

Hopefulness in a Year of Uncertainty



2020 Annual Report
Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church

ABOUT US

One of this congregation's beloved songs includes the phrase, "Come as you are." Extravagant welcome and God's unconditional grace are at the center of our life together – even in these times of being physically apart.

We are still the church together.

OUR MISSION

We are God's people being transformed by the Holy Spirit to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world in word and action.

Contents

3 Introduction

4 Our stories and ministry highlights

23 Leadership reports

Pastor's report

Deacon's report

Foundation report

Finance report

See separate documents for 2021 meeting agenda, 2020 meeting minutes and proposed budget information.

INTRODUCTION: A year of hopeful stories

by Pastor Sara Spohr

My brother bought his wife an instant pot for Christmas. But he didn't want to wait until Christmas to use it. So he took the gift out of the box and started to use it. He cleverly told his wife that he had borrowed an instant pot to try out for a while to see if they liked it. My sister-in-law then saw how much he liked it, so she decided to buy him an instant pot for Christmas.

Do you follow? On Christmas there were now two instant pots wrapped up under their tree. One from him to her and another one from her to him.

They laughed and laughed when the gifts were opened. Then they started telling and retelling the story. They told me, I told my parents, they told our other sister, and then the story came back around to them when our other sister texted: "I hear you guys really love instant pots."

You know, and I know, that the very best stories get told and retold again and again. This one from my family Christmas 2020 is inevitably going to be on the playlist for years to come.

This year, we wondered about the "must tell" stories of Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church. What if we gathered and told our best stories of the year. So this year, our annual report is a playlist of the stories that moved us, inspired us, gave us hope, developed our faith, helped us to make sense of grief and pain, and empowered us to serve or give or believe. This annual report is a little bit different than you're used to, but I think it gives a truer, deeper picture of all that God is up to, in and among us.

There are many, many more stories to tell. We hope one of the stories here inspires you to tell your own story. We hope that one of the stories here inspires you to think about your faith or your place in this church in a new way. We hope one of the stories told here helps you see something new about one of the people with whom you worship.

Mostly, we hope that the stories told here help you connect with the story of a God who loves you deeply. In this year full of ups and downs, God at work in you and in these stories of faith gives me so much hope.



HIGHLIGHTS:

Leadership

Transition Team developed Ministry Site Profile.

Call Committee discerned the call of our next lead pastor.

Congregation voted to call Pastor Sara Spohr.

COVID-19 team formed to guide worship and gathering safety protocols.

Church Council members led through pandemic, pastoral transition, and three-church decisions.

Looking ahead:

Strategic planning and vision process to begin in first quarter 2021.

OUR STORIES: Listening and learning

by Robin Huiras-Carlson

When I was approached by Pastor Chris and asked to be a part of the Transition Committee, I didn't know what to expect, but I did know I wanted a role in Lake Nokomis Lutheran's search for a new pastor, so I happily joined the team.

At the first meeting, I learned the committee's chief role was completing the ministry site profile. When complete, it would give the Call Committee and prospective pastor candidates an in-depth look at the composition of the congregation and the surrounding community – with detail on demographics and socioeconomics of the church and neighborhood, and an outline of resources, gifts and goals of our faith community. But we couldn't just fill in the document with our personal thoughts and feelings – we needed to gather insights, thoughts and viewpoints from the entire congregation.

So we devised ways to gauge the feelings of the group through surveys, interviews, and conversations. We spoke to dozens of church and community members about the role of our church in the community, the gifts we possess, the challenges we face. We talked about qualities we wanted in a pastor, the areas we required guidance and support, the spaces into which we could grow.

As part of the process, I listened to what others had to say about Lake Nokomis Lutheran's past, present, and future. I saw the commitment of members and their hopes for a sustainable future. With the support of the team, I synthesized all the feedback, incorporating dozens and dozens of ideas, opinions, and feelings into a final document that accurately represented our faith community.

As part of the Transition Committee, I got to know church members I otherwise wouldn't have. I not only learned about our church's history, but I played a small part in LNL's journey into the future.

OUR STORIES: Hearing God's voice

by David Walker

Being a member of Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church for 50 years (I'm 54 by the way), you have those people who you have looked up to for guidance. The parents of friends that you have always called Mr. or Mrs. – and then one day you are calling them by their first name. Which is really weird because you still feel like you're a 15-year-old goofball in their presence.

Being asked to be on the Call Committee by many of these same people was both an honor and made me wonder about their judgment. These people have seen me crawling underneath pews and flying paper airplanes in service, and now they want me to help pick the next pastor of our church.

Our first task as a Call Committee included 'get-to-know-you' activities. My first thought was that I know these people. I am in choir with them, I teach Sunday School with them, I teach their kids, I see them every Sunday. But being on the Call Committee gave me a look into these people beyond that of any task force or committee I have ever been on. I truly am in awe of the gifts and the stories these people possess. Their faith and dedication to the call process was inspiring.

Prayer has always been tricky for me. I pray when I want something. I pray to thank God for my amazing blessings. But when I pray for guidance I have a hard time hearing God. I want a burning bush or at least a billboard on 35th and Hiawatha. But this Call Committee process helped me see how prayer guides us as Christians. It made me become a better listener – to God and the other members of the Call Committee. As an individual I prayed. As a committee we prayed for guidance. There was no billboard with Pastor Sara's picture on it. But God worked through each of our hearts to let us know.





OUR STORIES: Comfort and healing

by Kris Howell

My sister, Julie Bell, had been a Lake Nokomis Lutheran member for many years. She had always made it known that it was very important for her to have a Christian memorial service. When she passed away in April, our church had closed its doors due to COVID safety precautions — which we totally understood and were in agreement with, but it made it hard to move on from our grief without getting to celebrate her life as she wished.

We were so appreciative when we asked if we could safely hold a small service and Pastor Sara granted our wish. Allowing us to come back into the sanctuary was like the BIG HUG we all needed. We were home again.

We loved having John and Lynn Walsh participate in the service (and who doesn't love to hear John's beautiful voice raised up in song?) and know Julie would've loved Pastor Sara if she'd only had the opportunity to meet her. And we were so grateful to receive many wonderful condolence notes from our church family.

I'd also like to add that I found the All Saints gathering to be so healing. To see Julie's name on a luminary with the glow of the candle at dusk was lovely. And then to enter the sanctuary to the sound of the harp made the candle lighting that much more heavenly. How could you not feel close to all of those that have gone on before us when you're listening to harp music?

My family would like to thank everyone at Lake Nokomis Lutheran who have provided support and comfort to us as we navigated this interesting year.



OUR STORIES: Hope personified

by Barb Tauferner, Parish Nurse and Director of Visitation

One of the benefits of my parish nurse and visitation roles is that I get to spend time with our congregation's elders. Over the years I have visited them in their homes, nursing homes and hospitals. I have heard their life stories and words of wisdom. We have shared prayers and communion, coffee and cookies. Spending time with them brings me joy.

I had no idea that 2020 and COVID-19 would throw a wrench in our usual visitation style. Now, masks and distancing are a must because I love these people too much to do anything that might bring them harm. But being compliant is hard. Life in a pandemic is lonely.

How does a person cope and keep hope alive at a time like this?

For guidance in answering this question I turn to our elders and I think about their life stories. They have experienced illness and loss, the death of loved ones and wars. They are honest about those hardships and yet they embraced opportunities to give and receive love and support along the way. They say prayers of gratitude when they feel some level, any level, of healing of their body, mind and spirit. They trust that God and the Angels are with them always, walking beside them or carrying them when they cannot take one more step forward on their own.

These elders are role models of how to persevere and keep hope alive in the worst of times. They remind us that together we can and will get to the other side of this pandemic. And oh, how we will rejoice when we can again share smiles, prayers, hugs, songs, laughter and tears together — in person. Thanks be to God for our elders!



HIGHLIGHTS: Worship & music

Shifted worship to pre-recorded services with Holy Communion, published on YouTube, and supported by dedicated volunteers.

Faithful readers and musicians continued to lead worship, recording both at home and church.

Said good-bye to Kat Vann who helped lead children's music for nearly 15 years; Welcomed Nissa Rolf as Interim Children's Music Director.

Remembered those gone before us at an All Saints Faith Walk.

Children and youth led worship at a summer service and at the Christmas Eve Family Worship service.

Offered worship via Zoom on Christmas Eve.

Looking ahead: We're hopeful about returning to in-person worship sometime in 2021.

OUR STORIES: A new adventure

by William Awe

What a long and adventurous year it's been.

I started filming and posting the Sunday Sermons to our newly created YouTube page in September of 2019. I had no idea that this new skill might soon help me to reach deeper into my feelings about church and about worshipping together as a congregation. The pandemic turned our lives inside out in March. Like everyone else, I felt overwhelmed, and sad. I also felt that somehow I could be useful. How could I "step up?" We had to keep the church "open," even if we had to physically close our doors?

The answer that came to me was I could work with the worship team to create and post our worship service online.

The first couple weeks of services took an entire week to edit. I made mistakes. I practiced a lot. John Walsh joined in filming the musical portions in April. Together with John, the worship team, and the pastors, we started to create meaningful worship services to share online. We've been posting these services for more than nine months now. We may soon be getting back to the 'normal' way of life again soon, but even then, I hope we continue to provide the worship services online.

I had started posting the services last year as a way to try to reach out to those who have a meaningful relationship or past experience with this church but who aren't able to attend the services for various reasons. I wanted to reach out to others, too. This was another way of reaching beyond the walls of our church. I realize now, I have also been fortunate to have been able to become a part of worshipping together, in a new and meaningful way — a part of a larger effort of helping our church members stay together when we are still physically apart.

OUR STORIES: Struck by lightning

by Jodi Gustafson, Music Director

Have you ever been struck by lightning? I have. It happened in a hymn writing class some years ago. The assignment was to take a melody and write a hymn text to go with it. An image flashed in my mind: a piece of art called "Incarnation." It hangs at Luther Seminary during Advent. It's eight feet tall!

Up until I saw that painting, I'd had a more sentimental feeling about Christmas, fed by long years of choral singing about the mother and babe. I had never thought much about the power of the Incarnation. Then, there was this painting. I suddenly saw it: the power burned the very earth.

With that image, a lyric formed in my head about our need for the Incarnation. It happened so quickly that my pen could barely keep up with my thoughts, and suddenly: DZZZT. You could almost smell the scorch and see the smoke. "Love's Bright Dawn" came to be:

*Deep is the night,
quiet and cold;
all earth waits for Love's bright dawn.
Send us your light,
promised of old;
oh, come, Lord Jesus come!*

These words guided our worship during Advent. During a year of loss, uncertainty, and suffering we needed a powerful image of incarnation. God comes to be among us.

I believe that hymns should have something to say that's bigger than we are, that the texts should be true, so that people can sing authentically. I want hymns that will enrich and express the faith life of the people who sing them. I am moved once again during this pandemic year to make music that sings to the depths of our human experience. *Love's Bright Dawn* helped us to sing about a hope that does not disappoint.





OUR STORIES: A full table

by Ginny Rudloff

The pasta dinner fundraiser for the Minnehaha Food Shelf has been one of my favorite community activities for several years now. In January, our Lake Nokomis community, neighborhood churches and other generous local businesses and friends, came out on a frigid winter night in support of our local food shelf and those experiencing food insecurity.

I enjoyed the time eating and visiting with one another, the accordion music, and “competing” for the raffle prizes. I looked around at all of the hard-working volunteers, my neighbors – some of whom I have known for more than 25 years, and at the others, some of whose faces were new to me, and I felt warm. I found comfort in the knowledge that we were all there because we share the same hope – that together, doing God’s Work, we can help to alleviate the suffering of others. “For where two or more are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.”

I think I had known last year that I wouldn’t be coming together again this year because of a global pandemic, I would have held these memories a little closer to my heart and better cherished our time together. Looking back has allowed me to do that.

I hope that we can all continue to support the Minnehaha Food Shelf as it struggles to feed our community and I pray that, until we can gather together again, these memories will continue to help fuel my own appreciation that I belong to this hopeful community of faith.



OUR STORIES: One sure thing

by Andrea Bolstad

One thing we know for sure during these uncertain times: COVID-19 doesn’t stop our neighbors from needing hot meals every day. That’s why I am grateful to all of the Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church members (and in December, some members from Hope Lutheran) who continued to deliver meals this year – even when it may not always have felt safe. We stepped up. We never missed a meal.

COVID-19 did bring some challenges though. So we adjusted and met the challenge the best we could. We put the meals in plastic bags, wore masks, and when we felt it necessary, we wore latex gloves – and we all used a lot of hand sanitizer. The meals rolled on. Volunteers agree that it’s gratifying that our clients are always so appreciative to receive a hot meal and to see a smiling face. Even though we wore masks, we knew they could recognize the twinkle in our eyes when we smiled behind them. We could *feel* their gratitude to hear a friendly voice and to know someone was there for them.

I remember from a very young age, riding along with my Mom (Pat Bolstad) while she delivered meals. She was the coordinator at her church for years before becoming coordinator for the South Minneapolis Meals On Wheels program until she retired at age 81. I am grateful I have been able to carry on my family tradition of delivering Meals On Wheels, and with co-coordinator, Linda Ojeda, we plan to continue this ministry with all of the barriers. We’ll just go safely around them.

HIGHLIGHTS: Service/Feeding our neighbors

\$12,500 in congregation giving supported Minnehaha Food Shelf operations. LNL members serve in leadership positions and as volunteers.

Food shelf dinner in January drew 250 community members and raised over \$4,500.

14 volunteers delivered Meals on Wheels seven times during the year.

Two carloads of household essentials collected and delivered to the Holy Trinity Lutheran distribution site during last summer’s unrest.

Looking ahead: We’re excited to welcome new members from Hope Lutheran to Meals on Wheels and other volunteer efforts.



OUR STORIES: Learning lessons of love

by Deacon Erica Larson and Sarah, Duke and Paige Borgerding

As we adapted Sunday School and resources for families this fall, we included a weekly *Spark Family Page*, which contains discussion questions, prayers, and family activities to enhance learning each week. The Borgerding family uses these family pages on Sunday mornings as they sit around the breakfast table together.

One of the gospel stories in October was from Matthew 22, where Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and to love your neighbor as yourself. Duke, Sarah, and their four young children talked that morning about how to love our neighbors, and about who, exactly, is our neighbor ... and they soon realized that our neighbor includes all of God's children!

Several days later, Sarah had a profound encounter with their oldest children, Duke (grade 3) and Paige (grade 1), and shares this story.

"During election season I was driving with Duke and Paige when we heard a disdainful comment about a particular candidate. There was a quiet pause, then a quiet but steady voice spoke up from the backseat. "I don't hate him."

"What's that Paige?"

"He's our neighbor too. I don't hate him. We are supposed to love each other, right?" She already knows the answer."

One of our joys in this unprecedented time of sheltering in place is that our families are engaging in faith at home in new and creative ways. Our children are listening and learning, and God is still here!



OUR STORIES: More than bread

by Pastor Sara Spohr

Kami Hopkins shared a memorable story about the gift of care in the Lake Nokomis Lutheran Community of faith. Kami lives with severe allergies and can experience life-threatening reactions to those allergens. In the last year, she said she was no longer able to receive Holy Communion because of some of her food allergies. Overall, she was okay with that. She still felt a part of this community; she did not feel excluded.

One usher noticed this and decided to try a new recipe for communion bread. This usher was hopeful that communion bread made of sweet potatoes would include Kami more tangibly in our sacred meal.

It did. This was bread she could eat. This bread drew her into the sacrament of grace through that usher's love and act of kindness.

We see the best of our faith community in this simple story. It may be just communion bread. It may be just a new



MILESTONES

Baptisms:

We continue to pray for these families and all families as their children grow in faith and love.

Cora Theisen

Olivia Womersley

Deaths:

With hope in the resurrection promise, we continue to pray for the families of:

Letha Clinton

Michael James Cramer

Vincent Marshall Streed

Mildred Evelyn (Wahl) Olson

Gladys Pederson

Julie Bell

James Anderson

Pauline Thompson

Lois Swenson

Norma Hall

LaDonna Becker

HIGHLIGHTS: Faith formation

All activities moved to Zoom, including Bible studies, Faith & Life Conversations, confirmation, and other kids and youth connections.

Developed at-home resources for children, youth and families: Church-in-a-Box, worship toolkits, Spark Family Pages, and recorded Sunday School.

Five 10th graders affirmed their baptisms in an October confirmation worship service.

28 people contributed hand-written, illustrated versions of Sunday gospel readings for a new Bible Scrapbook.

Looking ahead: *Hopeful that we can resume summer and fall youth and family programs in safe meaningful ways.*

OUR STORIES: Fresh insights

by Bette and Tom Stacy

Picture ten people leaning over their Bibles. They read, react, question, reflect, and then apply all while only seeing each other on a computer screen. Wednesday night Bible Study has been a wonderful thing during the pandemic shutdown! Someone sees something new and questions it while another member makes a profound comment. New insights are shared and there's always differing points of view.

Erica always leads with a personal question related to the chapter we're discussing. I love these questions – they prepare me to see things in a deeper way. Here are a few examples:

- Was there ever something you knew you had to do but resisted doing? (*Jonah*)
- For what would you be willing to go to prison? (*Ephesians*)
- Who have been the most influential people in your faith journey? Why? (*Colossians*)
- How important is your reputation to you? Has anyone ever done something to damage it? How did you respond? (*Genesis*)

Right now, I'm amazed to see how Joseph's dream to store grain during seven years of plenty and then distribute it during the following seven-year famine is starting to feel like today. For us it's been how to be prepared for a pandemic /health crisis (we've been warned about this) and now planning how to distribute the miraculous vaccine throughout the world.

God guided Joseph and now guides us. God's word is so meaningful to our lives in so many different ways!

OUR STORIES: A new way to remember

by Jenny Dowzak

I look forward to All Saints Sunday each year. We honor our friends and family who have died and give thanks for the resurrection promise. When we could no longer gather in the building, I wondered how we could keep the sacred tradition. We have had so many losses this past year, and we needed to honor them in a special way.

The feeling of walking the luminary path was warm and bright. As I walked, I cherished memories of so many that have left us too soon. As I entered the gathering space I was greeted with the kind, masked faces, of dear friends guiding me through a very peaceful process. Seeing the pictures of loved ones and the art installation of Matt Larson meant so much to me. I was reminded of something that Pastor Sara had said to us during the call process, "The next reformation will be led by the artists."

With the beckoning of the harp and piano, and with candles leading the way to the front of the sanctuary, I was moved to light a candle with so many people in my mind and heart. I could have stayed in that moment for so much longer. I was grateful for all of the protocols and procedures that everyone followed to keep us safe while still having an opportunity to honor those that we miss dearly.

As a final step on my way out, I received a prayer from Pastor Sara to take with me. It was comforting to be with members of our church community while remembering the saints together. Thank you to all that came together for that precious gift. It will be cherished.





OUR STORIES: Adapting is essential

by Erin Grube (sophomore at Roosevelt High School)

The confirmation service this year was different than previous years. Instead of getting confirmed all together in a service, my fellow confirmands and I were recorded separately in church confirming our faith.

Even though the confirmands couldn't be together physically to confirm our faith, I still felt the community through the unity of our recordings and the way that they were beautifully edited for the service. Nonetheless, I still felt very sad that we were not able to have the confirmation we wanted.

While we were deciding how to move forward with the confirmation service, I had to constantly remind myself that no matter what happened, this year's confirmation would be very different and much less traditional. I reminded myself that this would be a memorable year, for many, many reasons, including the way we conducted our confirmation service.

Many churches did confirmation this year very differently than in previous years, and in different ways from one another, but one thing we all had in common is that we all adapted. We all learned that being in person is a huge blessing, and that when we aren't together, we still have to find a way to spread the word of God and celebrate the milestones of those moving through their faith journey.

I also discovered that no tradition can be taken for granted; there will be years that are different, and the adaptations we make during years like this cannot be forgotten. Normal is easy and repetitive, but adaptation is essential for when the world gets turned upside down.



OUR STORIES: Here for each other

by Laurie Zaepfel

2020 has been "the world turned upside down." It's been disorienting for everyone. It should have been such a good year at our house, and instead we missed so many things that we had been looking forward to.

We've always been involved at church, but this year has shown me how important the LNL community really is to me. The personal phone calls have meant a lot as we've been more isolated from social interaction. Even my husband Joseph got a call from Pastor Chris, which touched him, as Joseph is officially a member elsewhere. It was good for me to talk with Kat Vann in a context other than an official meeting or rushing between activities at an event.

But the connections to LNL became deeper in other ways, as well. I served on the Call Committee this year, and the only good thing about the stay at home orders was that there was plenty of time for all those meetings and interviews. I got to know the members of the committee pretty well, and we all felt like we were guided in our decision to offer Pastor Sara the call. As we moved into the long haul of online worship, it became important to me to check in with the Zoom gatherings and see those familiar faces, even if I don't always have a lot to contribute to whatever conversation is going on.

Although my young adult kids aren't connecting with the same things that I am, LNL has even made it possible for them to keep in touch. Sarah is contributing art to the Bible Scrapbook project, and Julia likes to participate in the music recorded for the online services. I am excited about members of Hope joining us, and also about moving forward with our three-church partnership.

We have shown this year that our hiatus from meeting in person doesn't stop our community from being connected. We will continue to be there for each other and look forward to the day we're all in the same room again. Thank you, community. You are God's presence for each other.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Connections

Began sharing bi-monthly, and eventually weekly eNews updates to stay in touch with members more frequently.

Mailed printed copies of eNews to members without email access (45 current households).

Zoom 'Coffee Talks' on Sundays offered an informal way to stay connected.

New calling team organized three cycles of phone outreach to all members. Parish nurse and visitation director Barb Tauferner, with support of other volunteers, continued regular phone calls, socially-distanced visits and 'special deliveries' to elders.

Looking ahead: Building relationships with new members joining us from Hope Lutheran.

Exploring more social connection opportunities.

HIGHLIGHTS: Service/Homes for everyone

Delivered 80 postcards in support of housing bonds to MN legislators in January.

Volunteers delivered dinners from neighborhood restaurants to Families Moving Forward participants sheltering in hotels (due to COVID protocols).

Hats, gloves, family games and activities, and nearly \$600 collected for FMF families.

Looking ahead:
Planning ways to support Beacon's "Bring It Home, MN" rent subsidy legislation as it ramps up in 2021.



OUR STORIES: Inspiring God's love

by Lynn Walsh

Why would an employee of Fat Lorenzo's give \$50 to Families Moving Forward? Because we inspired him!

Our congregation began hosting families experiencing homelessness about five years ago, adding a new dimension to our commitment to affordable housing. I feel strongly about that mission and have been part of the planning team from the beginning. But due to COVID-19, we weren't able to house families in our church building in August. Beacon asked us instead to arrange for delivery of restaurant-prepared meals for the families being housed in hotels.

We bought all the dinners from local restaurants to support their businesses during these difficult times. So I arranged one meal from Fat Lorenzo's with one of their staff. A day later he called me back to pin down some details, and said, "Explain to me a little more about what you're doing."

I told him all about Families Moving Forward, how it usually works, and how it had to work this year because of COVID-19. He said, "Oh, I want to contribute to that. I will pay \$50 of this bill."

Wow, that was a big help – not only for our FMF budget, but also for the families! Plus it gave that employee a way to personally take action. We've heard a lot about the danger of spreading a virus. But let's remember our ability to spread God's love is also infectious. Our church's efforts inspired him to act – our generosity was infectious!

Thank you to Oxendale's for their generous support of FMF with the donation of breakfast food, desserts and beverages.

OUR STORIES: A "God thing"

by Sue Bergly

Our three-church partnership with Spirit of St. Stephen's Catholic Community and Living Table is something I am very excited about. What helped me get there?

Knowing both congregations needed a new home, we had one. They were looking for handicapped accessibilities; we had many. Both thought our building was well cared for; it is. They were ready; thanks to skillful preparation, we were ready. I call this a 'God thing!'

Spirit Catholic Community was unknown to me until we worshipped with them (pre-pandemic), and shared our excitement about partnering. Susan, their environment person, expressed to me her eagerness to work with our environment team. In recent Zoom team meetings with both partner churches, their respect for all opinions as well as for our building, and their willingness to work together is very apparent.

Most important to me is that "God's Work, Our Hands" has taken on a deeper meaning at this point in time. It is now filled with many more possibilities. Our partners not only share the same commitments we do – to welcome everyone, to do justice work, and to carry out ministries that reach into the community – they bring an eagerness and commitment to do more together than each one of us could do alone.

There is no doubt in my mind that when we joined LNL 55 years ago, this would not have happened. I believe that God has provided this opportunity for us now – to share our space and ministries as we do God's work together and also make new friends!

HIGHLIGHTS: Three-church partnership

Three-church discernment team shared information through in-person learning sessions early in the year and via Zoom in the fall.

Congregation voted to approve the building partnership with Spirit of St. Stephen's Catholic Community and Living Table United Church of Christ in October.

An architect and contractor were chosen for the remodel.

Looking ahead: *Eric Grube, Sarah Borgerding and Ginny Rudloff will serve on the new nonprofit building board, along with Pastor Sara Spohr.*

Construction will likely begin in late spring/early summer.



OUR STORIES: Stronger together

by Mary Peterson (former Hope Lutheran member)

There are lots of quotes about change, but the one I think fits human nature best is “Change is good ... you go first.” Hope Lutheran spent the last three years discerning where God was calling us. The decision to close our doors and join with another congregation in south Minneapolis was made.

At the same time LNL had been in a three-year conversation with two other congregations to come together and share a campus to do God’s work together. I am grateful that Hope was invited into these conversations in 2019.

We had been having conversations with other South Minneapolis congregations to determine where we should move. It was important that we move together and not just scatter. We would have been welcomed whatever direction we headed, but the opportunity to be part of the three-church initiative felt right to me. Together our congregations are stronger and the opportunity to be the hands and feet of Christ in South Minneapolis with Living Table United Church of Christ and Spirit of St. Stephen’s Catholic Community is exciting.

Ecumenical collaboration is what we are called to do. Our world can only become better by working together. I believe Hope has made the right decision to not continue to pour all of our financial resources into keeping our building open. I am proud of our congregation for the hard decisions we have had to make. Now we are able to be a blessing to ministries that have been important to us over the years with financial gifts. We bring with us financial support for LNL as new outreach ministry opportunities are explored.

Hope is a congregation built on relationships – that is what binds us together. So when worship returns to the building, and you find us gathering after worship over a cup of coffee and a donut, please join us so we can build new friendships with all of you.



OUR STORIES: Going public

by Maggie O’Groske

The video of the murder of George Floyd meant that I could no longer dismiss racism in the Minneapolis police force (not by all officers). Around us swirled the movement to defund the police and reports of increases in crime. How can we provide public safety in Minneapolis in a way that protects all of us without harming people of color?

This was the impetus for the October meeting our Racial Justice Task Force set up with Council Member Andrew Johnson that was open to the community.

Some of those present expressed concerns about the increase in shootings, car-jackings, purse snatchings and traffic violations. Others expressed concerns about racial bias and a toxic culture in the police force. Council Member Johnson invited as many questions as we could ask. He listened and shared his perspectives on relationships, MPD training, racial disparities, and the potential for community safety alternatives.

What did we accomplish?

I think our church demonstrated a willingness to go public with our values – a first step. These issues are complex, but we’re learning and beginning to show up. The task force agreed we need to continue to be involved in this issue. As our Racial Justice Statement affirms, “We pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us in our continuing work as we listen and engage in conversation that challenges deep roots of racism.”

HIGHLIGHTS: Racial justice work

Added ‘Black Lives Matter’ to our corner sign as a public witness.

Racial Justice Task Force hosted discussions on the movie “13th” and the book/movie “The Hate U Give.”

Organized a community conversation about policing and community safety with City Council Member Andrew Johnson.

Karen Ojeda serves as our Racial Justice Liaison with the Minneapolis Area Synod.

Looking ahead: *The racial justice team will create and act on a plan to support ministry priorities.*

OUR STORIES: Finding hope at The Square

by Marge Holmberg



Our church has always had a special relationship with The Nokomis Square Cooperative. In fact, members of our congregation helped develop it so that elderly members ready to downsize could stay in the neighborhood. Over the years, many of our members have lived there. I bought my apartment in 2006. Today I still brag that because of our church's effort, The Square came to be.

Several years ago the pastor and other staff began to hold monthly communion services here for church members and others who found it difficult to get to church. Everyone was welcome. After the service there was time for fellowship and coffee. It has been a blessing to us.

When COVID-19 hit, everything in our building was shut down and there were no more gatherings. For months now we have not been able to meet face to face. When Pastor Sara Spohr came we were anxious to meet her. In October, Barb Taufferer arranged for us to gather outside on the east side of our building. What a pleasure it was to meet Pastor Sara and begin to get to know her!

We decided to try again in November. The day was bitterly cold and there was talk of calling it off. "No, we are hearty Minnesotans. Let's go ahead!" We all came dressed appropriately as if we were to take part in the Iditarod. It was quite exciting, actually. Pastor Sara warmed us up with her presence and we were all glad we came.

Things will get better. We will meet inside again. Our church is entering a new phase in its life. Things change, nothing stays the same. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. – Hebrews 13:8*



Pastor's report

by Pastor Sara Spohr

I like to be outside. No matter the weather, I spend time outside every single day. Usually for a walk or a run; but in the summer I work in my garden, and in the snow I go skiing. In the winter of 2019 I encountered some challenges. First a polar vortex. No problem, I bundled up. Next, came an unthinkable windchill, so I took shorter walks in less open spaces. Then the ice. This presented a problem. Across the neighborhood, through the city parks, and even on major pathways – sidewalks were covered in sheer ice. I had to waddle so very slowly just to stay upright. My time outside became stressful and joyless.

Then, I found Yaktrax. They are ice grips you strap right to your own boots and they changed my life. (Side note: To say they "changed my life" is an exaggeration and no, this is not an ad for Yaktrax.) *The ice, my new ice grips, and the journey down the neighborhood sidewalk is a metaphor. Imagine you are so afraid your feet could slip out from under you, imagine that the path you've been walking on every day for years is suddenly not what you thought it was, imagine having to take each and every step with caution and slowness. Imagine a world in which you feel safer not leaving your own house.*

You don't have to imagine any of that do you? That layer of ice is the year 2020. This past year some of the foundations we've walked on our whole lives have been uncertain and slippery. We've had to slow down and move forward with more care. We've had to stop to reassess and make certain we're going out with the proper attire, the right information, and a grip on our true foundation. In many ways, this is the story of this past year at Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church. You navigated change, uncertainty and crisis by faithful adjustments and a firm hold to a foundation in the same God who has always been worthy of your trust.

I want to use this Pastoral Annual Report to reflect on four major events in the life of the Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church community and how we are moving forward with a foundation of faith.

Pastoral transition:

- After Pastor Drew's retirement and then a time of intentional interim, your leaders listened to the congregation, developed a Ministry Site Profile and let that profile guide the search for a new pastor. As that new pastor among you, I'm grateful for the work you did to name the unique programs, joys and challenges in this congregation. After nearly five months in this position, I feel deeply called to provide leadership in this place and this time.
- This sense of call grips me, and us, to our foundation of faith. This is God's church, this is God's call, and we are all God's hands and feet in this world.

- As we look ahead, I am assembling a team to create an intentional strategic plan. This group will reach out and listen to the hopes and dreams of our people and bring them back to create a 3-5 year plan that identifies our goals and names specific strategies to guide our work to achieve them.

Coronavirus and a pandemic

- In March we thought we might suspend in person worship for a week or two, maybe a month, get the virus under control and return to normalcy as soon as possible. After almost a year of social distance, virtual worship, and paying close attention to the Minnesota Department of Health, we finally have a vaccine and the anticipation of gathering and worshipping together again one day. This congregation has pivoted well, adapting to online worship, calls to check in on one another, and a heightened attention to communicating well.
- Worship and church life changed, but you held on to the gospel of grace. The church was never closed, it was just popping up in hearts and homes throughout this city. In a difficult time, that was a joy to watch.
- In the year ahead we are eager to find safe and meaningful ways to worship together. When that happens, I expect that every Sunday will feel a little bit like Easter.

Systemic racism and civic uprising in Minneapolis and nationwide:

- In May, Minneapolis became the center of a nationwide reckoning on race in America. We, in a predominantly white Christian denomination, also had to come to terms with our own privilege in this system. This is ongoing work. We listen, we learn, we use our voices to name systems of oppression and discrimination, we repent, we admit our failures, we amplify the voices of people of color. The way here is icy, we will fall and we will get up, but we cannot give up.
- We cannot continue in this conversation without a firm foundation in God's unconditional and inclusive love. A commitment to the wideness of God's mercy must be central to our identity.
- Our Racial Justice team has led an important conversation of learning. Now as we move into the year ahead we will begin to put this work into practice in the ways that we speak, serve, advocate, and set policy. This work will guide any plans we make and it will turn our focus outward.

A move forward with the three-church partnership

- After years of conversation and discernment, we made the decision to enter into partnership with Living Table United Church of Christ and Spirit of St Stephen's Catholic Community. We also joyfully welcome members of Hope Lutheran Church into our Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church community.
- This decision was not made lightly, this is a bold and courageous step and for some it comes with grief and uncertainty, the ground feels shaky. We are finding ways to listen, learn from, and grow with each other and our new partners in faith.
- The partnership that we enter will be at the center of our community in the year ahead. There will be changes, new ideas, and many new people, but we remain focused on God's call and our expanded capacity to share the gospel.

If only navigating uncertainty in our church and world was as easy as strapping a pair of ice grips to your boots! I am thankful that together, through uncertainty, change, and crisis, we remain together. I trust in God's tight grip on us. I am hopeful that as we faithfully seek to worship, grow and serve together in the year ahead we will see God leading us to new and exciting places.



Deacon's report

by Deacon Erica Larson, Director of Faith Formation

When I celebrated my birthday at Disneyland last January, I never imagined that I'd have to relearn how to do my job. But it feels like that is exactly what has happened in 2020 as we have responded to a global pandemic and sought to keep our congregation safe and engaged at the same time. As I reflect on 2020, particularly the last ten months, I realize that this pandemic has actually generated renewed energy and creativity. This has given me new life!

There have certainly been disappointments and heartache. We had to cancel all of our summer plans for our service trip, Bible camp, canoe trips, Vacation Bible School and our summer lock-in for youth. We missed out on service project nights, packaging food at Feed My Starving Children, and making sandwiches for our hungry brothers and sisters in Minneapolis. We didn't have a graduation celebration in the spring, our Silent Auction Fundraiser, or our Affirmation of Baptism service where we surround our newly confirmed youth and celebrate their renewed life of faith. We've lost almost a year of movie nights, women's circles, Bible studies, and gatherings at Nokomis Square. We've missed Easter, Advent and Christmas together in our sanctuary; our 5th graders had to stop midway through Holy Communion instruction; and, our youth have not praised God together in song on Wednesday nights since February of 2019.

There have been many losses along the way, and I felt loneliness and experienced dark days and nights early on in this pandemic. I am positive that you felt it too.

But...our God is faithful! And the story doesn't end with difficult and lonely days filled with sadness and loss. For me, there has been so much joy this year that my heart overflows and my eyes are filled with tears as I type these words. YOU have been faithful! And you have lifted my spirits through your emails, your affirmations, your stories, your engagement, your enthusiastic response to trying new things, your brilliant faces that light up my computer screen, and your ability to see God at work in the midst of all things.

Some Faith Formation highlights this year include:

- Adult Bible Study, we studied six books of the bible and read Barbara Brown Taylor's book *Learning to Walk in the Dark*. Discussions have been personal and profound, filled with joy, laughter and meaningful exploration of scripture.
- The first Kids Zoom, where we enjoyed a scavenger hunt together, scrambling through our homes to find silly objects, including rolls of toilet paper! We always pray together and talk about God at Kids Zoom, but it is the laughter of children that delights us all.

- The thoughtful conversations during Senior High Youth Group, particularly on the day after the election and in discussing the book *The Hate U Give*, by Audrey Wells
- Several in-person gatherings that were held outside this summer and fall, where I got to see your beautiful faces and remember why I love this community.

In 2021, I am most excited about continuing to work with our creative and energetic new pastor, Sara Spohr. Our staff has been given new life, and we are constantly evaluating and imagining new ways of being church together. I thank God for our congregation, and I look forward to the work we do together to share God's love with each other and our community!

Foundation report

by Keith Atkinson and Eric Grube

The Lake Nokomis Lutheran Church Foundation was established more than 50 years ago by a long-time member of the congregation for the purpose of expanding support from the church in nontraditional ways. Throughout the years, this endowment fund has supported dozens of young members with college scholarships, provided assistance for community projects, funded special church building, ministry and landscaping projects, and provided financial support for neighbors in need.

Applications for scholarships and grants are due to the Foundation by Mar. 1 of every year.

Scholarship program

In 2020, the Foundation provided 10 financial awards of \$1,000 each to students who were pursuing a two-year associate or a four-year bachelor's degree, for a total of \$10,000. 2020 scholarship recipients were:

Vince Grube, Nick Kendall, Katie Fernandez, Sam Gardner, Nissa Rolf, Amber Atkinson, Emma Horstman, Julia Zaepfel, Kathleen Grube, Owen Kimmes.

Grant program

The Foundation provided a total of \$4,500 in funding for the following individuals, groups, and projects:

*Lori Mueller: \$2,000
Erica Larson: \$2,500*

Foundation board members:

Keith Atkinson (president), Diana Grundeen (vice president), Dave Milland (secretary), Eric Grube (treasurer), Cammie Kimmes, Pastor Sara Spohr

Finance committee report

submitted by the Jerry Winzig

The Finance Committee's function is to evaluate the daily and long-term financial responsibilities and make recommendations to the Council on how church funds should be spent. In 2020, the church approved a budget of \$476,400 income/\$487,640 expenses with actual \$534,583 income/\$458,232 expenses and ended with a \$76,451 balance at year end. This was due in part to receiving a PPP loan of \$43,977 because of the pandemic and also due to LNL members who dug deeper in their pockets.

The congregation voted to continue the ELCA benevolence support of \$19,000.00 in 2020, which was shown in the approved budget of \$476,400 expenses.

Mortgage report

January 1, 2020 balance: \$410,343.72

December 31, 2020 balance: \$385,154.11

Audit Report

submitted by Tom Dowzak

Records for the General Fund were audited monthly throughout the year for the period from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020, following standard auditing procedures. All documentation for the Wells Fargo Checking Account, Wells Fargo Saving Account and the Mission Plus Investment Account was reviewed. All records and documentation were complete.

Our procedure of having a representative of the Audit Committee review bank statements BEFORE opening by staff continues. These monthly audits continue to provide adequate detection of any unauthorized expenditures from church funds. These audits include opening the bank statement, reviewing all documents for any irregularities, and reviewing the check and receipt registers generated from the computer system.

Finance committee members:

Jerry Winzig (congregation treasurer), Tom Dowzak, Randy Ritterman, Eric Grube, Glen Wheeler, Jody Billmeier (staff)

