

Senior Pastor's Report

In preparing this report, I look back over newsletters, council report, and sermons, making a long list of events and activities, and watching out for themes that keep resurfacing in our life together. This year, one of those themes was uncertainty. The news moved faster than ever, and we worked together to respond faithfully, or at least to wrestle faithfully, with what was before us. Uncertainty is, in many ways, a fact of life. None of us knows the future. We wait for results, for news, and for opportunities. St. Paul wrote to the congregation in Thessalonica because they were very uncertain about the future. They thought Jesus would come back soon, but now members of their community are dying, and they're feeling the consequences of their conversion more regularly. And in the closing, Paul says, "the one who calls you is faithful." I am deeply comforted by this, trusting that none of this is a test of my faith, but I am daily surrounded by evidence that God's presence is with me. This community, the people of St. Thomas Lutheran Church, remain, to me, evidence of God's presence in the world and in my life. Thank you.

Nurturing Caring Community

In 2025, St. Thomas was the recipient of a \$40,000 grant from the Center for Congregations to create a mental health initiative in the congregation. Our ten Group Peer Support facilitators (April Armstrong, Leah Iversen, Helen Kane, Audra Miller, Pr. Ellen Mills, Mary Moore, Tom Sinn, Brian Ventura, plus Pr. Lecia and me) have lead grief support groups, groups for people who have been hurt by church, support groups for LGBTQIA+ folx and allies, Mother's Day groups, and Pregnancy and Infant Loss support groups. The congregation hosted three lunch and learn conversations, as well as several adult forums, around mental health. Our Lent and Advent themes in 2025 included purchased devotionals and activities to create space for mental health and wellness.

In late 2025, St. Thomas launched a new senior ministry. Several folks have stepped up to lead interest groups; Dawn Bakken planned several organizational meetings (and a fantastic luncheon) to kick off this ministry.

I also want to highlight three behind-the-scenes caring ministries. Every month, a volunteer sends a card to members and friends of the congregation who are homebound, living in a nursing care facility, or otherwise in need of friendly support, as well as a birthday card to anyone in the congregation over the age of 80. In the coming year, the group will expand its ministry to include regular cards for people in the congregation who are grieving. You can find a report from the card ministry in the coming pages, but I wanted to be sure these dedicated volunteers got front-page billing. The second ministry is our regular communion services at Bell Trace and Red Bud Hills. Pr. Lecia or I visit each facility monthly, but there are a couple of folks—Betty Smith at Bell Trace and Marilyn Saum at Redbud—who take the time to invite people to come. Ken Pedersen also regularly attends these services and provides an extra voice to the service and lots of great, caring conversation. Finally, Kari Esary visits or calls several folks in other facilities. She organized caroling in December and a Passion reading for Palm Sunday.

Living out justice and mercy

This year, St. Thomas provided scholarships for 15 students in Chichipate, Guatemala and a refugee student in Lebanon. We wrote letters to our elected representatives on behalf of Bread for the World. We raised money for the chapel at Beacon's new facility. We collected coats, a mountain of mashed potatoes, ramen noodles (again LuMin's canned soup), and nearly \$5000 for the Pastor's Discretionary fund.

Furthermore, it has been my honor to represent the congregation in number of ways. In August, I finished my fourth—and final—year as communication coordinator for the Bloomington Multi-Faith Alliance. In September, I began a term on the board for Heading Home of South Central Indiana. In October, at the request of Bishop Tim Graham and along with several other clergy from the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, I attended a prayer vigil for ICE detainees at the Miami Valley Correctional Facility. I also serve on the Indiana-Kentucky Synod's Immigration Task Force. I offered prayers at Beacon's annual memorial service for people who had died who had experienced homelessness. In January, I volunteered for and attended a rally with Interfaith Voices for Justice at the Statehouse. After the May 2025 and the February 2026 tornadoes, I worked closely with Jayme Beneker, Disaster Response Coordinator for the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, to connect her with resources in the Bloomington community.

Expanding the Welcome

This year, our partner, Reconciling Works, has started listing congregations in its network during the month of their anniversary. It was truly remarkable to see St. Thomas listed among so many other welcoming and affirming churches, and some pride to see how long (more than 40 years!) St. Thomas has been committed to this welcome. We continue to host tables at Bloomington PrideFest and Spencer Pride Festival. We hosted GPS (Group Peer Support) Groups to honor and celebrate Pride in June for LGBTQIA+ folks and for Allies. Our Love Boldly banner continues to be cited as a reason people visit the congregation, and our commitment to making those words true is the reason people stay and join us in our mission to live, share, and celebrate God's grace with all people!

Deepening faith formation

Perhaps one of the most fun faith formation activities this year was the Hymn Madness bracket. Matt Benkert gave brief background articles on eight hymns which were voted on in successive weeks until "It Is Well With My Soul" came out the winner.

Equipping disciples for service

This year, as part of our annual stewardship campaign, the congregation committed to serving over 5000 hours in our community. Many of St. Thomas's members and friends are already active volunteers. The Indiana-Kentucky Synod Storyteller recently wrote about our 5000-hour challenge [here](#). The Mission Committee organizes opportunities for people to volunteer—sorting coats, building Easter

baskets, helping out at Pantry 279 (these three things were organized by Susan Kinzer), and packing lunches for the Welcome Table (organized by Deacon Allison Ward). In September, we blessed over 30 quilts made by our Piecemakers (organized by Sharon Fawbush).

Caring for Creation

This year, we utilized a Solar, Energy Efficiency, and Lighting (SEEL) grant from the City of Bloomington to install an energy efficient cold weather heat pump serving the Youth Room and West Bathrooms and to upgrade the insulation above the office suite. In December, a hole was discovered in the roof under our solar array. The roof was replaced, and a solution to the array will be considered at the Annual Program Meeting.

Meaningful Worship

In June and July, we celebrated the 1700th Anniversary of the Nicene Creed, and in September we celebrated the 800th anniversary of St. Francis's hymn of creation. In the season of Advent, our theme was *Sanctuary Within*, and in Lent we explored the prayer attributed to St. Francis in a theme called *A Prayer for Peace*. We continued worship traditions such as the Longest Night Service, the Christmas Strum-Along, and a full offering of worship services for Holy Week. We continue to offer a livestream service every week, for which I am exceptionally grateful to our three A/V techs: Jim Ward, Johnathan Frank, and Andrew Rhoda. Our community gathers around worship to be together in fellowship, to hear God's word and share in the Lord's supper, and to be supported and inspired in our walk of faith.

Additional Highlights

One interesting theme this year was that I was interviewed a lot! In August, I was interviewed by a reporter from WFIU for a podcast on Christian Nationalism. A couple of times this year I met with graduate students to discuss various aspects of Lutheranism or women in the ministry. And Megen Pillar, the IK Synod Storyteller, interviewed me in March about our 5000-hour volunteer challenge.

In February I present at the Wabash Pastoral Leaders Program annual reunion on work with the Lily School of Philanthropy's Lake Institute's Executive Certificate on Religious Fundraiser. Later that month, a colleague asked me to consult with her endowment committee on nurturing young adult givers, which is what my current project is about. I wrote two articles for the ELCA Youth Ministry Network. I continue to serve in the IK Synod as a Mentor for First Call pastors.

A colleague who was moving out of our synod asked me to take his place in a Lutheran-Jewish dialogue. Together we planned a text study for Jewish rabbis and scholars and Lutheran pastors and scholars. We discussed the texts for the first three weeks of Lent this year: the fall, the call of Abraham, and water from the rock.

I want to thank our excellent council—Ashley Ahlbrand, Mike Witt, Janine Drake, Dean Arnold, Randy Arnold, Lynn Coyne, Kari Esarey, Johnathan Frank, Justin Rust,

and Carol Seaman—for their wise leadership. Much of what you'll read in these reports grew from their thoughtful discernment. Thank you as well to our dedicated committee chairs for their leadership this past year.

And we are blessed with an amazing staff: Pastor Lecia Beck, Parish Administrator Erica Whichello, Music Director Matt Benkert, Choir Director Ben Wegner, Sexton Debbie Selk, Children's Choir Director Melissa de Graaf, and our Choral Scholars Nichole Barbeau, Jisoo Choi, Lane Harden, and Tyler Whitney.

Gratefully submitted,
Pr. Adrienne Meier

President's Report, Annual Congregational Program Meeting, April 2026

This past year has been one of both renewal and challenge in the life of our congregation, and I am deeply grateful to have had the opportunity to serve as Council President during this time. Time and again, I have been reminded that what makes this church special is not just what we do, but who we are together – a committed, caring, and active community of faith.

I want to begin my report by thanking a number of individuals: our incredible, hard-working, church staff, always working thoughtfully and intentionally to serve and enrich St. Thomas and the broader community; members of the many committees of St. Thomas, putting in countless hours to keep our facilities and grounds in shape, thoughtfully steward the church's finances and budget, extend critical outreach to underserved populations, and provide for our spiritual nourishment in worship, education, and beyond; the countless volunteers who give their time and talents before, during, and after services; and the members of the Congregation Council who have worked throughout the year, representing the congregation and working closely with staff to steer the church through every opportunity and obstacle that presented itself. In particular I would like to thank Mike Witt and Janine Drake, who, as Council officers, met with Pastor Adrienne and me additionally throughout the year to conduct the business of the Executive Committee; and special thanks also go to Kari Esarey and Justin Rust, our outgoing Council members, in grateful recognition of their years of service. Thanks also to the new members of the Council who will begin their terms after the Program meeting – I look forward to working with you in the next year!

There are so many wonderful things I could highlight about St. Thomas' activity over the past year, but I will restrict myself to focusing on just a few: As an outgrowth of strategic planning work we began in 2024, the Council has been engaged in thoughtful work to identify areas of our congregation that we hope to grow and strengthen. This year, we began taking more concrete, actionable steps toward those goals. One of the most encouraging outcomes has been the revitalization of our 60+ group. This is a program with deep roots in our congregation, and it has been wonderful to see it come back to life in a way that fosters connection, fellowship, and care. Many thanks to the Outreach Committee and the many leaders within the 60+ group for their continued work to keep this momentum going. We look forward to building up additional communities for growth in the coming months.

St. Thomas has also continued to look outward, strengthening our presence in the broader community, through our ever-deepening commitment to mission and our relentless identification of additional underserved populations we can serve. Our Advent and Lenten community dinners were a particular highlight for me this year, drawing not only our own members but also neighbors and visitors into our space for shared meals and conversation during these important seasons. In addition, we began a new partnership with the Bloomington Chamber Singers, offering them space for weekly rehearsals. This has been a natural and joyful connection,

especially as several of our current and former members participate in this group as well.

Within our own congregation, the energy and engagement of our youth continues to be a source of joy and inspiration to me. Their Christmas program this year, written and performed by the youth themselves, was creative, heartfelt, and so moving. Seeing them bring their many talents to not only the pageant, but also our regular Sunday services and special services like the Easter Vigil is a powerful reminder of the gifts and leadership already present among our younger members.

Like many congregations, we also faced a number of practical challenges this year: We addressed several significant facilities issues, including upgrading an aging HVAC system, replacing our commercial gas range with a safer and more user-friendly induction range, and responding to both an emergency roof repair and an emergency sewer repair. The roof repair required the removal of our solar panels but also presents an opportunity as we look ahead to installing a newer, more efficient model. Many thanks to the members of the congregation that lent their expertise to these facilities decisions; your assistance and insights are critically appreciated.

Financially, this has been a year of careful stewardship. Inflation and unexpected facility needs have made predictive budgeting more difficult, even as we have worked to keep expenses as low as possible. I am so grateful to the members of the Finance Committee for their unwavering attention to these realities, including adjusting the timing of benevolence payments so that they are distributed more evenly throughout the year, helping to provide a clearer and more stable financial picture month to month. We also continue to encourage intentional, regular giving as a way to sustain the ongoing work of the church, while recognizing the very real financial pressures many are facing. To all who are able to increase their giving, I thank you. Even a small increase makes a world of difference, and your gifts have very real impact, both locally and beyond.

As we look ahead, I am hopeful. There is clear evidence of vitality in this congregation – in our worship, in our outreach, in our relationships with one another, and in the ways we continue to adapt and grow. I trust that the work begun this year will continue to bear fruit in the years to come. It has been a true honor to serve as your Council President. Thank you for your trust, your support, and for the many ways you contribute to the life of this church.

Respectfully submitted,
Ashley Ahlbrand, Congregation President

From the Pastor of Youth & Christian Nurture

"Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."
Hebrews 12:1-2

In our faith formation program, we strive to surround every person with that great cloud of witnesses—and truly, the cloud is vast. It includes the caring leaders of each class, thoughtful co-learners, the faithful people of Scripture, and the writers and thinkers throughout history who help us recognize God's work in the world.

I am deeply grateful for all who make faith formation possible across every stage of life—from our youngest children to our adults. Thank you to those who serve faithfully week after week, and to those who step in when needed. Thank you to those who engage in meaningful conversation, who listen well, and who share where they see God at work in their lives and in the world around them.

Each of you is part of this great cloud of witnesses that gathers around the people of St. Thomas, encouraging one another to persevere in faith and to keep our eyes fixed on Christ.

With gratitude,

Pastor Lecia

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Vacation Bible School

Students and volunteers spent three days Filled by the Holy Spirit in May where they played games, made art, learned about the Holy Spirit through Bible stories about the Spirit as wind, dove and fire. They also packed lunches for the hungry to be distributed by First Methodist Church. Thank you to all our volunteers: Eve Arnold, Lydia Arnold, Joseph Arnold, Rebekah Arnold, Jennifer Garl, Leah Iversen, Debbie Lemon, Judy Louise, Claire Marsh, Pr. Adrianne, Gretchen Moehlmann, Arno Risner, Ila Risner, Deacon Allison Ward, Jim Ward, Alex Westphal, Toby Westphal, and especially Kris Stewart, VBS Coordinator.



Worship Leaders

In August, we held the Worship Leaders Training Festival, which included brief workshops in all the ways lay leaders can serve as worship leaders. For the children, it included a workshop on the parts of worship, how to acolyte and practicing reading/prayer leading for worship. Children continue to serve as acolytes, Lord's Prayer Leaders and lectors, while some older youth serve as assisting ministers, ushers and with the Flower Guild and Altar Guild.

Sunday School

Sunday School began in September with some changes in age groups. The toddler-caregiver class for young children is coordinated by Kris Stewart. The class uses Sparkhouse Frolic, which is a play-based preschool curriculum to encounter Scripture. Thank you to all the teachers, including Kim Arnold, Jennifer Garl, Judy Louise, Kris Stewart, and Sarah Lynn Wells.



We kicked off the new school year with a potluck for families of elementary and middle school students hosted by the Iversen family. Our Elementary Sunday School class now includes kindergarten through fourth grade. It is taught by Sarah Harrison, Sarah Fogleman, Brooklyn Kucera, and Eve Arnold where they explore Bible stories using the Spark: Activate Faith Lectionary curriculum. The fifth to eighth grade class has explored the Hebrew Scriptures using Echo the Story, which engages the stories through creativity and contemplation, with Craig Smedley and Pr. Lecia. Deacon Allison worked with the fifth to eighth grade class to bake communion bread. Thank you to Leah Iversen who serves as our Sunday School Coordinator.

All elementary students are invited to sing with the children's choir led by Melissa de Graaf and accompanied by Debbie Witt. The students practice three Sundays each month and offer music in worship monthly. Melissa also worked with our elementary classes to present a Christmas Program, which was written by several students. Thanks to Debbie Witt for musical accompaniment and Rebekah, Eve and Lydia Arnold for coordinating props.

High school students continue to gather for coffee periodically on Sunday mornings to connect and talk with caring adults. They also hosted Student to Student from Beth Shalom in order to learn more about Judaism from other high school students. Thank you to Mary Thomason-Smith, Moriah Brook, Janine Drake, and Johnathan Frank for your presence with our students!



The adult class has explored many topics this year including: climate ambassador training, positive spirituality, IK Synod Disaster Response, the epistle to the Romans, Echo the Story with the 5th-8th grade students and more.

Reformation Celebration

The Reformation Celebration was on Sunday, October 26 with self-guided activities for people of all ages to learn more about the history of the reformation and consider how it connects with us today. Thanks to Dawn Bakken and Eve Arnold for helping create this program

Confirmation

Joseph Arnold, Ila Risner, and Alex Westphal made Affirmation of Baptism on Sunday, October 26. They shared how faith shapes their lives and challenges them during the sermon.



Advent Mini-Retreat

Advent began with a mini-retreat on Sunday, November 30. Our theme Sanctuary Within: Practices of Hope and Healing closed out our year's work on the Mental Health Initiative. Thank you to Pr. Lecia, Susan Colston, Savannah Hadley-DeMark, Pr. Adrianne, and Deacon Allison Ward for your work on the mini-retreat.



Epiphany Retreat

The New Year was marked by the annual Epiphany Retreat on Saturday, January 3. We explored our Spiritual Genealogies. Thank you to Pr. Lecia, Susan Colston, Leah Iversen, Pr. Adrienne, Carol Seaman, Pamela Smith, and Kris Stewart for crafting the retreat and providing hospitality.

Lent Mini-Retreat

The Lent Mini-Retreat on February 15 explored the Prayer of St Francis, by looking at transformation, service, vocation and more. Thanks to Pr. Lecia, Susan Colston, Carol Seaman, and Deacon Allison Ward for creating stations, and to everyone who helped with breakfast.

YOUTH

Ice Cream Meet-Ups

In the summer, we hosted several ice cream meet-ups at Jiffy Treet for 5th-8th graders and for high school students. They provided a fun and informal way to stay connected to each other through the summer.

Sunday Afternoon Activities

In the fall, we had several activities after church for 5th-8th graders and for high school youth. High school students went hiking, made lunch together, explored their gifts, and played games. Fifth to eighth graders had make-your-own-pizza, played games, and visited Bloomington Creative Arts Center. Thank you to Kim Arnold, Johnathan Frank, Jennifer Garl, Brooklyn Kucera, Gretchen Moehlmann, and Craig Smedley for working with Pastor Lecia to make these events happen!



Music Report 2025-2026

This past year at St. Thomas has been one of continued growth. Ben Wegner continues to lead our Adult Choir, which he does with great care and skill. Under his direction, the Adult Choir continues to provide leadership at Sunday services through anthems, hymns, and especially psalms. Several new and familiar faces have joined or returned to choir, which makes the experience even more fulfilling.

The Adult Choir continues to be involved in concerts outside of Sunday worship. Their annual Advent concert was distinctly Lutheran and included music by Johann Schelle (one of Bach's predecessors at St. Thomas in Leipzig, Germany) and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (Bach's most well-known son). They choir sang Schelle's cantata "Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar" (From Heaven came the Angel Choir) in German and C. P. E. Bach's *Magnificat* in Latin. A small orchestra of Jacobs students accompanied them at this joyous event. On May 3, the choir is looking forward to leading a more contemplative Evening Prayer service, which will include a mixture of choral anthems, hymn arrangements, scripture readings, and prayers. As always, we are greatly blessed to have such wonderfully planned receptions after these events.

The Choral Scholars Program we began several years ago continues to grow. This year we have four new Choral Scholars: Jisoo Choi (soprano), Nicole Barbeau (alto), Tyler Whitney (tenor), and Lane Harden (bass). They help "fill in gaps" when choir members are sick or otherwise unable to attend and provide leadership within their musical section. Because the training of church musicians is an important mission at St. Thomas, the Choral Scholars receive valuable experience as church leaders that will guide their career paths. All four of these Choral Scholars are wonderful musicians and people, and the bonds they share with choir members enhances fellowship in rehearsals and worship.

This past Reformation, we celebrated with brass players, including Connor Bitterman (trumpet), Seth Marshall (trumpet), Cal Hughes (horn) and Eli Brauner (trombone). At Easter, Carter O'Brien (trumpet), Avery Fuller (trumpet), Kari Esarey (horn), and Eli Brauner (trombone) brought the good news of Christ's resurrection. These brass quartets are a wonderful mix of church members, Jacobs students, and community members that embody St. Thomas's welcoming atmosphere. We are grateful for the distinct joy they bring to the Church's most celebratory days. St. Thomas also continued its Worship and the Arts Concert Series, which included six Bloomington Bach Cantata Project concerts and the annual Friday Musicale concert. These performances are another example of St. Thomas's support for the arts in our community.

The Children's Choir, directed by Melissa deGraaf and accompanied by Debbie Witt, continues to provide enriching music each month in Sunday worship. The Children's Christmas Program was very musical and had a moving message. On April 19, the Children's Choir joined the Adult Choir in singing a rousing version of "In Thee is Gladness." It was an exciting experience for both groups!

During the last three summers, congregants have offered their own special music during worship services. Because of the past years' success, we will continue our "Make a Joyful Noise!" program again this upcoming summer. All ages and ability levels are encouraged to offer their gifts. Our goal this year is to continue filling both services each Sunday with music. Those interested can contact me with their ideas for available dates. I am happy to help in any way.

Matthew Benkert

Card Ministry

Card Ministry is provided by a group of volunteers who send monthly greetings to homebound church members or those facing difficult challenges. Each month one member of the group sends a card from STLC to these people with words of encouragement or a simple greeting. Volunteers also send birthday cards to those members over 80 years old.

Special thanks go to Margaret Harter, Nancy Chadburn, Shirley Mingee, Pauline Caldwell, Jennifer Garl, Judy Louise, Kathy McDonald, Jaydene Laros, Ashley Ahlbrand, Helen Kane, Linda McNabb, Kathleen Boggess and others who have retired from sending.

If you would like to suggest a person to receive cards or if you would like to volunteer to help, please [contact the church office](#).

Kathleen Boggess

Community Garden

This was established in 2014 has elevated vegetable planting beds inside the deer fence behind the church building for St. Thomas members and community gardeners. You are always welcome to visit the garden and enjoy viewing the fruits and vegetables or walking through the labyrinth path design. Approximately one quarter of what we grow is donated to local not-for-profit organizations such as the Community Kitchen and Mother Hubbard's Cupboard.

Three garden plots are available for this year if you are interested in growing vegetables.

Kathleen Boggess

Creation Care

Our emphasis on energy conservation at STLC began in the 1980s when foam cups were banned and the sanctuary design included an earth berm for natural insulation from north winds. The interior temperature is stabilized by brick columns and exposed stone on the north wall to retain heat throughout the building.

Our renewable energy response to climate change started with a grant of \$25,000 for installation of solar energy systems at each of six churches, four of them in Bloomington and two in Indianapolis. After more than a decade during which we have been protected from electric rate increases, a ground array was added near the community garden in 2023.

Another solar ground array planned for inside the deer fence will continue our legacy of producing power for the property through future decades. The cost of solar investments has been recovered by cumulative reductions in our annual budget for electricity (near \$300).

Our solar energy investment is paying dividends by providing electricity for high efficiency heat pumps to reduce the natural gas heating budget (near \$4,000). A cold climate heat pump was installed and attic insulation added in the east end of the building in 2025, partly funded by an energy efficiency grant from the city of Bloomington. We are eligible to apply for another grant in 2026 for a second cold climate heat pump.

Kathleen Boggess

Finance Committee Annual Report, May 2026

2025 Summary

The year started on a high note with some big donations in January. Expenses tracked along with the budget and finished below budget for the year, even with a huge increase in the cost of insurance. Donations tracked above budget for the first half of the year, then decreased in the second half to finish the year \$22,000 under budget. The net deficit was \$15,000. This is much worse than last year. We've now had multiple years with deficits and our reserves of cash are low.

An independent financial review was conducted in 2025 by the same team as in the last two years. Once again, the review found no issues. The team did suggest more credit card use by the staff to reduce reimbursements. A credit card policy was drafted and approved by Council, so more credit cards are in use. We plan to engage the same review team for 2026.

2026 Prognosis

The 2026 budget was presented at the November meeting and was approved by the congregation. This budget included a 3.5% increase in expenses needed to meet inflation. Once again, this increase was emphasized to the congregation since donations must also increase, and last year's income was not sufficient.

The 2026 income started out without the large, early donations as seen last year. We did ask donors to consider spreading out their pledge throughout the year, and that appears to have happened. We've also lost some members due to moves who were significant givers. Although we've added new members, the donations are still lagging behind the budget.

Early year expenses included the annual insurance payment and the expensive removal of our 14-inch snowfall. We are already showing a net deficit; a condition that usually happens sometime in the year, but not until much later. We will be watching the giving closely throughout the year.

As usual, the Restricted Funds are fully backed with money in bank accounts that are separate from the operating funds accounts. The Restricted Funds have been used for the repair of a hole in the roof under the solar panels and repair of a break in the sewer line which allowed roots to enter. Thanks to a generous donor, the roof repair did not impact the Capital Repair fund as much as anticipated.

Additional communication is being implemented to improve congregation awareness and stress the need for more thoughtful giving. The monthly newsletter includes a summary of the YTD income and expenses. There will be more articles in the newsletter describing various aspects of church finances. There will be more Ministry Moments during worship services on state of the finances.

Many thanks to all the Finance Committee members for developing the budget and for reviewing the finances each month: Dean Arnold (council representative),

Sharon Fawbush, Ellen Mills, Carol Seaman, Erica Whichello, Frank Nierzwicki, Mike Witt, and Pastor Adrienne.

Thanks also for the generosity and stewardship of the St. Thomas congregation.
Respectfully submitted,

Jim Ward, Finance Committee Chair

Funeral/Memorial Food Ministry

This is primarily centered around providing food for funerals or memorial services. After the families decide which food option they prefer, volunteers are asked to bring side dishes to complete the menu. Volunteers help with set up, serving, and cleanup. A huge thank you to all who have helped with any part of this special ministry.

If you would like to participate in this ministry, please contact Kathleen at kboggess44@gmail.com or Jaydene at jaydlaros@gmail.com.

Kathleen Boggess

Landscaping Committee

This group oversees the outdoor space at STLC. Charlene Braun and Debbie Selk faithfully keep the front and side gardens looking their best. The fountain and prayer garden area is maintained by a paid landscaping professional who cuts it down in the spring and removes weeds during the growing season.

The sanctuary berm was a major area of revitalization this year. After invasive euonymus and other weeds were removed, the highly visible space now has a variety of native plantings which will continue emerging and add color through the growing season.

You can help with ground keeping tasks like gathering tree branches or removing weeds. If you are in the mood to help outside in some small way, [contact the church office.](#)

Kathleen Boggess

Mission Committee 2026 Report

(April 2025-May 2026)

The role of Mission Committee is to connect the congregation to good works of all kinds in Monroe County, ELCA, and the world. The committee reminds itself of this at each meeting as we open with prayer then review the established and new connections that we care and tend to on behalf of the congregation. The congregation's support with funds, donations, volunteer hours, and prayers is so very much appreciated.

The committee consists of the following faithful members; April Armstrong, Gerhard Glomm, Suzanne Halvorson, Susan Kinzer, Pastor Adrienne Meier, Carol Seaman, Jan Sinn, Tom Sinn, and Allison Ward as chair. We welcomed two new members this year: Mary Ann Valenta and Nancy Woolery. Justin Rust and then Carol Seaman serve as Council Representatives. We give thanks for the outgoing member, Helen Kane, who faithfully served as the Thriving Connections Liaison. New visitors and members are always welcome to our meetings. We meet most months via Zoom on the first Monday evening at 7pm.

We have established Mission Partners whom we make efforts to support financially, with publicity, volunteer hours, and donations. Each committee member has a particular partner that they personally keep abreast of news and needs. Erica, our Parish Administrator, does a great job of pushing out information about our Mission Partners' events and notices. More information on our Mission Partners is found on the St. Thomas website under the ACT page. We have 10 Mission Partners:

Monroe County Community Kitchen — CK serves carry-out meals in Bloomington and Ellettsville, offers take-home Backpack Buddy weekend backpacks of food for children, serves meals and snacks for children in after-school programs and during the summer, and delivers meals to selected HIV+ patients and low-income seniors. In the Narthex we host collection boxes for their Backpack Buddy program of light-weight food. An Amazon wish list is on St. Thomas website.

Pathways, formally known as **Monroe County United Ministries** — offers a preschool, a food pantry for their preschool families, family life coaching, financial assistance, and more. The items collected for the LuMin vs. St. Thomas Souper Bowl challenge went to this ministry.

New Hope for Families — New Hope for Families is the only shelter in Monroe County where families with children can find shelter together. It also offers an accredited early childhood program and employment counseling to help parents get back to work. NHFF is supported through the St. Thomas budget and with collection boxes for household items, and with volunteers. Special collections are often held as the needs arise. Items were collected for NHFF at our Pentecost Birthday collection. An Amazon wishlist for them is available.

Beacon — Beacon is the largest not-for-profit provider of overnight shelter for the homeless. It also offers a day shelter with social services and life essentials like showers, laundry, and mailboxes, street outreach, a breakfast program, a rapid re-housing program, and low-income housing. St. Thomas provides funds from the budget, volunteers, and special collections. Additional funds are offered by the Mission Endowment fund for special items like hand warmers. This year members pledged over \$60,000 for their capital campaign. Valentines and candy along with funds for the new chapel were delivered. Items were collected for Beacon at our Pentecost Birthday collection. A Dessert with Beacon event was held for people to learn about their mission and how St. Thomas can be helpful.

St. Vincent DePaul — SVdP provides a safety net for the working poor, the homeless, the formerly-incarcerated, and others. They specialize in collecting and distributing furniture, as well as help with rent, utility payments, rent deposits, medical bills, car repair, and other financial needs. They connect clients to additional community resources such as the Township Trustees and other faith organizations. St Thomas sponsored a table for raffle ticket sales and supports via the budget and volunteers. A Volunteer Information session was held where new St. Thomas members signed up to help.

Mother Hubbard's Cupboard — The Hub is a community advocate for healthy food for everyone, with cooking classes, a teaching garden, tool sharing, and a free community lunch. Many of our community gardeners donate produce to The Hub's food pantry. St. Thomas offered support through the budget. At least 25% of the garden produce from St. Thomas's Community Garden goes to Mother Hubbard's Cupboard. Items were collected for Mother Hubbard's at our Pentecost Birthday collection.

Sister Parish International — Sister Parish links churches in the US and faith communities in Central America with the goal of building solidarity and understanding through accompaniment. St. Thomas and our sister parish, Iglesia Santo Domingo de Guzman in Chichipate, Guatemala, have been linked for over thirty years. We often connect via Zoom. A new Scholarship program was put into place this year to support 15 students for middle and high school education. This is a three-year obligation where we will raise \$5,000 per year. At Advent a very special sale was done with handcrafted items and goods brought back from Guatemala. \$2,000 was raised in support of Sister Parish.

Living Waters Lutheran Church in Cherokee, North Carolina is an American Indian ELCA ministry, serving those living within the Qualla Boundary of the Eastern Band of Cherokee. Efforts are being made to make this connection stronger. Funds are offered from the budget along with correspondence to offer concern and support. Gerhard made a visit to LW and brought our greetings.

ELCA Missionary Support As both of our previous ELCA missionaries are no longer available for support, we will now support a person from YAGM, Young Adult Global Mission. This person will be selected this spring.

Pantry 279 is a community-based food bank currently serving the largest number of families locally. They are a “zero barrier” food bank offering weekly groceries to any household living in Monroe and surrounding counties. Collection of staple food is taken at St. Thomas to be regularly delivered to Pantry 279. There is an Amazon wish list that makes for easy shopping and delivery. Funds are offered from the budget as well as volunteers. This year members participated in their Thanksgiving food box preparation and also in the Elf Dispatch program where gifts are provided for children in need. St. Thomas provided carloads of wrapped gifts.

Other Activities:

Mental Health Initiative, funded by a Lilly Grant, training continued this summer. Members trained last spring began serving in the summer and continue on a regular basis to facilitate small groups that meet to discuss common issues like religious trauma, grief, and family issues. Four Lunch and Learn Gatherings were held during the summer. The Mission Committee organized the lunch for each gathering.

ECHO, Educational Concerns for Hunger Organization, sale of plants on Mother’s Day weekend helps support education to address hunger issues. Vicki Polanski has faithfully organized this event over the years.

Coat Drive St. Thomas participated with other congregations to provide 800 warm coats for the community. The distribution was held at Trinity Episcopal Church.

Refugee Resettlement Funds are now going to tuition for Islama as she proudly attends high school in Lebanon. Originally \$20,000 in funds was raised to bring her and her family here to Bloomington. With the changes in the US for immigration policy, that hope has been put on hold. The Mission Committee has proposed that the remaining funds be split between helping to cover medical expenses for our first refugee family, legal fees for local refugees being served through Exodus, and continuing to offer tuition for Islama.

Welcome Table Lunch for the Unhoused—St. Thomas brings bag lunches for the people who come for breakfast on Sunday at First Christian Church downtown. As the shelters do not offer food on the weekends, the unhoused have limited food options. Once a quarter, in just over an hour, groups of St. Thomas volunteers have gathered to pack 110 lunch bags which include homemade cookies and love. VBS students lovingly packed the summer load. Thrivent grants have covered the cost of these meals.

During Advent a **MUSH Tree** was up to gather mittens, underwear, scarves, and hats for children. The distribution is via the school counselors with the Monroe County Community School Corporation.

BSWERS, Bloomington Severe Weather Emergency shelter, had our attention in January when we made a special collection of snacks and warm socks. St. Thomas has several dedicated volunteers who spend the night in the shelter to help keep people safe and feel welcomed. A volunteer training event was held in January.

A Quilting group called Piecemakers, chaired by Sharon Fawbush, has been busy making quilts for Lutheran World Relief. Their first shipment of 33 quilts was made this year. They meet on the second Saturday of each month.

68 **Easter Baskets** were prepared for children at New Hope for Families and Pathways. St. Thomas members donated homemade blankets and many goodies to bring Easter joy to children in need. This project is done in partnership with Trinity Episcopal Church.

Pastor's Discretionary Fund campaign was in March. It was timed to raise funds as the grace period for utility bills ends and people scramble to make payments. This Fund allows our pastor to help meet a variety of needs in our congregation and the community where God's love can be shared in a tangible way.

Submitted with a grateful heart,
Allison Ward, Chair

Mutual Ministry Committee Annual Report, April 19, 2026

Purpose:

The primary purpose of the Mutual Ministry Committee is to affirm and strengthen the mission of the congregation and the ministry of the staff. This is accomplished not with programs but through:

- Listening and clarifying
- Sharing and communication
- Reviewing and reflecting

Through prayer, the committee performs its responsibilities with kindness and compassion, honoring confidentiality.

Responsibilities:

- Identify early warning signs of conflict and misunderstandings
- Be a "listening post" for pastors, staff, and members of the congregation
- Serve as a group where pastors and staff can test new ideas
- Be a "sounding board" in time of personal and professional stress
- Encourage and review staff continuing education
- Develop, promote, and maintain open communication about the expectations, attitudes, and concerns within the congregation, the community, and staff.

This past year the committee:

- visited with staff members individually to provide them with an opportunity to discuss their work, share their joys, and express their concerns and for the committee to provide them with support
- met bi-annually with the pastors
- met as needed to address issues as they arose
- provided a holiday lunch for the staff

Members: Kris Stewart (chair), Mary Lou Nierzwicki, Bruce Colston, David Ellies, Kelli Skram, and Sacha Arterberry

Respectfully submitted by
Kris Stewart

Outreach and Community Care: Committee Report for 2025-2026

We pray that the Outreach and Community Care Committee will continue to be part of the work of St. Thomas: to “Love Boldly” as God has loved us, to promote fellowship in our congregation, and to help spread the word about our faith community.

St. Thomas members will be representing our congregation at three community events in the coming year: the City of Bloomington’s 50-Plus Expo at Switchyard Park in May (our first year at this event); Bloomington’s Pridefest in August; and the Spencer Pride Festival on October 3.

We’re continuing to sponsor events that encourage fellowship. This year, we’ve started an Every Odd Month event on third Saturdays. In January, a casual pizza and game night brought people out in the winter cold; in March, trivia master Rance Fawbush was the leader of our Tacos and Trivia evening. In May, look for group bowling; in July, an ice cream social; in September, Rance returns with a Pizza and Trivia night; and game night (with more pizza) returns in November.

April 24 marks the kick-off of our 60-Plus Group. We enjoyed a great planning lunch in January (DeAngelo’s lasagna). Later this month, we’ll gather to start planning a monthly meeting time as well as smaller special interest groups (including Seniors Helping Seniors and an Out and About Bloomington group).

We continue to express our congregation’s commitment to LuMin, sponsoring monthly grab-and-go lunches for students and a Christmas cookie baking day with students and St. Thomas members (cookies are handed out on campus by LuMin’s students to their fellow students during finals). Committee funds also support a joint LuMin/St. Thomas advertisement in the *Indiana Daily Student*.

Look for our committee’s planned events in the monthly newsletter under the title “Come Together.” Check the weekly bulletin and sign-up sheets on the Welcome Desk for information about upcoming events. And please consider joining the Outreach Committee! We can do so much to spread the word about St. Thomas and encourage visitors and new members to become involved in our congregation. Our usual meeting time is the third Monday of the month via Zoom.

Thank you to the committee members who make everything possible: Kathleen Boggess, Johnathan Frank, Brooklyn Kucera, Rita Oates, and our Pastoral trio: Adrienne, Amanda, and Lecia. Finally, perpetual thanks to Erica Whichello, our organized and patient Parish Administrator.

Dawn Bakken, chair of the Outreach Committee

Property Committee 2025–2026 Annual Report

Sam Eichmiller resigned as chair of the Property Committee in May 2025. Since then, the Committee has been jointly chaired by Jim Ward and Ian Bensberg. The Committee thanks Sam for his long and dedicated stewardship. For their work on behalf of the Committee and the Church, the Committee also thanks Stephanie Abel, Ashley Ahlbrand, Randy Arnold, Doug Hoffman, Paul Leber, Craig McDonald, Scott Miller, Larry Moore, Randy Nye, and Jim Pankow, and especially Debbie Selk. They help keep our space beautiful and welcoming.

Over the past year, the Committee has hosted two monthly work days on the second and fourth Saturdays of the month. We have also addressed a number of exigent issues as they arose. The Committee has accomplished a host of routine and not-so-routine maintenance tasks, including electrical, plumbing, painting and drywalling, and HVAC maintenance. We have also accomplished a number of nonroutine projects, including installing shelving in the narthex, constructing a bumper for the piano in the sanctuary, and enclosing the exterior AC unit outside the sanctuary. We contributed to the community by helping clean up after the February 2026 tornado. In total, we estimate Committee members have contributed approximately 100 to 150 hours of labor and \$200 to \$250 in tools and supplies to the Church over the past year.

The Committee's near- and medium-term goals in addition to continuing regular maintenance include installing fencing and a bed under the sign facing the parking lot entrance and making our monthly workdays more accessible. We welcome the congregation's input and advice on how we can better serve the Church.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Ward and Ian Bensberg

Worship Committee Report 2025-26

Current members: Dave Belbutoski, Matt Benkert (Director of Music and Organist), Johnathan Frank (Council Liaison), Pastor Adrienne Meier, Nancy Nye (Altar Guild), Gail Seegert (Flower Guild), Debbie Selk, Mary Thomason-Smith (Chair), and Barb Unger.

Committee purpose, as stated in our Constitution and Bylaws

The Worship Committee shall assist the Congregation Council in seeing that worship is conducted regularly and within the liturgical traditions of the Lutheran church, that assisting ministers are recruited and trained to serve in the several needed capacities, and that hymnals and devotional materials are provided and properly cared for. It shall supervise and strive to advance the welfare and effective service of the choirs of this congregation. It shall arrange for the care of paraments, vestments, and musical instruments; and in consultation with the pastor(s), the music director and organist, and choir. It shall furnish music supplies appropriate for use in the worship of a congregation of the ELCA.

Committee Report for 2025-26

Altar Guild graciously prepares the altar for worship each week. From cleaning linens to caring for the elements, they provide behind-the-scenes tasks for which we are grateful. We thank guild members Lydia Arnold, Rebekah Arnold, Sacha Arterberry, Spencer Anspach, Charlene Braun, Susan Colston, Ute Coyne, Jennifer Garl, Haley Hatton, Kaye Hill, Shirley Mingee, Nancy Nye (chair), Mary Sasse, Carol Seaman, Gail Seegert, Barb Unger, and Debbie Witt for their faithful service to this ministry.

Flower Guild continues to provide seasonal and sustainable flowers for worship. Altar bouquets are arranged with consideration to their donors' designation, as well as the liturgical season. When a scripture, hymn, or prayer inspires a bouquet, guild members share with one another, amplifying the joy and meaning of our efforts. We thank guild members Carol Seaman (chair), Brooklyn Kucera, Gail Seegert, Jan Sinn, Melody Smith, and Mary Thomason-Smith for their creative service to this ministry.

Prayer Writer's Guild, now in its third year, prepare prayers of intercession used in weekly worship. Drawing on resources from the ELCA, the SALT project, and current news events, members contemplate intercessions for the Church Universal, creation, the nations, those in need, the parish, and those who have died. We thank guild members Dawn Bakken, Janine Drake, Gretchen Moehlmann, Moriah Brook, Pamela Smith, and Mary Thomason-Smith for their thoughtful service to this ministry.

Choir Director Ben Wegner and **Director of Music and Organist Matt Benkert** and the **St. Thomas Choir** combined with the choirs of First Presbyterian Church, First United Church, and First Christian Church to perform Mozart's *Coronation Mass* on May 4, 2025. Worship committee honored our church musicians on Pentecost

with a small flower token of appreciation. **Choral Scholars installation** by our pastors and Matt Benkert was celebrated on October 12, 2025. We give thanks for the abundant ways God blesses the music-making in our congregation.

"Worship in the Park" gathered congregants for an outdoor service at Lower Cascades with vibrant music and fellowship. **"Make a Joyful Noise" summer special music** added creativity and an opportunity to hear from a variety of congregation members.

Worship leader on-boarding in August provided learning and growth for a variety of worship leader roles, from ushers and lectors to communion stewards, including education from our musicians on singing chant. **Annotated bulletins** in the fall offered additional education for the broader worshipping community around our liturgy and order of service.

Three confirmands offered inspiring testimonies on Reformation Sunday, with brass enhancing our festival worship.

Advent services and the **Advent Choir Concert** featuring CPE Bach's *Magnificat* enriched our congregation's Advent journey. Worship Committee, with generous support from the congregation, hosted a **candle-lit Advent choir reception and nativity display**. Holden Evening Prayer and a Longest Night Service offered meditative worship experiences. Thank you to Matt Benkert, Ben Wegner, the choir, and all who enriched our seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Appreciation as well to our congregation for supporting **Hanging of the Greens** and its removal.

Sphinx Organization offered enthusiastic gratitude for our continued financial gifts. An organization dedicated to transforming lives through the power of the arts, Sphinx receives a quarterly gift from St. Thomas based on our use of African American Spirituals in worship.

"Best Hymn Bracket" during Epiphany offered a fun approach to diving more deeply into hymnody of the church, with "It is Well With My Soul" emerging as the winner. Thanks to Pastor Adrienne and Matt Benkert for their research on hymns celebrating anniversaries this year, and Matt's educational write-ups on each selection for the congregation.

A Cantic of Creation preaching series in the fall, **Practices of Faith series** in Advent, and a **series on St. Francis' Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace** during Lent, along with thoughtfully selected companion hymns and anthems by our staff musicians on these themes, offered meaningful preaching across a continuous theme.

A Welcome Post was recently installed in our narthex thanks to Jim Ward, a space for displaying large-print bulletins, hearing-assistance devices, and items children can explore during worship. The committee is continuing to build out additional resources to be offered here.

We are deeply grateful to those on the committee who recently stepped down after years of dedication and service to this committee, Kim Filiatrault, Gayl Laughman, and Debbie Witt.

With gratitude, the Worship Committee extends our profound appreciation to our St. Thomas pastors, staff, musicians, guild members, lay worship leaders, members, and friends for creatively and enthusiastically participating in this vibrant worship community. May our worship be a pleasing sacrifice to God.

We welcome your gifts in carrying out the committee's responsibilities. You are welcome to join us at a meeting to explore what interests you. We meet on the first Tuesdays of the month, 6:30 to 8 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Thomason-Smith

Statistical Report for 2025

Total Baptized Membership, end of 2025	274
Total Confirmed Membership, end of 2025	274

Average Attendance per Week	126
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LOSSES

Transfer to ELCA	3
Moved, no transfer	4
Death	3
total losses	10

GAINS

Transfers from ELCA	0
Affirmations of Faith	7
Baptisms	2
Total gains	9

CONFIRMED	3
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—Respectfully submitted, Erica Whichello, Parish Administrator