue to meet Thursdays from 9:30 am to 11 am in the Commons. These meetings are a chance to be in fellowship with one another, with conversation ranging from lighthearted to deep and profound.

After enjoying rolls, fruit, coffee, and good conversation, the group moves onto study. Every week members take turns to lead a Bible Study, or discussion on a devotional they've found.

The group also gives back to the wider Lord of Life community. For the second year, the group took money it collects and purchased Study Bibles for every 9th Grader being confirmed at Lord of Life.

Wednesday Night Supper (Submitted by Darrell Pedersen)

Great food, hard-working servers, and well-filled eaters – that's what happened at Lord of Life Lutheran on Wednesday nights during the past school year. Eight food-serving teams took turns providing nourishing and tasty meals to an average of 70+ diners each week. Supper, worship, confirmation, choir, 5th-6th grade youth group – and lots of good conversation and fellowship lifted our faith family, the Body of Christ each week. The free-will offerings more than covered the cost of the food. Thanks be to God, and thanks to all the roughly 80 workers, ranging from Middle School to well into retirement age.

Next fall, we will set up serving teams again. Each team serves about 3 times a year. Many of the existing teams have already indicated an interest in continuing. New members are welcome to join or to form an entirely new team. This is fun! Please let me know if you'd like to help with food service next fall.

Darrell J. Pedersen

Sarah Circle Women's Fellowship Group

For about a dozen or so women at Lord of Life, Sarah Circle has been a monthly opportunity to gather for fellowship, food, and Bible studies and devotionals.

In the last couple years however, the group also decided it was a chance for them to give back. Before Thanksgiving, the women in the Circle came together to sponsor a Thanksgiving meal basket as part of Bridges of Hope's annual program. For Christmas, they collected items that were on wishlists of veterans in local nursing homes.

For more information about Sarah Circle, please contact Ginny Orlowski at virginialake99@gmail.com.

Prayer Chain

Serving others in the Lord of Life community through prayer, the members of the Prayer Chain provide the simple comfort of knowing someone is praying for you. In the last year, the group has responded to 73 prayer requests, confidentially petitioning God for intercession for those in need. Those interested in joining the Prayer Chain should contact the Church Office at (218) 828-9374.

Friends of the Soup Kitchen

Volunteers from Lord of Life continue to live out Christ's teachings to feed the hungry, by working to serve one meal a month at the Sharing Bread Soup Kitchen in Brainerd.

In addition to the amazing families and groups that have each taken one or two months of the year to plan and prepare the meal, a spectacular core team of volunteers has formed, serving almost every month.

We are incredibly thankful for their gifts to this critical ministry, and invite other members of the Congregation to join them, or come together with friends and family to take the lead on one of the monthly shifts. For more information, please email tyler@lolbaxter.org.

Nursery Volunteers

Over the last year, a group of volunteers came together to reinvigorate the Nursery Ministry here at Lord of Life. This space offers the youngest members of Lord of Life a place to rest and play safely and happily during Sunday morning worship and special events.

Two goals for the group in the coming year are to increase the number of volunteers in order to ensure the Nursery can be open every Sunday, and possibly additional times, as well as to continue updating the items and decor in the Nursery.

For more information, or to volunteer, please email tyler@lolbaxter.org.

Other Ministries Include...

- Friday Men's Breakfast;
- Martha Circle Women's Fellowship Group;
- Prayer Shawl Ministry;
- Friends of the Red Cross;
- Friends of Habitat for Humanity
- Friends of Bridges of Hope;
- The Funeral Hospitality Team; and
- Worship Volunteers.

Synod Assembly Report

Wendy Adamson, Jessamyn Foley, and Jane Peterson accompanied Pastor Erika and Pastor Sarah to the NEMN Synod Assembly at Breezy Point April 24th-26th.

Friday night was a lot of rules and information, singing, Bishop Amy's farewell address, and the first ballot to vote for our new bishop. Our own Anne Laechel is the Synod registrar so she was busy checking people in and registering people so that all the voting could be official. The Synod Values are Welcoming, Connecting, Reforming, Supporting. And the theme for this assembly was "A New Creation Is Everything."

Saturday began with singing. There is something about being in a room of confident good voices that inspires! We heard various churchwide reports about where our benevolence goes and learned about various synod resources we and other churches can use to enhance ministry. Did you know there are 2.7 million members in the ELCA? Our synod sent to the ELCA more than \$237,000 for world hunger, more than \$75,000 for disaster relief, and more than \$399,000 for Mission support. The individual stories about what some congregations are doing was a wake-up call – we could be doing more!

Much of Saturday was spent voting for a new Bishop. There were five ballots and finally Pastor Taryn Montgomery, who has been working as the Synod Minister for Discipleship and Christian Community, was elected. Bishop Amy will officially retire later this summer. In between votes we sang, passed resolutions, reviewed budgets, etc. Here are the four resolutions that passed:

- 26-1A Designates \$5,000 for the NEMN Synod Hunger Grant Fund in the 2028 budget.
- 26-2B Affirms ecological resilience- encouraging all mitigate climate change and to live out God's call to be stewards of the earth for the sake of the whole creation.
- 26-3A Encourages congregations to appoint one young adult (18-35 years) as a synod delegate and entitle each congregation to add on youth (under 18) voting delegate to the synod assembly.
- 26-4A Urges every congregation to commit to active participation in the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action. Urges the ELCA to devote additional funds and staffing to lead the church's work for climate justice.

Saturday evening was the Emmaus Fund Dinner and auction. \$43,000 was raised for this fund whose interest is used to offer micro grants to congregations to support leadership development, youth and young adult engagement, and congregational outreach.

Sunday morning we elected a new Synod Vice President, Karen Gabriel from Faith Lutheran in Isle; approved the budget and compensation packages and worshipped with 250ish NEMN brothers and sisters in Christ.

The whole weekend was a good reminder that we are not in this alone. There are many congregations who are doing creative things. Let's be one of them!

Nominating Committee Report

Below is a list of candidates we will be voting on during the Congregational Meeting to fill committee and Church Council positions.

Some candidates have not yet been nominated by the Nominating Committee, and those spots are marked by a "TBD." A final ballot will be available at the Congregational Meeting.

Church Council Positions

(Officers serve 1-year terms, up to two consecutive terms)

President - Greg Bennett*

Vice-President - Jane Peterson*

Secretary - Beth Bastian*

Treasurer - TBD

(Directional Members serve 2-year terms, up to two consecutive terms)

Upward - Guy Kelm**

Outward - Jessamyn Foley (2nd year of first 2 year term)

Inward - Wendy Adamson (2nd year of first 2 year term)

Ground - Matt Delaney**

Youth - TBD

Synod Assembly Voting Members (3 possible)

Greg Bennett

Deb Bergstrom

Jessamyn Foley

Financial Review Committee

TBD

Nominating Committee

TBD

* - We will vote on whether to re-elect for another 1-year term

** - We will vote on whether to re-elect for another 2-year term



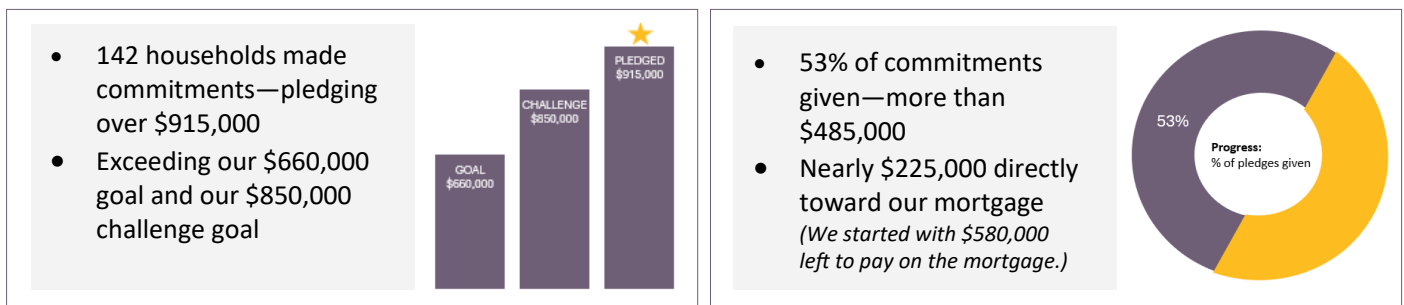
What we've made possible together

One year ago, we stepped forward in faith. Together, we committed to becoming debt-free and mission-focused while creating a space that welcomes all.

Today, we celebrate.

Where we are now

This past year has shown something powerful. We are a church that shows up, gives generously, and believes in the future. Forward Together isn't just a campaign. It's a reflection of who we are and who we are becoming.



What we've done so far

Already, your generosity is at work:

- New HVAC system in the sanctuary
- Updated furnaces and added air conditioning
- Paid down the mortgage *(\$277,000 left to go.)*
- Kitchen and building improvements
- Columbarium paving stones
- Paid campaign expenses

These aren't just upgrades. They create space for kids to learn and grow, families to gather, and ministry to thrive.

What's ahead in year two

We're not done. Upcoming priorities include:

- Continuing to pay down the mortgage
- Continuing to improve our building
- Continuing to expand ministry opportunities
- Continuing accessibility upgrades
- Sanctuary sound improvements
- Window updates
- Pay forward to youth ministry budget

Who we are becoming

This is our season. A season to celebrate and step forward together. Thank you for being part of this story.

An invitation

If you've already made a commitment, thank you. You are making a difference.

If you haven't yet participated, it's not too late. This campaign isn't just about a goal. It's about being part of what God is doing here.

Fill out a pledge card and return it, or email Anne for more info: anne.laechel@lolbaxter.org. Every step moves us forward.

Statement of Financial Position

Statement of Financial Position

Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Baxter, MN
Balance Sheet as of 04/30/2026

Account Number	Amount
<u>Assets</u>	
Total Current Assets	198,940.62
Total Fixed Assets	2,941,557.70
Total Assets	3,140,498.32
<u>Liabilities</u>	
Total Current Liabilities	18,661.79
Total Long Term Liabilities	277,244.66
Total Liabilities	295,906.45
<u>Equity</u>	
Total Unrestricted Net Assets	-55,658.24
Total Restricted Net Assets - Ministry Ground	2,852,460.22
Total Restricted Net Assets - Ministry Upward	19,601.62
Total Restricted Net Assets - Ministry Inward	16,771.10
Total Restricted Net Assets - Ministry Outward	11,417.17
Total Equity	2,844,591.87
Total Liabilities + Total Equity	3,140,498.32

Statement of Financial Activities

Lord of Life Lutheran Church Statement of Activity

Year to Date for the period of 7/1/2025 to 4/30/2026

			2025-2026	2026-2027
	Actual	YTD Budget	Annual Budget	Proposed Budget
Income				
Total Donations	458,121	454,872	545,826	572,794
Total Capital Campaign Donations	319,213	56,830	68,196	68,196
Total Other Income	30,040	9,854	11,725	119,825
Total Dedicated Income	66,307	0	0	0
Total Income	873,681	521,556	625,747	760,815
Expense				
Total Pastoral Ministry - Personnel	131,379	109,463	128,796	204,849
Total Lay Ministries - Personnel	232,899	213,508	255,210	307,559
Total Ministry - Ground	106,510	108,666	121,370	118,855
Total Ministry - Inward	15,409	9,533	11,200	19,450
Total Ministry - Outward	21,398	22,792	27,350	38,750
Total Ministry - Upward	13,448	12,688	13,625	23,925
Total Capital Campaign Expenses	252,400	56,830	68,196	68,196
Total Dedicated Expenses	54,836	0	0	0
Total Expense	828,279	533,480	625,747	781,584
Net Income (Loss)	45,402	-11,924	0	-20,769

Donations to our 2025-2028 Capital Campaign and additional Principal Mortgage Payments or other Capital Campaign Expenses are not included in the proposed 2026-2027 Budget