THE MESSENGER

DECEMBER 2026

First Lutheran Church

New Office Hours:
Monday – Thursday
10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Fridays—Closed

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"For Unto us a Child is born" Handel in his oratorio "Messiah" (and the angel in Luke 2:11)



Blessed Advent to All!

Lots of changes this Christmas at First Lutheran. Different pastor, saying goodbye to a staff member, also (Nicole). Change is part of life and sometimes very hard.

The way people celebrate Christmas has changed over the centuries. Until the 4th century AD, Christmas was celebrated at various times of the year. So why not celebrate Christmas on Christ's birthday? The answer is simple: no one knows when it was. Christ was probably born in summer. Why? In the Bible Mary and Joseph traveled to Jerusalem for a census. Well, the Romans were no fools. No one traveled in the rainy winter season if they could help it. We think of Palestine as being a desert country, but it has driving rain at times in winter, and with temps not far above freezing.

So why is Christmas celebrated on December 25th, and not in July? Is there an important reason? Not exactly. You see, early in the 4th century after Christ, the Roman Empire had a civil war. Two halves of the great Roman Army were fighting each other. One of the generals who trying for the throne was Constantine. Before a key battle Constantine had a dream. He saw a cross in the sky with the words: "by this sign you will conquer." He put the first two letters of Christ's name on his shield and won the battle. When Constantine became Emperor, he made the Roman Empire Christian. Big Roman festivals took place around December 21, so the date for Christmas was moved permanently to December 25th, to replace festivals the Rome had celebrated earlier. It's been that date ever since.

Not only has the date of celebrating Christmas changed, but also many customs have. We think things like gift-giving and nativity scenes have been around forever, but it's not true. Gifts were first given to the poor at Christmastime around 800 years ago. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century was the first to arrange people and animals into a nativity scene. Traveling around Assisi singing songs about God, Francis was also the first Christmas caroler.

The Christmas tree did not come indoors until the 16th century. Silent Night was composed in 1818 and wasn't translated into English until 1863. The first Christmas card dates back to England, around 1830. These are good changes, changes which enhanced the joy of the season.

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Finding Peace in the Christmas Rush

Caring for Your Body, Mind, and Spirit This December

December is a beautiful season filled with celebrations, family gatherings, Christmas traditions, and the excitement of preparing for the holidays. But sometimes, in the middle of shopping, baking, decorating, traveling, and caring for others, we forget to take care of ourselves. The Christmas season can also bring stress, financial pressures, grief, loneliness, and the loss of loved ones whose absence feels especially noticeable during the holidays. It is important to remember that we don't have to make everything perfect to make Christmas meaningful.

God doesn't ask us to do it all. He invites us to slow down and make room for Him.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 11:28: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."* What a wonderful reminder during one of the busiest months of the year!

A Few Tips for Getting Through December

1. Give yourself permission to slow down.
You don't have to attend every gathering, bake every recipe, or decorate every corner. Choose the traditions that bring you joy and let go of the pressure to do it all.

2. Make your health a priority.
Amid holiday activities, remember to eat regular meals, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep, and stay physically active. Even a short walk can help reduce stress and improve your mood.

3. Protect your peace.
Set realistic expectations, take breaks, and make time for quiet moments. Deep breathing, prayer, reading Scripture, or listening to Christmas music can help restore your sense of calm.

4. Watch out for the winter blues.
Shorter days and less sunlight can affect our mood and energy. Get outside during daylight when possible, stay connected with friends and family, and reach out for support if sadness or anxiety becomes overwhelming.

5. Be mindful of others.
The holidays aren't happy for everyone. A phone call, invitation, handwritten card, or simple act of kindness can mean so much to someone experiencing loneliness or grief.

6. Keep holiday safety in mind.
Wash your hands frequently, stay home when sick, use safe food-handling practices, and take precautions when driving in winter weather. Don't forget to keep medications and routine healthcare appointments on track during the busy season.

7. Remember the reason for the season.
Make time for worship, prayer, and reflection. The greatest gift of Christmas isn't something wrapped under the tree. It is the gift of God's love through the birth of Jesus.

A Little Christmas Encouragement

Philippians 4:6-7 reminds us not to be anxious, but to bring our concerns to God through prayer, with thanksgiving, and that His peace will guard our hearts and minds.

Your December Health Challenge:

Take 10 minutes each day for yourself. Step away from the holiday to-do list and spend time in prayer, reflection, or quiet.

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Pastor Glen article—Continued from page 1

The problem for me comes with other recent Christmas changes. I'm sad to see Christmas commercials in early October or even September, two or months earlier than in years past. Christmas is being transformed from a holiday of joy and giving into a holiday of getting ever more and better presents. Christmas is more and more a non-religious holiday, where Christians are less and less able to celebrate publicly its true meaning. Yet even so there is hope. When the children of Israel first heard the news of a savior, they were in bondage. Today we are free yet we feel the need of a savior, especially at Christmas time. I am thankful that the Lutheran church, and especially First Lutheran Church remembers the true meaning of Christmas.

But not all recent changes in Christmas are bad ones. In America these days there are signs of another Christmas change. Some people are realizing that enough is enough. Not long ago, on the radio was a program on how not to fall into the trap of doing too much and spending too much. And along with that wise advice came a suggestion: take the focus of Christmas off ourselves and make it on others. I'm not talking about other people in our family. The program suggested that we make Christmas a time when we work and give to others outside our family. We could spend time less time decorating and instead work for our food shelf or community meals. We could send a gift to a person's favorite charity in their honor. We can show our family how important giving is, by giving to others outside our family, those truly in need.

We can't do all at once. We need to discuss it with our family first or there will be problems. I'm not suggesting eliminating family presents entirely. What I'm suggesting is including special gifts and work for others as part of our Christmas tradition. I guarantee if we do this Christmas will be even merrier!

And for those whose Christmas is not easy due to a loss, we have Blue Christmas on December 21. All of us can enjoy the Cantata on December 13th and the Sunday School Christmas program on December 20th.

Christmas Blessings, Pastor Glen

Parish Nurse article—Continued from page 2

A Prayer for December

Heavenly Father, as we enter this busy Christmas season, help us slow down and focus on what truly matters. Give us peace when we feel overwhelmed, comfort when we feel lonely, strength when we are weary, and gratitude for the blessings in our lives. Help us care for our bodies, minds, and spirits while sharing Your love with those around us. May the light of Christ shine through us this Christmas and throughout the coming year. Amen.

This December, remember:

- It's okay to say no.
- It's okay to ask for help.
- It's okay if everything isn't perfect.
- It's okay to miss someone who is no longer with you.
- It's important to make time for yourself.
- You are never too busy to receive God's love.

Wishing everyone a healthy, peaceful, and blessed Christmas!

Your Parish Nurse, Traci Moreland, RN

DECEMBER WORSHIP SCHEDULE



9:00 & 10:40 AM WORSHIP SERVICES

DECEMBER 1ST

9:00 AM WORSHIP SERVICE ONLY

DECEMBER 13TH, 20TH AND 27TH

Coffee Fellowship Immediately Following 9:00 AM Service

Children's Christmas Program: "Jesus is the Reason"
Sunday, December 20th - 9:00am service





2026 Confirmands

Cayden Emery
Charles Kabus
Eva Kalis
Reed Parkin
Drew Proctor
Quinton Rikala

Pastor Glen Bickford



GOOD GIFTS GIVING TREE



SELECT AN ORNAMENT FROM THE TREE IN THE NARTHEX AND PLACE YOUR DONATION IN AN EXTRA MILE ENVELOPE WITH A MEMO STATING "GOOD GIFTS" OR JUST PUT A CHECK IN THE OFFERING. GIFTS OF ANY DOLLAR AMOUNT ARE WELCOME. HANG THE ORNAMENT ON YOUR TREE AT HOME OR GIVE IT TO A PERSON YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO HONOR THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON. OUR GOAL IS TO HAVE AN EMPTY TREE BY CHRISTMAS!

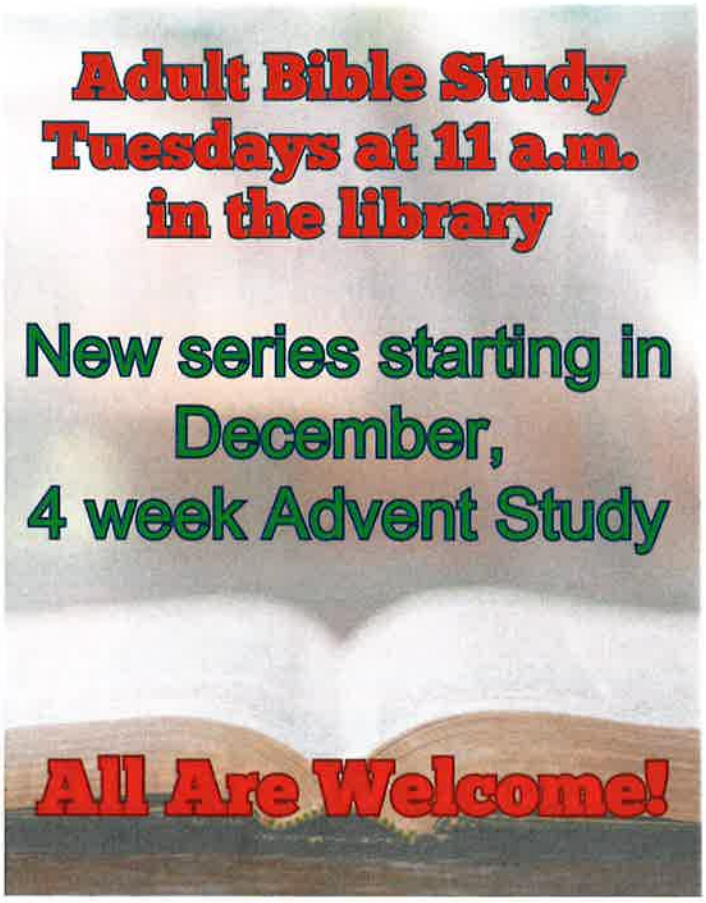


Wednesday Night News!

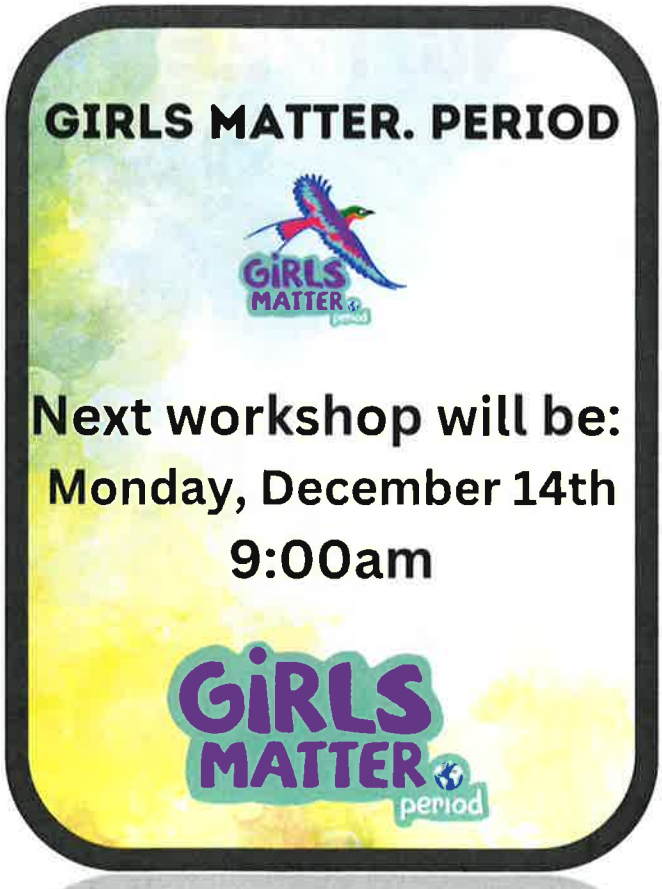
Wednesday evening Faith Formation is increasing in students, participation, and our Wednesday meals and worship currently are at 60+ members. Worship is short and interactive so folks of all ages gather together to talk about theology and the Bible.

Come and have fun!

December schedule includes the 2nd, 9th and 16th
(No activities December 23rd or 30th due to school breaks)



NEWSLETTER ARTICLES DUE ON THE 15TH OF EVERY MONTH





Finance Committee

Financial Summary through October 2026

	2025	2026
General Operating Income - YTD	280,411	260,453
October Budget Expectations-YTD (Historical Average)	320,486	334,413
Variance to Budget Expectations - YTD	(40,075)	(73,960)
Actual Expenditures - YTD	323,170	330,905
Percentage of dollars received for period to dollars pledged	92%	97%
Unpledged Dollars Rec'd – YTD (Regular Offering)	76,420	93,477
Building Fund Income - YTD	25,970	23,703
Building Fund Expenditure - YTD	34,270	29,270
Campership Balance	9,997	10,317

In comparing General Fund income with **actual** expenses, you will see a shortfall of $70,452. This compares to last month when the shortfall was $61,765.

Regular offering was $67,717 under budget expectations through October, and less than 2025 by $18,255.

General Fund offering for October was $21,960. Historically, October results in 9.34% of general fund giving. This amount would be $41,146.



Weekly Attendance

Week of:	9am	10:40am	Wed. prior	YouTube
11.1	99	9	52	79
11.8	80	10	NS	73
11.15	75	11	50	70
11.22	86	9	40	71
11.29	Available next month			

YouTube attendance is based on views as of Nov. 24th.
A view may be more than one person.

STAFF

Pastor Glen Bickford
(Interim Pastor)
glen@flc-aitkin.com

Jill Jameson
(Office Manager)
office@flc-aitkin.com

Barb Bendson
(Accountant)
barb@flc-aitkin.com

Justine Nordick
(Sunday School Coordinator)
justinenordick@gmail.com

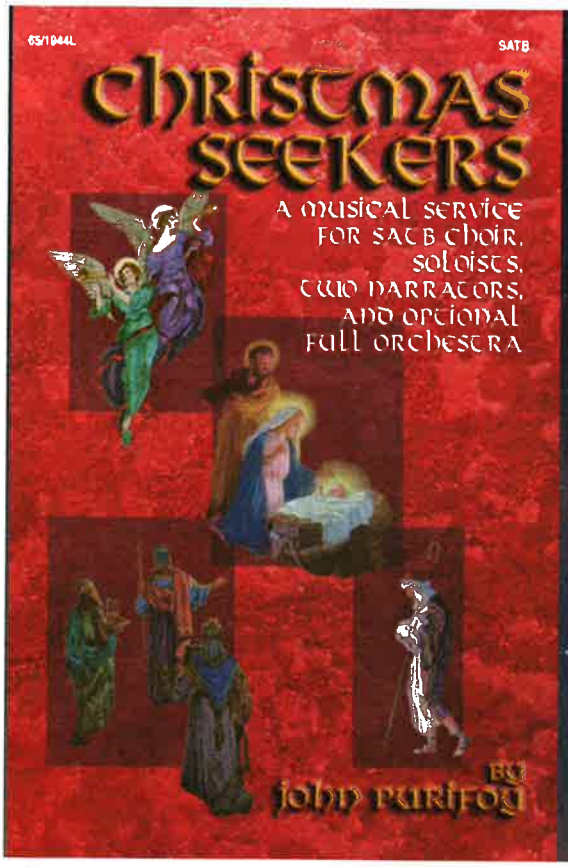
Pete Erickson
(Youth Coordinator)
youth@flc-aitkin.com

Mike Purdy (Custodian)

Rebecca May (Organist)

Sarah Grovogel
(Nursery Facilitator)

Aaron Perrine (Choir Director)





BLUE CHRISTMAS
LONGEST NIGHT
WORSHIP

December 21st
6:00 pm



DECEMBER 80 PLUS BIRTHDAYS

Norma Lehmann – 12/8
Jean Prickett – 12/8
Gwen Dickey – 12/12
Bonnie Bohn – 12/15
Dorothy Brandt – 12/28
Janet Gardner – 12/30
Darlene Munneke – 12/30





36th ANNUAL COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS DAY DINNER



The annual Community Christmas Day Dinner will be hosted at First Lutheran Church on Christmas Day, Friday, December 25.
Pick-up and delivery starts at 11am. Dine-in 12pm - 1:30pm.
To pre-order local delivery & pick-up or make reservations (parties of 10 or more), contact Kathy Lebens at 218-398-2537.

HELPERS ARE NEEDED to make this event a success. There will be a sign-up sheet in the narthex to volunteer.

A very special thank you to Kathy & Ken Lebens and Carla & Bill Hakes for making this event a success.



STEWARDSHIP MINISTRY REPORT FOR DECEMBER 2026

As you read this, the *Annual Appeal Campaign* will be almost over, just waiting for the return of final *Estimate of Giving* Cards and *Time and Talent* Sheets. Pastor Glen, Stephanie Perrine, Mary Beth Woodrow, Loren Rachey and Doug Larson have spent a lot of time and energy this fall. The climax was on Sunday the 22nd as cards and sheets were asked to be gathered in by then. Over the course of about eight weeks, you heard Lowell Larson, Lara Parkin, Paige Holmgren, Shawn Nelson, Linda Hommes share what their faith means to them and how First Lutheran Church is a strength in their life. As we listened to them, we find ourselves evaluating and committing ourselves to the ministry of Jesus Christ here at First Lutheran.

We were reminded that God's love and blessings, support and encouragement have been "Freely Given" and we are to "Freely Give" in response. Where does that "freely give" take us, who knows, but if Jesus is leading us, it will be good for those around us. So, "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received." 1 Peter 4:10

In the *Mission Endowment Fund* area, the estate of Ruth Hauge passed on a check for $15,000 to the fund. One thing that an endowment fund does, is enable a person to leave a legacy for generations to come. Ruth Hauge's intent to donate this money from her estate, reveals a concern for a continuing way to make an impact in this world, even though that person is no longer living. Ruth Hauge's$15,000 gift will be added to the principal and only the interest or gains from that money will be available to be given out in grants.

On Sunday, November 8th, Doyle Jelsing, of the Endowment Fund Committee presented Jeremy Goble with a check for $4,000 to be used to support the Aitkin Community meals. What a legacy to be passed on.

Time and Talent sheets were passed out along with the Estimate of Giving letter.

Sometimes in churches, these forms are collected and then forgotten about. That is not the intent for this year. They will be collated and a proper group or persons will be named to utilize these names.

Sincerely, Douglas Larson, Stewardship Ministry Chair



Live Stream/Recording of every 9:00 a.m. Sunday Service

Can't make it to church? Watch it live.
Missed last week? Catch up by watching the recording.
Want to see it again? Or pass it on….
Go to YouTube – enter First Lutheran Church in Aitkin
Scroll thru and search for the date you are looking for.
Click on play. It's that simple.

9:00 a.m. Worship Service is livestreamed on YouTube at First Lutheran Church of Aitkin and broadcast at 10:00 a.m. on KKIN 94.3 FM

Annual Reports are due to Jill in the Office no later than January 15th.

Please submit electronically to:

office@flc-aitkin.com

Mission Statement

With God's love we embrace one another, our neighbors, and all creation.

Vision Statement

Doing God's Work with Our Hands by Providing:
Spiritual Growth for All; Opportunities for Living Out Our Christian Faith; Support of our Mission and Ministries

Church Values

TRUST and LOVE in Jesus Christ; COMMIT to living God's Word; PRACTICE hospitality with welcoming and kindness; RESPECT and CARE for all people; SERVE our community; LIVE as generous stewards



PLEASE NOTE: The church is charged 75 cents for undeliverable mailings. If you do not want to continue receiving this mailing, please request that your name be removed from our list by returning the attached label to First Lutheran Church, 107 2nd St., SE, Aitkin MN 56431, or by emailing the church at office@flc-aitkin.com

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
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