

From Your Church Council President

Communication is the foundation of any healthy relationship, and this is just as true within the church as it is in our personal lives. Open, honest, and respectful communication between the church council and the congregation builds trust, fosters unity, and ensures that everyone feels informed and valued. By sharing updates, listening to concerns, and inviting input, we strengthen our sense of community and ensure that decisions reflect both our shared mission and the diverse voices within our congregation. In this way, communication becomes not just an exchange of information, but an act of mutual care and faithful stewardship.

I believe the newsletter is one of the best ways to have communication to the congregation as all members receive it. This article as well as those that follow, are a way that the church council will continue its efforts communicating to the congregation.

The congregational survey was a way to give members an opportunity to be heard. We received a total of 12 survey responses; the council will be reviewing the results and assessing action items from the surveys – I will continue to update. It is the intent of the council to continue to utilize the surveys at least on an annual basis. It is important for council members to hear the congregation's questions, concerns, suggestions, ideas – so, please continue to reach out to Hope's council regarding.

The parsonage has been empty without a pastor. In efforts to minimize the expenses of the parsonage and have rental income, we are renting the parsonage out again. This is a month-to-month lease; so, when we do get a pastor, the parsonage will be available for housing. The items left in the parsonage have been sold by blind bid and the proceeds of \$1,235 deposited into the general fund.

The Special Congregational Meeting was held on June 1, 2025. We had an excellent turnout, questions, and discussion. At the June council meeting, a motion was made to set a date for the second vote for the constitutional amendment; a written vote was held, and the motion did not pass.

All members that were interested in volunteering for the Constitutional Amendment Team have been contacted and agreed to being on the team. The members of the team are Sandy Josephson, Scott Josephson, Barry Gronke, Val Buysse, and Lynette Nelson; the council thanks you for giving your time and doing this important work. Pastor Janel Kuester from Cottonwood has been assigned to our congregation to lead and guide Hope Lutheran through our next constitution update. The first meeting date has been set with Pastor Janel to start the work.

An email was sent out to the congregation after the Mission Trip Meeting on June 1, 2025, about an update regarding the mission trip. The travel agent, who was used previously, was given the money for the tickets and transportation - but there were no tickets or transportation. The travel agent was indicted sometime in May 2025 by a South Dakota grand jury for grand

larceny; she turned herself in the evening of June 3rd, so the charges were not made public until after such time. There is an ongoing criminal investigation and the Watertown Police Department has all of the information needed from Hope. The South Dakota Attorney General's office is prosecuting the travel agent, and I am in contact with that office. I will continue to provide updates in the newsletter for the congregation.

This was the first year that Hope collaborated with Bethany-Elim for VBS, and I am thankful for them for being willing to collaborate with Hope Lutheran. Bethany-Elim's VBS has a long history and is very well organized. Our number of campers from Hope Lutheran was lower this year – there were several changes to VBS this year including being in Ivanhoe, the week it was held, as well as the increased cost. The education committee had been tasked to lower the cost of the VBS program this year, as last summer the cost was at its highest. So, in evaluating ways to lower Hope's costs, we looked to collaborate and have the campers share more in the cost. The education committee and council will continue to evaluate VBS. I coordinated VBS the week of June 9 at Bethany-Elim; I will not be coordinating next year, so if you are interested in the role, please reach out to Emily Hennen or myself.

We are working on an outdoor service and meal at Hope Lutheran. Praise Band has agreed to lead the outdoor service on August 3 with more details to follow.

I have been thinking a lot about acts of service. My son Pierce attended the lock-in and served a meal at The Banquet, and my daughter Nola will be going on the Minnesota Area Mission Trip. I am grateful for these acts of service to others and modeling to be given to our youth (and my children) at Hope Lutheran. Just as our youth are learning to serve others by volunteering by meeting specific community needs, we are also called to serve our church family by being attentive to its needs — whether that means volunteering for ministries, supporting one another in times of joy and sorrow, or contributing our time and talents to strengthen the church's mission.

Our youth volunteering and congregational service reflect the same calling: to love as Christ loves, to serve as Christ serves, and to recognize the face of Christ in every person we encounter. Also, they should involve some sort of challenge; they don't have to be big challenges (like our Minnesota youth doing manual labor in Florida in the summer) but can be small (such as reaching out to someone in need).

I want you as a member of Hope Lutheran to think about the following questions: Are there groups of members or members whose needs are not getting met? If so, what are they? Are those needs known? What can I do? How am I serving my congregation?

Again, I continue to encourage the congregation to reach out to council members regarding questions, concerns, and ideas.

Amie Ascherman, Hope Lutheran's Council President