

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



# A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDING BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON



Dear friends in Christ,

Over the past year we have continued to experience changes in the world around us. Even as our church finds ways to adapt to this changing world, we find hope in the unchanging and always present promise of God's love through Jesus Christ. We change and adapt not to conform to the world but because we believe that the gift of God's Son is for the world, and that our congregations and worshiping communities are places to gather and be sent into the world, where we will tell the story of God's love in word and deed.

The ministries of our congregations, our synods and the churchwide organization provide ways for the church to move beyond the boundaries of structures and geography and to share God's love with people in our neighborhoods, our cities, our country and beyond. We engage in this ministry knowing that our church walks by faith, trusting in God's promise in the gospel, and that we exist by and for the proclamation of this gospel word. In John 15:5, Jesus reminds us, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." We are connected by the promise that we do all through Christ and can do nothing apart from him.

God gives the Holy Spirit, who uses gospel proclamation — in preaching and sacraments, in forgiveness and in healing conversations — to create and sustain this faith. Just as we rely on God to sustain our faith, we rely on each other to sustain the ministries that offer God's love to the world. Through your generosity to each expression

of this church — your congregation, your synod and your churchwide organization — you add to our collective voice proclaiming God's love for all.

I am grateful for your generosity over this last year. My gratitude spreads far beyond your generous financial gifts. You've shared your gifts of time through countless hours of volunteering, serving and accompanying. You've shared the gifts of your voices as we've tried to discover and learn how God is calling us to be the church now and into the future. And, finally, dear church, you have shared the gift of the realness of God's love with the world around you. Be well, dear church, and stand steadfast in the promise of God's love and grace as you take that promise with you into the world.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” —John 15:5

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## ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Sunday, January 28, 2024

### AGENDA

- I. Call to Order – Congregation President, Andy Eidson
- II. Opening Prayer
- III. Approval of Agenda / Appointment of Tellers and Parliamentarian
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# ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES

Sunday, January 29, 2023

## Call to Order

Holy Cross Church Council President Andy Eidson called the meeting to order at 10:48 am. Andy explained he would lead the meeting and Pastor Chris and Steve Oelschlager, Harold Sargent, Jen Christensen, contributing at various moments.

## Opening Prayer - Blessed are those who comes to the annual meeting

Pastor Chris led the Congregation in an opening prayer.

## Approve Agenda/Appointment of Tellers

- Meeting will be conduct following Robert's Rules of Order according to our Constitution.
  - We do this to promote discussion yet follow a productive and efficient process.
  - For each issue, Andy will ask for motion, provide time for discussion, and conclude with verbal yay or nay from congregation.
- When Andy refers to the "Annual Report" it is the 2022 Annual Report distributed in paper copy last Sunday and this morning. It is also available on the Church's website at [HolyCrossChurch.org/resources](http://HolyCrossChurch.org/resources)
- Today's meeting is not being recorded, so Terry Berger, Council Secretary, will take minutes.
- Amy Sekili, Bill Miksch and Darin and Peggy Chartier have volunteered to act as Tellers for the meeting.
  - They will help distribute materials and facilitate ballots if needed.
- Harold Sargent was appointed as Parliamentarian.
- Andy presented the Agenda for approval, which was shown on the screen and was available in handout.
  - Ralph Freye made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Jeannine Phillips seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Congregation.

## Approval of Congregational Meeting Minutes

- Andy asked the congregation to review the **1/30/22 Congregational Meeting minutes** found on page 3 of the Annual Report and **4/24/22 Special Congregational Meeting minutes** included in the handout.
- Congregation was reminded that if they saw typo's or slight corrections please contact the church office – they do not need to be raised today.
- Carole Kenney made a motion to approve the **1/30/22 Congregational Meeting** minutes and **4/24/22 Special Congregational Meeting** minutes approve the as presented. John Villani seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Congregation.

## Approving New Business and the Election of New Council Members

- Thanks to outgoing members Amy Sekili, Mick Garrison, Bill Miksch for their time, energy and commitment to serving on Council
- Andy reminded the congregation that the Church Council has 12 members, each serving a 3-year term
  - Each year 4 terms expire. Members cannot serve more than 2 consecutive terms.
  - If a member resigns during their term, the Council appoints a replacement to complete the remainder of the term.
  - The replacement must be elected to complete the term at the next congregational meeting.
- Four individuals are being considered today
  - Identified by a Nomination Committee, consulted, agreed to serve
  - Information about each nominee can be found on page 9 of the Annual Report
- Candidates are
  - Wendy Brewer (Seeking first term)
  - Karen Karris (Seeking first term)
  - Jeannine Phillips (Current member, seeking second term)
  - Joe Taylor (Seeking first term)
- Andy asked if there were any other Nominees, none were provided
- Wayne Luplow made a motion to close the nominations for Council Members. Dave Kenney seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Congregation.
- Harold Sargent made a motion to approve the election of 4 candidates. Jen Christiansen seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Congregation.

## Presentation and Approval of the 2023 Proposed Budget

- Steve Oelschlager provided a Stewardship message and discussed the 2023 budgeting process.
- Andy reminded the congregation that the purpose at this time of the meeting was to approve the 2023 budget.
- Steve walked us through the highlights of the budget.

- 2023 budget includes the transition of Pastor Bob to pastor emeritus and addition of a full time Director of Youth and Family Ministries. This has been identified as a high priority for congregation
- 2022 ended very well with record giving from the congregation members
- Thank you to Tom Miller for the generous commitment of his time reviewing financial matters
- Jen Christensen made a motion to approve the 2023 Proposed Ministry Budget. Nicole Drake seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Congregation.

### **Informational Discussion about Church Constitution**

Terry Berger and Harold Sargent have volunteered to review and propose amendments to our 20 year old constitution.

Harold informed the congregation:

- Current Constitution was written in 2000, and has not been updated since then
- Church Wide Assembly occurs every three years, with the “model” constitution (which is the basis of our constitution) being updated at each assembly
- There have been 10 updates since our congregation last updated our constitutions
- Important updates need to be made regarding things such as remote meetings, simplifications of amendment process, etc.
- The “Model” constitution will be compared side by side with the Holy Cross Constitution, to determine where updates are needed
- We will present proposed updates to the Council and congregation
- A meeting will be held with the congregation for approval of the changes, with the updates being ratified at next year’s Congregational meeting
- All of this will be done in partnership with the Bishop’s office

### **Approval of Ministry and Administrative Reports**

- Reports from church staff members as well as administrative reports and results are included on pages 10 through 45 of the Annual Report
- Ministry reports make up the largest portion of the Annual Report, and illustrate the strength of our congregation
- Wayne Luplow made a motion to approve the Ministry and Administrative reports as found on pages 10 thru 45 of the Annual Report. Judy Frank-Gonwa seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Congregation.

### **Path Forward and Transition Committee Update**

- Jen Christensen provided an update on the Path Forward and Transition Committee
  - A year ago we were in the middle of the non-traditional path forward
  - Thank you to everyone who participated in the Path Forward
  - The effort has brought the congregation a long way in the last year
  - God has graced and blessed us with the ability to have this transition process
  - We will be a benchmark for other congregations to follow a similar transition
  - We wish Bob all the best as he begins his sabbatical and look forward to hearing about the experience when he returns

### **Innovation Team**

- Steve Oelschlager presented the concept of the Innovation team
- Innovation is not new to Holy Cross
- This team will seek opportunities to see what/how we can continue to grow as a congregation

### **Adjournment and Closing Prayer**

Andy asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

- Darin Chartier made a motion to adjourn the meeting. John Villani seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by the Congregation

Pastor Chris led the congregation in closing prayer.

The Meeting was adjourned at 11:22 am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Terry Berger

Holy Cross Church Council Secretary

# SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING MINUTES

Sunday, November 5, 2023

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Andy Eidson at 9:31 am.

2. Approve Agenda / Appointment of Tellers and Parliamentarian

Ralph Freye, Gail Kelly, Darin Chartier, and Wendy Brewer were appointed as Tellers.  
Harold Sargent was appointed as Parliamentarian.

Karen Karris made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. John Villani seconded the motion.

3. Discuss changes to 2000 Constitution

a. Constitution update process outlined with dates/steps.

B. Harold Sargent went over major changes. No questions were asked by congregation.

Thanks to Harold Sargent, Terry Berger, and Eric Christensen who were responsible for updating the constitution.

4. Motion to approve

Jeannine Phillips made a motion to approve the changes to the constitution. John Villani seconded the motion.

5. Vote

Paper ballots were passed out and collected after member vote. Congregants were asked to mark "Yes" or "No".

The updated constitution was approved by majority vote.

6. Closing Prayer was led by Pastor Chris.

7. Meeting Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Andy Eidson at 9:44 am.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kathy Pritts  
Holy Cross Church Council Secretary

# HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH... WHO WE ARE

## Aspirations

At Holy Cross Lutheran Church, we aspire to...

**Gather** as diverse individuals, coming together to be a supportive community, inspired by Jesus and each other to live life more abundantly, and working with each other to make the world a better place.

**Love** like Jesus taught and modeled as a way of life, including loving God, loving the world that God loves so much, and loving each other.

**Grow** into more mature, thoughtful, and generous followers of Jesus, nurturing hope, cultivating joy, promoting peace, and discovering meaning and purpose in concerns bigger than ourselves.

We believe that following Jesus is a pathway to better lives and a better world. Please join us as we journey together.

## Vision & Mission

### Vision

As a Christian community we provide strength and encourage people of faith to grow... by celebrating Christ and his message of grace and hope in our lives, through our acts of compassion which transforms peoples' lives, and, by nurturing community that reminds us that we are connected relationally.

### Mission

We are a Christian community committed to celebrate God's Love for all creation. We boldly proclaim the Gospel that frees us to witness, minister, and live the Christian faith in our everyday lives.

## Core Values

**Core Values** create the foundation that informs our ministry and life together. Core Values shape our congregational culture and character. Core Values drive our priorities and decision-making. Core Values engage our creativity and imagination. Core Values communicate our distinctiveness and are descriptive of our life together in a faith community.

**"Come as You Are"** and **"Come Where You Are"** in your personal faith journey. You are welcome and will discover a place of hospitality as individuals and families move towards the ultimate goal of knowing God.

Be inspired to **"Embrace God's Gift of Grace"** in a setting of openness and honesty through intentional engagement with the Christian tradition as embodied in faith practices.

As people created in the image of God, we explore the connection between our passions and a sense of vocation as we **"Share our Gifts"** in a dynamic, authentic and genuine environment.

**Compose a Christian way of life** through Christ-centered opportunities for personal transformation and discernment through sharing stories, risk taking, sharing the Word, praying, contemplating, and participating in truthful conversations around questions that surface in life.

## Core Beliefs and Teachings

**The Bible:** We teach that the Holy Bible is the Living Word of God and functions as the authority in matters of faith and life.

**God:** We teach that there is one God, eternally existing in three persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. A relationship with God is a gift not an accomplishment!

**Jesus Christ:** We teach that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human, who by His death and resurrection has redeemed us.

**The Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit is truly present at work in the community of believers. Its gifts vary from person to person and no one is left out .

**Human Nature:** We teach that no one is perfect and that everyone has sin and needs the grace, love, and forgiveness of God.

**Prayer:** We are a people of prayer and believe that God will answer prayer and longs for all of us to grow in prayer.

**Baptism and the Lord's Supper:** We believe, teach and confess that Jesus is truly present in, with and under the elements of water, bread, and wine nourishing our lives on earth with these gifts.

**The Church:** Holy Cross Lutheran Church is a small part of a greater body of Christ alive in the world and affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**Our Evangelical Lutheran Heritage and Identity:** We believe, teach, and confess our faith in the Lutheran reformation themes of: grace through faith alone, scripture alone, and Christ alone!



## **Council Member Candidates**

### **Lori Fedyk**

Mark and Lori were married in 2006, and along with their sons, Tommy and Michael Watson, have been members of Holy Cross since 2008. They have four grown children, two in Illinois, one in Georgia, and one in Texas. Having relocated in 2021 from Illinois to Wisconsin, they recently purchased a home just over the border in Pleasant Prairie but continue to make Holy Cross their church home. Lori has served a previous term on the Church Council, was Treasurer of Holy Cross, served as the service coordinator for confirmation, and has been involved in the bell choir and the vocal choir over the years.

Lori, a native of central Illinois, graduated from Illinois State University and became a Certified Public Accountant in 1987. She is currently employed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America which is headquartered in Chicago and has served as Treasurer of the ELCA since 2018. In November 2023, she was re-elected to a second six-year term as Treasurer. In this role Lori also serves as an advisor to the ELCA Foundation and Portico Benefit Services. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of Lutheran Life Communities (senior living) and has previously served as a board member of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services.

Lori has a passion for serving the church, both locally and nationally. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family and friends, sports, boating, and traveling.

### **Gail Kelly**

I've been a member of Holy Cross for twenty three years and am running for a second term on the church council. I have two grown daughters who now live in Boston, but we were all very involved in the Sunday school program, Confirmation and the High School youth group. Participating in church and these activities brought not only a stronger faith, but special friendships for all of us.

I have been part of the Cookie Walk Committee, an usher, taken a trip to Rosebud, and packed meals for Feed My Starving Children. Relational groups are important too, and Monday night Pilates is good for both the body and the soul.

I've been blessed to be part of this vibrant congregation that encourages people of faith to grow and celebrates Christ and his message of grace and hope. I would be proud to represent the members of this congregation on the church council for a second term.

### **Donna Thomey**

My husband Tom and I have been members at Holy Cross for 17 years. We have lived in Libertyville since 2007. Our three children have been raised in Libertyville and one is currently a junior in college and two are freshman in high school. I was on the board for Celebration Childcare, have volunteered for Sunday School, recycling committee and assisted with various activities during shelter in place to assist the congregation.

I have worked in sales, administrative roles and currently work part-time for my husband's company handling administrative duties.

Thank you for consideration to serve on the Church Council.

### **Joe Young**

Joe was the 2<sup>nd</sup> person hired as Associate Director for Human Resources with the new Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1987. Joe and his wife Debra moved their family from Iowa and located in Waukegan, IL. He is retired from the ELCA as Director for Community Development Services. His career has included: teaching and holding administrative posts at the college and university level, creator of the Missional Sustainability Program, coaching social ministry organizations on governance, strategic planning, grant writing, and fundraising.

Joe holds a bachelor's degree from Wartburg College, and his master's degree from the University of Iowa.

# STAFF REPORTS

## **Pastoral Ministry**

### **Rev. Christopher P. Neptun, Senior Pastor**

A great deal happened at Holy Cross in 2023. In 2022, the focus was calling a new senior pastor and beginning the leadership transition. This year, the transition continued, although with a different focus.

The year began with Pastor Bob and me as Co-Senior Pastors. Pastor Bob then left on a three-month sabbatical in February. I assumed the role of Senior Pastor. Pastor Bob returned at the beginning of June as Pastor Emeritus. This change of titles was a milestone. Still, the work of living in these new roles has continued for both Pr. Bob and me. I continue to assume the role and call of Senior Pastor with all its blessings and responsibilities. Pastor Bob has increasingly and thoughtfully stepped back to allow me to achieve this.

Other transitions and additions to the staff occurred in 2023 as well. Darrin Rose was hired part-time as Holy Cross' Choir Director in August. Darrin has resumed weekly rehearsals for the choir, performed many anthems at both Sunday services, and orchestrated opportunities for our choristers to participate in music events beyond the walls of Holy Cross. Darrin has involved new and invited long-time singers to join in the choir.

Beginning in 2024, Dale Tippet Jr. will assume the role and title of Director of Worship Arts. He will lead our contemporary music ministries and technical worship arts, coordinating music, worship planning, and scheduling musicians. This expanded role will also require Dale to lead, delegate tasks, and equip others to share the ministry of Worship Arts at Holy Cross.

Edwin Andrade joined us in September from Tucson, AZ, to become Holy Cross' first full-time Director of Youth and Family Ministries. As a result, Holy Cross is experiencing shifts in ministering to our youth and their families, specifically ministry to middle school youth. The structure of confirmation has changed from three years of instruction to a six week intensive course focusing on the teachings of Luther's Small Catechism. Our commitment to teaching the Bible as the Word of God has led to the start of Emerge, a middle school youth group that meets weekly, much like our High School youth group, Crossroads. Deaconess Katie and I will help Edwin take on a more significant role in confirmation instruction while she focuses on other areas of ministry.

In 2021, Deaconess Katie began to partner with Holy Cross as the Director of Children and Family Ministry. While she is a consecrated Deaconess with the Lutheran Deaconess Association, she is also an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She is currently "On Leave from Call" with the Virginia Synod of the ELCA. As you might imagine, ministry can be challenging. It requires a pastor to continue discernment and give attention to the needs of the churches they serve and their personal, physical, and emotional needs. Over the last three years, Deaconess Katie has taken time to rest, heal, discern, and assess her calling while serving the church in a role other than pastor. Having done so, she realizes she remains called to ordained ministry as a pastor in the ELCA. To return to the "Active" roster, she must receive a call from a congregation.

Deaconess Katie has completed her mobility papers and worked with the Virginia Synod to prepare what she needs to do to return to the "Active" roster. She could begin interviewing with churches and accept a call if such a church extended it. If Katie were to accept a call to another congregation, Holy Cross would suffer a significant loss for the leadership of Sunday School, Milestone Ministries, and Early Childhood Ministry Chapel.

There is possibly an opportunity for Holy Cross to discern a call for an associate pastor, allowing Deaconess Katie to return to the "Active" roster and continue to partner with Holy Cross as a pastor. I have discussed this possibility with Katie, the staff support team, the church council, individuals who have worked closely with her, and Pastor Bob, asking for their thoughts. While it is an opportunity to be explored and discerned, it is the power of the congregation to vote to extend a call to a pastor. The leadership of Holy Cross Lutheran Church is in the beginning stages of discerning the possibilities to know if this is what God is calling us to do. As more develops, we hope the events benefit the Kingdom, Deaconess Katie, Holy Cross, and the larger church for ministry.

Holy Cross has called associate pastors in the past, allowing the senior pastor more time to focus on ministry opportunities, leading to more significant opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. An associate pastor can preach and preside at worship, offer pastoral care to individuals, and lead other areas of ministry. As a pastor, Deaconess Katie could also be a pastor to the care and growth of families with young children, not just of our congregation but also as a resource for our daycare and preschool families in collaboration with Sam Cooper-Tuttle, Director of CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare.

Steve Oelschlager and Beth Ann Koenemann continue to partner in ministry through their gifts of administration and management of our finances, human resources, facilities, and IT needs and through their heart and passion for ministry. It is sometimes difficult to recognize where the roles of individuals as church staff and members (partners in ministry) begin and end. I am grateful for the passion and commitment of Steve and Beth Ann as they perform their roles with the care of a ministry partner and lead as ministry partners with the staff's dedication. In 2024, Steve will take on less time as a staff member and become a finance, facilities, and IT consultant. Beth Ann will take on more Finance and HR responsibilities as he transitions.

No changes in our organization affect just one individual. Any change for one is likely to impact the role of many. Our Administrative Coordinator, Administrator of Congregational Activities, and Administrator of Congregational Communications are most aware of this. I am grateful and humbled by the grace and persistence of Sarah Accettura, Janet Carr, and Ellie Rautenbach for their continued professionalism and care to meet the needs of the staff, the congregation, and the community we serve through the ministry of Holy Cross.

One of my responsibilities as Senior Pastor is to discern and share direction and vision for the congregation. I have laid out part of that vision in the paragraphs above related to the staff and my hopes for the partnership we will share in the coming year and beyond. Our ministry for the Kingdom goes well beyond the work of our staff. The ministry of those who gather at Holy Cross involves every member or PARTNERS IN MINISTRY. The church's ministry is for people of faith to gather and then be sent to the world week after week to share the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We gather to be strengthened and sent out again to INVITE more to gather in Christ's name. As we gather, we NURTURE one another by caring for our needs. Having been nurtured, we can then EQUIP one another to share the gift of God's love through the unique skills, talents, and gifts God has given each of us. Equipped, we go out to SERVE all people and creation using these gifts to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This past year, I wrote five articles for The Cross Connection that focused on growing faith in four movements: INVITE, NURTURE, EQUIP, and SERVE. In his ministry, Jesus modeled this pattern with his disciples. He INVITES them to follow. Then, they are NURTURED and cared for by him. Next, Jesus begins to EQUIP them for ministry. Finally, Jesus sends the disciples out to SERVE others, and the cycle starts again when they INVITE others to follow Jesus.

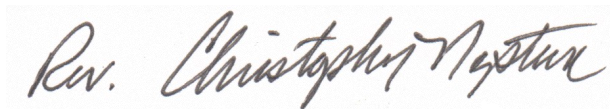
These four movements have continued across the centuries and are still at work in the church today. We continue to gather as Holy Cross Lutheran Church because the saints before us participated in these actions. You are a follower of Jesus because you are INVITED, NURTURED by others, EQUIPPED by parents, friends, teachers, and pastors to learn what it means to be the church, and then SERVE to invite, nurture, and equip others to serve as well.

In 2024, Holy Cross will focus on putting energy into EQUIP us for ministry to others. My goal for myself is to seek leadership coaching intentionally and to collaborate with other leaders to grow in my ability to equip the STAFF and the leaders of Holy Cross to partner together in ministry so they, in turn, can provide you with what is necessary to grow in your ability to INVITE, NURTURE, EQUIP, and SERVE.

As I speak with staff, volunteer leaders, and members we ask to serve, many are serving or would like to serve but feel they need to be better taught to do what we ask. By intentionally investing time and resources and being relational, we will support and empower one another to answer the invitation God extends to all to participate in the continuing event of creation! I hope to equip you with the skills and knowledge you need to participate in the church's work. I sense many of you are waiting to act.

Pieces of the vision have been falling into place. At the end of 2024, I hope each of you has a sense and realization of being invited to participate, nurtured by a loving community, better equipped for ministry, and serving in ways leading to abundant life in Christ Jesus.

In Christ's love,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Rev. Christopher Neptun". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Christopher P. Neptun, Senior Pastor

**Pastoral Ministry**  
**Rev. Dr. Robert A. Davis, Pastor Emeritus**

2023... A Year of Transitions

It has been a few years ago, but I still remember when a group of us from the campus ministry at University of Iowa decided to do a canoe trip into the Boundary Waters in upper Minnesota. We decided to go after finals and before we dispersed to head to our summer destinations. It was the first time for many of the group and I think it is accurate to confess that we didn't know entirely what to expect. We were to be out for six days and preparations had been made. For those of you who might be unfamiliar with the Boundary Waters park, it is a series of lakes and river systems. There are specific camp sites to minimize the impact on the environment and limits to the size of the group and how many people can be in the Boundary Waters at any given time. The lakes are connected by a series of portages that are not always clearly marked. These trails provide access for you to take a route that will bring you back to your original starting point. Some of the portages are easy and others are extremely demanding. Either way, after a while, the aluminum canoes get heavier and so does all the gear that you packed and thought was so essential once upon a time.

We were two days in and had a very difficult portage that took the collective will of the group to complete. People were tired and people were complaining and whining. The outfitter provided us with two guides. At the highlight of the complaining, one of guides asked this question: ***When I snap a picture, does the film weigh more because there's an image on it?***

It seemed like a silly question! What a nonsensical notion! I must admit, there were no digital cameras or even mobile phones for that matter at this time. After the guide asked this question we started in what seemed like a meaningless exchange of ideas. We realized later that the question served a deeper purpose. It inspired conversations and reactions, and therefore caused us to stow away our own perceived troubles for a few moments and move beyond our weariness and finish the day's journey.

Of course film stock or for that matter a memory card won't weigh more after capturing scenes of lakes and friends grinning around a campfire. Or... would it?

Which leads me to wonder... How much do words weigh? How much do memories weigh? Can an anguished memory weigh you down, a tender memory lift you up? Does the depiction of a sublime sunrise expand a soul while the snapshot of a burned forest shrinks the heart? Pictures and memories. Some are overloaded luggage dragging you down, others lighter than feathers. And what about the very words spoken or written to convey our experience? Do they add or subtract weight? I believe that our words matter... our behavior matters... our beliefs matter... and, in whom we place our trust matters.

We have shared many words and many moments together during the past 32 years. We have more to share as we move into the future.

Holy Cross gifted me with a three month sabbatical leave (March – May 2023). It was a time to reflect and refresh. It was also a time for study and reading. If you have interest please refer to the attached addendum highlighting some of my discoveries and thoughts.

During 2023 I participated in some major transitions. I transitioned from the role as Senior Pastor (1991-2022) to Co-Senior Pastor (2022-2023) and, to Pastor Emeritus (June 2023 to present). Rev. Chris Neptun was called as Holy Cross' Senior Pastor following an intentional transition strategy that was stewarded by Holy Cross' Church Council beginning in 2019 and culminating in a congregational meeting to extend a letter of call to Pastor Neptun in April 2022. Pastor Chris has been extremely gracious throughout this journey and he is both a valued colleague and a wonderful friend. His leadership and gifts will continue to serve Holy Cross into the future.

My new position as Pastor Emeritus has afforded Nancy and me some wonderful opportunities. We are able to continue to call Holy Cross our spiritual home and enjoy our treasured relationships with the people at Holy Cross. I continue to preach, teach, provide pastoral care and participate in pastoral acts, e.g., Baptisms, Weddings & Funerals. I average 15-20 hours a week and am able to provide leadership for special initiatives.

I count my blessings and am grateful for the opportunity to continue the ministry partnership with Holy Cross. I celebrated in 2023 my 43<sup>rd</sup> year of ordained ministry and my 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary with Nancy. She has accompanied me throughout my years of service to three congregations and has been a true partner in the ministry we have shared with all of you.

I look forward to what the future will provide in the years to come and continue to put my trust in God's unconditional love and grace.



God Bless!

Peace!



Rev. Dr. Robert A. Davis Pastor Emeritus

### **Addendum: Rev. Davis' Sabbatical Leave**

I saw the news release in 2022 from the Episcopal Church that stated: "Most Americans see Jesus as an important spiritual figure. More than 30% of Americans have decreased their participation in religious activities during the COVID-19 pandemic." Those are some of the findings of a national study commissioned by The Episcopal Church and conducted by the polling firm IPSOS. The results of the "Jesus in America" study, highlights the wide-ranging faith perspectives of a diverse cross section of Americans, including those who identify as nonreligious. The study points to both the popularity of Jesus' teachings and the ways Christians are often perceived as failing to live up to those teachings.

The study piqued my curiosity. I wanted to learn more and initiated some conversations with individuals who provided leadership for the commissioned study. After those initial conversations it was suggested that I do some additional reading about the shift that has taken place in our culture and how it impacts our life together in community. I was particularly interested in how this shift impacts organized religion in general and more specifically how it is redefining congregational life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This shift is identified by some as the movement from an "age of authenticity" to an "age of association". This concept is associated with the sociologist and cultural critic Charles Taylor. Charles Taylor is a Canadian philosopher and social theorist who has written extensively on issues related to modernity, secularism, and the nature of contemporary societies.

In his book "The Ethics of Authenticity," Charles Taylor explores the cultural shifts that have led to what he terms the "ethic of authenticity." He discusses how modern Western societies have moved away from traditional frameworks and have increasingly emphasized individual self-expression and the pursuit of authentic personal identity. While the specific terms such as an "age of authenticity" and an "age of association" may not be explicitly coined by Taylor, his work has been influential in shaping discussions about these concepts, particularly in understanding the dynamics of identity, individualism, and community in contemporary societies.

The term "**Age of Association**" refers to a time in history or a societal phase where people primarily identified with or associated themselves with certain groups, ideologies, or cultural movements. It may suggest an era characterized by strong collective identities and group affiliations.

The term "**Age of Authenticity**" implies a cultural or societal shift towards valuing individualism, self-expression, and genuine personal experiences. In such an age, people might prioritize being true to themselves rather than conforming to external expectations

I believe that within the context of organized religion, the concepts of the "age of association" and the "age of authenticity" can help us to understand the changing attitudes and dynamics within religious communities and assist us in positioning congregations to be more relevant.

For example, in an "age of association" within organized religion, people may be more likely to identify strongly with a religious group or community. The emphasis would be on collective beliefs, rituals, and shared practices. Individuals may find a sense of belonging and identity within the larger religious organization or community. Loyalty to established religious institutions and adherence to traditional doctrines might be more pronounced during such times.

In an "age of authenticity" within organized religion, there might be a shift towards a more individualistic approach. People may seek a personal and authentic connection with their faith, focusing on their own spiritual journey rather than conforming strictly to institutional norms. This could manifest in a more personalized interpretation of religious teachings, diverse spiritual practices, and a questioning of traditional authority within religious institutions.

The tension between the age of association and the age of authenticity in organized religion can lead to various dynamics, including debates over doctrinal interpretation, the role of institutional authority, and the balance between communal and individual expressions of faith.

The concept of the "age of authenticity" has significant implications for organized religion in the 21st century, influencing the ways in which individuals engage with their faith, religious institutions, and spiritual practices. Here are some key considerations:

**Individualism and Personalization:** In the age of authenticity, there is an increased emphasis on individualism and personal experience. People may seek a more personalized and authentic connection with their faith, moving away from rigid, traditional structures. This can manifest in diverse interpretations of religious teachings, eclectic spiritual practices, and a focus on subjective experiences of the divine.

**Questioning Authority:** Individuals in the 21st century, influenced by the age of authenticity, may be more inclined to question traditional religious authority. The hierarchical structures of many religious institutions may be challenged, and there may be a desire for a more egalitarian and participatory approach to religious practices and decision-making.

**Diversity of Beliefs and Practices:** The age of authenticity contributes to a diverse religious landscape, with individuals choosing beliefs and practices that resonate personally. This diversity may extend beyond denominational boundaries, leading to a more pluralistic understanding of spirituality. It can also give rise to the blending of religious traditions or the exploration of alternative spiritual paths.

**Technology and Global Connectivity:** The 21st century's technological advancements and global connectivity play a role in the age of authenticity within organized religion. Access to information allows individuals to explore various religious perspectives, engage in online spiritual communities, and access alternative sources of religious knowledge, contributing to a more individualized approach to faith.

**Challenges for Traditional Institutions:** Established religious institutions may face challenges in adapting to the age of authenticity. The demand for more inclusive, flexible, and personally relevant religious experiences may challenge traditional structures and prompt a reevaluation of how religious communities engage with their members.

**Spiritual Seeking Outside Institutional Boundaries:** The age of authenticity often involves spiritual seeking beyond the confines of organized religion. Many individuals explore spirituality independently, drawing from a variety of sources, including mindfulness practices, Eastern philosophies, and eclectic spiritual traditions, rather than exclusively aligning with a specific religious tradition.

**Impact on Community Dynamics:** While the age of authenticity emphasizes individual experiences, it also raises questions about the role of community in religious life. Balancing the pursuit of individual authenticity with the desire for communal connection remains a challenge for religious communities adapting to these changing dynamics.

In summary, the age of authenticity shapes how individuals approach and engage with organized religion in the 21st century, impacting the authority structures, practices, and overall dynamics within religious communities. This trend reflects broader societal shifts towards individualism, personal autonomy, and the quest for authentic spiritual experiences.

The goal of the 'Jesus in America' research project was to identify the most compelling themes and narratives about Americans' attitudes and perceptions of who Jesus is, his enduring importance and impact on society, how recent events have shaped how people pursue and find spiritual and religious fulfillment, and how Christians are currently perceived by non-Christians. The study examined common perceptions of Christianity and Christians in the United States and the disparities between what religion says and how we act. One of the more significant questions of the study asked respondents: What they thought was Jesus' most important teaching. More than a third said "love your neighbor." Perhaps the only thing left to do is to compose a life where we live into Jesus' teaching.

## Congregational Statistical Report

	<u>Baptized</u>	<u>Confirmed</u>
Beginning of 2023	<b>2046</b>	<b>1498</b>
Received		
Baptism	8	0
Affirmation of Faith	6	3
Transfer ELCA	7	7
Transfer	7	5
Other	0	0
Total Received	28	15
Youth Confirmed		34
Total Increase	28	49
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>2074</b>	<b>1547</b>
Removed		
Transfer ELCA	11	8
Transfer Other	1	1
Death	4	4
Other	12	12
Total Removed	28	25
<b>END OF YEAR TOTALS</b>	<b>2046</b>	<b>1522</b>

### Pastoral Acts

#### Baptisms

January 7, 2023	Lillian Marie Wilk
January 22, 2023	Cooper Edward Voorhees
May 7, 2023	Josephine Lee Wright
September 3, 2023	Luna Lazuli Najera
October 15, 2023	Enzo Milan Mejia
November 12, 2023	Jacob Tyler Penley
November 18, 2023	Athena Teresa Klein
December 17, 2023	Reagan Kay Maurer
December 17, 2023	Logan Michael Maurer

#### Funerals

January 14, 2023	Warren Thummel
May 13, 2023	Walter Tyszko
July 1, 2023	Connor Leden
October 15, 2023	May Sprenger

#### Marriages

December 9, 2023	Morgan Zupkus & Kristopher Smith
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#### Affirmation of Baptism

Lauren Barry	Casey Lovejoy
Reese Bensman	Maxwell Miller
Zachary Brueck	Nicholas Miller
Brody Cordes	Sawyer Miller
Isaac Dio	Miles Sanborn
Sarah Drake	Carter Schlitt
Ethan Drover	Molly Schlitt
Ella Evans	Kayla Schmidt
Jack Ford	Robert Schmidt III
Maxwell Forkner	Colten Siebert
Carson George	Nora Siebert
Caitlin Greer	Henry Tahvonen
Madelyn Greer	Elizabeth Thomey
Anne Gutowski	Nicholas Thomey
Jacob Haan	Lana Turner
Nicholas Haan	Jack Wells
Faith Hasbrouck	Audrie White

#### First Communion

Mackenzie Moore
Annabelle Moran
Emma Weber
Summer Yarc

## **Director of Early Faith Formation Ministries**

### **Deaconess Katie Freund**

This has been a fruitful year. Our staff has been living into the long anticipated “path forward” and there has been a lot of good work done. Since I was first brought into the Holy Cross family we’ve known that our community was at the threshold of transition. With a church as large and active as ours, we’re going to keep growing and changing for years to come.

For me specifically, this has been a year of professional development and long term planning. Some of you might recall I came to Holy Cross straight from years of rural ministry where limited resources demand creativity and nearly all responsibilities are fielded by the pastor alone. This year my work habits have shifted away from “one person show” to bringing in, equipping, and supporting others in the work of the community. That’s no small task; but navigating this change in work style has honestly been a (hard-worked for) pleasure. Both our Senior Pastor and Pastor Emeritus have been supportive, but I want to specifically lift up one of our congregation members, Val Maxwell, for volunteering to coach me in project management. Without a doubt the richest resource we have as a church is the high caliber of skills our people bring to the table. Val is a perfect example of this. Working together we were able to bring some much needed structure to our Sunday School program. Looking ahead, the skills she has (and still does) teach and model for me are ones that will continue to transform what I can offer when serving our community.

Some of the sacred work done this year has been independent of any “big” programming, such as cleaning up and reinstating the church’s Bible cart (did you know we had one of those?). Another large project was developing our approach to hospitality for families in worship; this includes putting together busy bags, setting up the new prayer ground, and evaluating what families need to feel supported and comfortable on Sunday morning. Some of you may have heard me talk about this by using the phrase “spectrum of hospitality”, assuming that this is not a single universal approach that will work for all families. Additionally, we continue to grow our children’s library to be utilized by families from Holy Cross and our Early Childhood Ministry program alike. This year there have been multiple children in our daycare program who have experienced the death of family members, and having resources like children’s books on grief is invaluable.

This past year has also gifted me the joy of preaching for the congregation as well as attending the annual meeting for the Lutheran Deaconess Association in Valparaiso, IN. Both reminding me why I felt the call to ministry in the first place.

## **Director of Youth and Family Ministry**

### **Edwin Andrade**

Can you believe it has only been several months since we have been at Holy Cross? Colleen and I packed up and gathered our stuff and moved cross country and headed out for Chicagoland. I suppose I could say all roads led to Holy Cross, right? At any rate, it has been a wild, challenging, and joyful season. When people ask me how it has been so far, my answer is: all of the above. And I can’t wait to see what God has in store this upcoming year.

Change is coming to Crossroads. The high school student Nurture Events will shift from Sunday evening to Sunday morning. We will meet following our Sunday worship service. The reason behind the time change is to encourage families, both parents and students to attend worship together. Having a space for different age groups on Sunday can cut through the idea of ‘separateness’ and create an intergenerational space for worship and faith formation on Sunday morning.

Crossroads, along with our eighth graders from Emerge are raising funds to attend the 2024 ELCA National Youth gathering this summer in New Orleans. For our first fundraiser, we offered gift wrapping at The Cookie Walk and the following Sunday during service. We were able to raise over \$500 and we’re hoping to raise more with some additional upcoming fundraising ideas. I am grateful for Nikki Spencer’s and Becky Sawle’s support during our fundraiser and for helping me plan for our summer trip.

We were able to partner with the students from First Presbyterian Church of Libertyville, and we went Christmas Caroling. One of my hopes as we continue to grow and develop the program is to collaborate with other churches in our local community. I believe a sign of a healthy church is not only a church that serves but also a church that partners with others. As I am building relationships with other youth leaders, I am encouraged and inspired by their respective ministries. I can’t wait to see how God will work through our relationships with others to better equip and serve our students.

This last year during confirmation, we had one of the larger groups in recent memory. Pastor Chris, Deaconess Katie and I will be back at it this February. Each of us we be leading two classes. One of my hopes for our students being confirmed is for them to become more involved in the life of our community. Be it youth group, Sunday morning, or other ministries at Holy Cross. As I highlighted on Reformation Sunday, faith isn’t an individual pursuit. Our faith grows best in community. Confirmation is one of the first steps on the journey and not a means to an end.

Several moments stood out for me these last few months. The first highlight was the confirmation classes in the fall. Although the classes were hectic at times (i.e., dodgeball), it was a privilege to be able to teach and learn alongside Pastor Chris and Deaconess Katie. In one of the classes, we covered a variety of creeds concerning our faith. I asked the students to write and share some of their beliefs. One of the students shared that they believed in miracles, at first some of



the other students chuckled, but I asked them to say more about their belief in miracles. They shared that had witnessed God intervening and transforming lives. When things seemed hopeless, God turned it around.

I have also enjoyed the meaningful discussions we have shared at our Nurture Events for Emerge and Crossroads. Youth ministry isn't glorified babysitting. It must be more than just entertainment. As I listened and learned from our students, one of the things that impressed me was their desire for something meaningful. One of the questions I am holding is: 'What is youth ministry for?' I found the answer to be joy, not fun. Joy is the bass note. Joy is the meaning behind our students' questions and curiosity. Fun comes and goes, but joy sustains. As our students ask questions and wrestle with their identities, joy will see us through and lead to an encounter with God.

Another highlight for me was having the opportunity to meet and know the parents of our students. It has been a privilege to listen to them share their vision for their children and personal stories. One of the things that sometimes gets lost in youth ministry is that relationship-building happens not only with the students but also with their parents. Faith formation happens in the church and the home. When families can grow together, a community is transformed. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to build a solid foundation as we move forward into this new season at Holy Cross.

### **Finance, Facilities, and IT Consultant Steve Oelschlager**

One of my highlights in 2023 was working with Council President Andy Eidson. Andy and I would meet over Zoom every other Wednesday to talk through the various projects, opportunities, and challenges that I was either working on or tuned into in one way or another. Andy brought his years of experience in the corporate world around leadership and project management to help me gain clarity around solutions, paths forward, and priorities. It was a brilliant concept that Andy initiated and invested in, not just with me but also separately with Pastor Chris. As I experienced it, I realized every congregation would benefit immensely from having this kind of partnership between staff and elected leaders.

This past fall, Andy and I met at Grainger headquarters, where Andy has worked for over 20 years, for me to experience as a case study how Grainger systematically prepares itself for relevancy in the marketplace. There are all sorts of "organizational technologies" that help companies and non-profits thrive as they bring people together as teammates to focus on initiatives and goals. I don't believe that churches are businesses, but they share many things in common, and it is fascinating to me what churches might learn and coopt from ethical and impactful business practices.

As Andy prepares to step back from being president of this congregation, I want to thank him for his servant leadership and for being a model of better ways to lead. I know Andy has invested tons of his time into Holy Cross while he has been president for the last two years, and we are indeed very fortunate to have received his generous gift. Please make sure to thank him!

I also want to thank and call out our talented and committed office staff: Pastor Chris, Pastor Bob, Deaconess Katie, Edwin, Dale, Beth Ann, Sarah, Janet, Ellie, Samantha, Roxanne, Tania, Manny, Carmen, Abel, Paul, Darrin, and Carrie. Please see the reports from these colleagues in this annual report that cover their incredible work, from communications to managing our Early Childhood Ministry, our faith formation, video, and pastoral and music ministries.

People and relationships are central to what I referred to above as organizational technology and are how we do what we do at the magnitude we do it. So, without naming everyone, we are exceedingly grateful for all of you, for who you are, and for your contributions to the whole. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

### **Financial Items of Interest**

- In 2023, Ryan Young stepped into the role of financial secretary, getting up to speed on what that entails. Thank you to Ryan for learning and handling those critical tasks. Thanks to Beth Ann Koenemann for taking care of our bookkeeping, payroll, and HR needs, among many other things, and her attention to detail, and Tom Miller for stepping in during the last quarter to tie up the year, including preparing the financial statements in this annual report. And, thanks to our audit team of Chuck Boucek, Nancy Ryan, and Tim Skelton for their work reviewing our records and processes.
- In June, Holy Cross was fortunate to renew our mortgage with Thrivent Financial and keep our interest rate of 4.25% intact for another ten years. We were negotiating with Thrivent and the ELCA Mission Investment Fund and were breathtakingly surprised at the result. Holy Cross pays \$26K monthly on an outstanding balance of about \$3.4 million.
- Holy Cross agreed to partner with *Freewill.com* this past year as we expand our options to receive donations. If you visit our online giving page at [HolyCrossChurch.org/giving](https://HolyCrossChurch.org/giving), you will see new options for gifts of stock and appreciated assets, donor-advised funds, IRAs, and legacy gifts, including estate planning and wills. I encourage you to consider extending your life's impact beyond the years you are alive. Please put in place a plan that takes care of your family's needs and lifts up the causes that have been important to you during your life. I know at least five households that named the ministries of Holy Cross in their estate plans. You probably also noticed that we redesigned the giving cards we use during the offering to refer to all the ways we can give now. Thanks to Ellie Rautenbach and her creative flair and design skills on our new giving cards.

### **Property Items of Interest**

- Our buildings are a tremendous asset but require continual care and upkeep. I'm grateful for Carmen and Abel Cervantes, who work incredibly hard and lovingly care for our buildings as custodians. I'm also thankful for Manny Rivera and his broad expertise as he fixes various problems that emerge weekly. And thanks to all of you who participate in all the different building and property-related chores.
- Part of our fire-safety system is a network of pipes in the attic that can spray water should there ever be a fire. Because the attic space is not temperature-controlled, these pipes cannot contain standing water, or they would freeze. Instead, they hold pressurized air that is quickly replaced by water should there be a sudden pressure drop, like what would happen if a sprinkler head melted due to a fire. All this to say that the network of "dry" pipes has not been holding the compressed air due to leaks. In 2023, we substantially invested in replacing problematic pipes and adding a nitrogen generator to replace compressed air with compressed nitrogen to stop pipe decay and extend our pipes' life.
- With the expansion of our staff, we reconfigured the office to eliminate clutter and expand the number of workspaces. The key was taking one of our larger offices and making it a place with three desks instead of one. We did this without building new walls or doing construction work. We also hauled many banker boxes of old financial records to the shredder as part of our decluttering. We also added windows to the inner office doors to cultivate safe spaces.
- You probably noticed the loft we used during early COVID for parking lot worship is no longer standing. Thanks to the demolition crew who came together in the fall to take down and move those materials over by the fire pit on the south end of our property for future use.
- There are a variety of other building improvements that you might have noticed, including new vanities with auto-sensing faucets and soap dispensers in the main bathrooms, new coat racks in the southwest corner of the Fellowship Area, two new A/C condenser units for our Crossways Preschool area, parking lot banners, painting, etc. We are fortunate to have a capital replacement fund and a building fund to pay for this vital work. Thank you for your gifts!
- In 2024, we are looking to replace much of the lighting infrastructure in the sanctuary due to aging hardware that is becoming impossible to fix. Watch for more details, or contact me if you are interested in learning more.

### **Other Items of Interest**

- Holy Cross is blessed to have CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare as part of our ministry as it brings energy and vibrancy to our congregation. I'm grateful to the visionaries in our congregation who, years ago, put the plan in place to create these ministries from scratch out of nothing. Many people have invested significantly in these ministries over the years to take them to where they are today. We are also fortunate to have Samantha Cooper-Tuttle and her leadership team of Roxanne Lamont and Tania Zombolo to lovingly lead that ministry on behalf of Holy Cross.
- In 2023, we worked on refreshing the Early Childhood Ministry bylaws concerning governance. As you might imagine, many things have changed since the early days, including more internal staff resources to assist with planning and decision-making. The new structure calls for three groups:
  - A parent group for parent/teacher relations
  - A staff governance group for operational decisions
  - A strategic group for big-picture strategy, visioning, and marketing workCouncil approved the changes, and we started implementing them in the fall. Thanks to Sam Cooper-Tuttle, Matthew Sargent, Val Maxwell, Carly Thornberry, Judy Frank-Gonwa, Beth Ann Koenemann, Andy Eidson, and Pastor Chris for working through these changes.

Lastly, I wanted to share that beginning in 2024, I am scaling back my role at Holy Cross to work less and create more time for healthier rhythms. I will continue managing finance, facilities, and IT issues as a part-time consultant while that makes sense for Holy Cross and myself. I look forward to continued involvement in our remarkable congregation and all the valued relationships I have with all of you. Thank you for the opportunities you have and continue to provide me to serve at Holy Cross.

**Director of Early Childhood Ministry (ECM)**  
**Samantha Cooper-Tuttle**

CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare had an incredible year full of support, kindness, learning and growing. We started the year off right with healthy students and staff, decent winter weather, and blessings of a Happy New Year. We continued the good feelings into February by celebrating Love and Friendship. For the first Dine and Donate event of the year, we partnered with Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory for a sweet treat just in time for Valentine's Day. The event was a success, raising over \$300 for the ECM programs. I attribute our success to the adorable commercial Dale Tippet created with the help of Carly Thornberry and her family! We continued to have two additional Dine and Donate events, one with Suzy Swirl and the other most recently with Cards for A Cause. While Suzy Swirl was less successful, bringing in \$162, Cards for A Cause was a HUGE success. With purchases from our families and the congregation, we raised over \$600!

In addition to Dine and Donates, we held our largest fundraiser in October. Fallin' Into Fun 2023 was an amazing testament to our staff, families, and the community. We had over 200 guests during the event who ate, shopped, played, and socialized. Guests of all ages enjoyed what we had to offer, from the silent auction to the puppet show. Due to the support and contributions of everyone who attended, we raised over \$2,000 for ECM. As we advertised, the proceeds from the fundraisers, including WISHES, will go towards building an outdoor Infant/Toddler play space this spring. Located in the old Garden, we will be fencing in the area to provide our younger students with a sensory-enriched environment where they can play safely with materials and equipment suitable for their age group. We cannot thank enough those who helped make this dream a reality. This new addition will be the perfect area for our littles to improve their relationship with the natural environment.

The staff of CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare has our unending gratitude for their dedication and commitment to our students and families. Day in and day out, our staff shows up, ready to help our students grow and learn. Watching personalities develop, new skills emerge, and seeing the moment when a learning lesson clicks is inspirational. Our staff works tirelessly to find ways to help each student thrive within the classroom. Whether that is teaching a child their alphabet or finding the best method of potty training, our staff goes above and beyond for the students in our programs.

During the summer, we had the opportunity to educate our students about bunnies in a live action, hands-on environment. A mother bunny decided to make her nest right on our playground! We discovered the baby bunnies hiding out under one of the climbing walls. Instead of moving the bunnies, we took the opportunity to fence off the area, and allowed the students to visually interact with the bunnies within their space. The children were thrilled to see the bunnies each time they went out on the playground. The experience opened their minds and expanded their curiosity. Our staff spent time with their students talking about bunnies: what they eat, where they sleep, where they go when they leave... continuous questions asked and answered because of a special learning moment such as this one. Our staff supported this week-long adventure to give our students an educational experience they won't soon forget.

The impact we have on our community is one of the many reasons I find value in what we do. Walking in the Libertyville Parade and setting up a table at the Farmer's Market not only keeps us current and seen, but gives us the chance to interact with families; both from the present and the past. It is rewarding to see past families at these events, to hear about the success and growth of our alumni students. It is even more remarkable when these students remember who we are and the positive feelings they have from their time with us. Of course, hearing from our current families brings the same sense of joy and reward as it does from past families. I love receiving out-of-the-blue emails from our current families about the wonderful experience they, and their children, are having by attending CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare. It is a reminder that what we do matters. The way we teach, interact, and grow relationships has real, long-term positive effects on the people we have made connections with.

The staff at CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare could not do what we do without the support of the Holy Cross Church Staff and the Congregation. Steve Oelschlager has been an amiable presence for our programs. We are grateful for his sound advice and problem-solving skills, and are thankful for the time he dedicates to our programs, in addition to the job he does for the Church. I'd also like to show my gratitude to Beth Ann Koenemann for the additional support she has given to our programs and staff. She has become an invaluable resource for us to rely on. Dale Tippet and Deaconess Katie have been rockstars to our students! The dedication and effort they put into Children's Chapel as well as lending a helping hand wherever and whenever is a testament to their good-natured personalities. Pastor Chris is a daily presence within our programs. We cannot thank him enough for being available by spreading peace and love to our students and staff each and every day. In addition to these key individuals, I'd like to thank the rest of the Church Staff, the Church Council, and the Parent Advisory Committee for the parts they play.

Wishing everyone a happy and healthy 2024!

## **Administrative Staff**

**Sarah Accettura, Administrative Coordinator**

**Janet Carr, Administrator of Congregational Activities**

**Ellie Rautenbach, Administrator of Congregational Communications**

### *Worship Participant Schedules*

Holy Cross has been blessed with an active congregation that helps support each worship service through a variety of ministries: *Acolytes, Altar Care, Assisting Ministers, Coffee Hosts, Communion Assistants, Greeters, Readers and Ushers*. A list of worship participant opportunities can be found in the Worship Participant Ministries Brochure available on our website at [holycrosschurch.org/resources](http://holycrosschurch.org/resources). Those currently on our worship participant lists are invited to schedule volunteer opportunities via Church Community Builder (CCB). Volunteers may select dates and times that suit their schedules for service at worship. If you are not on a worship participant list and would like to join one please contact the church office at [office@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:office@holycrosschurch.org)

### *Key Fob Requests*

In order to gain access to the church building outside of worship, special event and office hours, a key fob is required. Key fob request forms are available in the church office or can also be emailed to you upon request. Key fob requests may take one to two business days to process.

## **Communications**

### *The Cross Connection Newsletter*

Our monthly newsletter is an integral part of Holy Cross communications. It includes letters from the pastors, staff and group leaders, early childhood and youth ministry details, and news beyond the congregation informing the congregation and larger community of upcoming events, activities, and opportunities to connect with others here at Holy Cross. All aspects of curating content, layout and design, printing, and the mail prep process occurs in-house by the office team. Once mailed, the newsletter reaches almost 1,000 households and partner organizations via U.S. mail. Our mailing addressing service continues to provide a mailing list that verifies each address and provides a bar code unique to each destination. This process helps keep our mailing list accurate and up-to-date, and it also eliminates a step at the post office in order for newsletters to reach homes more quickly. An electronic copy of each newsletter is posted and archived on the Holy Cross website at [HolyCrossChurch.org/newsletters](http://HolyCrossChurch.org/newsletters)

If you would like to join the mailing list contact the church office at [office@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:office@holycrosschurch.org). For current recipients, please keep us updated with any mailing address changes to ensure receipt, and keep down our returned mail costs. Planning to go south for the winter? Please notify us when to stop/resume the newsletter.

If you would like information about your ministry or event published in the newsletter, please submit your article no later than the 1st day of the month prior to [janet@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:janet@holycrosschurch.org). Space can be limited. Contact the church office in advance if you have questions.

### *Staying Connected Email*

In addition to *The Cross Connection* newsletter mailing, an abbreviated version is sent electronically via Constant Contact at the beginning of every month. This email serves as an overview at a glance and a quick reminder of upcoming events. For convenience, it contains direct links to additional information on our websites and access to signups, if requested. We also utilize this email list to notify the congregation of changes or updates to scheduled events or memorial information.

### *Websites*

The Holy Cross Lutheran Church website, [HolyCrossChurch.org](http://HolyCrossChurch.org) connects our members and the community to up to date information about our church and various events, activities, and opportunities. All aspects of the website's design, production, updates and maintenance are completed in-house.

We continue offering livestream worship services on most Sundays at 8 and 10 am. Livestream worship includes all of the music, scripture readings, a sermon message, hymns and announcements as the in-person worship experience offers with the added benefit of the ability to tune in from anywhere in the world with an internet connection. Livestream worship services at 10 am on Sundays are archived and made available to view on demand within 24 hours. On average, about 150 users per week tune in to livestream or watch an archived worship video. View livestream services and videos on our website at [HolyCrossChurch.org/sermons](http://HolyCrossChurch.org/sermons)

CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare have their own individual websites at [cpreschool.org](http://cpreschool.org) and [cchildcare.org](http://cchildcare.org) respectively. CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare follow the same curriculum but one consists of a half day preschool and the other a full day preschool. Prospective families can view information about each school and what they have to offer and even take a virtual tour of each entity! The integration of Brightwheel management software to the websites of CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare continues to be a success.



Church Community Builder (CCB) is utilized as Holy Cross' member management system. Users can register or sign in to their accounts from the Holy Cross home page navigational menu. This management system allows us to more effectively target communication, maintain group participation records, create and schedule worship volunteer opportunities and affords each user the ability to connect easily with others. If you have not created your own login yet, you can request access from our home page by clicking on "Sign In" or on the following page: [holycrosschurch.ccbchurch.com/goto/login](http://holycrosschurch.ccbchurch.com/goto/login)

#### *CCB Email Outreach*

Through email, Holy Cross is able to reach over 1,600 individual email addresses every month. Members and visitors of Holy Cross are encouraged to keep their email addresses up to date. This can be accomplished by notifying the church office or through our member management system. This email outreach is also an important way for young adults who are away at college or out of town to stay in touch with their church family.

#### *Social Media*

The Holy Cross Facebook page has over 420 followers at [facebook.com/HolyCrossLibertyville](https://facebook.com/HolyCrossLibertyville) Postings include scheduled event details and reminders of worship services and announcements on weekends.

#### *Brochures, Inserts, Flyers and Posters*

Worship Bulletin inserts and programs for special events

Giving Statement inserts

Event flyers and posters

#### *Visual Communications*

The electronic messages on the indoor screens in the fellowship area, entrances to CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare, as well as the outdoor LED road sign are created and maintained in-house. We hope you find the information displayed helpful.

# ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

## Council President's Report Andy Eidson

Church Council meets monthly supporting our Congregation, Clergy, Staff and "Who We Are" document (see page 5).

I encourage you to read this Annual Report and reflect on impacts we make individually and as a congregation. Please consider how Holy Cross can help "Compose a Christian way of life" for you and your families.

I will dedicate a major portion of this report to recapping our 4-year pastoral transition process named A Path Forward. Following is a thorough, but incomplete list of our Path Forward milestones:

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### 2020

Pastor Bob announced his request to transition from a full time Senior Pastor to a part-time pastoral role. Council supported and involved Chicago Metro Synod in planning a "non-traditional" transition. Staff Support and Pastor Bob developed a process for the transition named "A Path Forward".

### 2021

Congregation focus groups and a survey were conducted.  
Sr. Pastor Executive Search was conducted.  
Four candidates were presented to the Call Committee and participated in an all-day interviews.

### 2022

Call Committee conducted second interviews.  
Call Committee made selection, created compensation package, and presented to Council.  
Council conducted a special session, met candidate, debriefed, and voted to accept recommendations.  
Special Congregation meeting held (outside in the rain), met quorum, and voted to approve selection.  
Pastor Chris Neptun began co-Sr. Pastor duties on June 1, 2022.  
Transition Team Committee formed to support Pastors, staff and the congregation.  
Installation Service held on October 9, 2022 – Bishop Curry presided.

### 2023

Pastor Bob left for sabbatical (March 1).  
Pastor Chris Neptun assumed sole Sr. Pastor duties (March 1).  
Pastor Bob returned from sabbatical as Pastor Emeritus, assuming a part time role (June 1).

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We thank the members of the Transition Team for their service: Jen Christensen (Chair), Jeannine Phillips, Dave Klein, Sarah Accettura, Susan Beck, Sarah Grayer, Tim Jackson-Skelton, and Gary Johnston.

We are updating our constitution to align with the Synod model. A final congregation ratification vote will be taken during the Annual Meeting 1/28/24. Many thanks to Harold Sargent, Terry Berger and Eric Christensen for leading this effort. Visit our website at [HolyCrossChurch.org/constitution](https://HolyCrossChurch.org/constitution) for details on content and process.

I want to thank the following Council members completing terms:

- Nicole Drake
- Gail Kelly
- Harold Sargent

I will leave Council this month having completed a second three-year term. Thank you for the opportunity to serve and grow.

Council asks for your support and consideration of the following nominees for new 3-year terms:

- Lori Fedyk (Will assume Treasurer role in April)
- Gail Kelly (Returning for second term)
- Donna Thomey
- Joe Young

Yours in Christ,  
Andy Eidson  
President, Holy Cross Lutheran Church Council

**HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**STATEMENTS OF CHANGES IN FUND BALANCES**  
**For years ended December 31, 2022 and 2023**

<b>UNRESTRICTED FUND BALANCES</b>							
	Balance Dec 31, 2021	Additions	Expended	Balance Dec 31, 2022	Additions	Expended	Balance Dec 31, 2023
<b>Church Operation Fund</b>							
Retained Earnings	310,579	-	-	315,269	-	-	315,269
Net Income (Loss)	-	(7,311)	-	-	(53,802)	-	(53,802)
Miscellaneous Adjustments	-	-	-	-	(157)	-	(157)
Transfers to Other Funds	-	-	12,000	-	-	54,000	54,000
	310,579	(7,311)	12,000	315,269	(53,959)	54,000	315,310
<b>Capital Assets &amp; Mortgage Fund</b>							
Cost of Fixed Assets	8,231,095	-	-	8,343,581	-	-	8,343,581
Purchase of Fixed Assets	-	112,485	-	-	68,211	-	68,211
	8,231,095	112,485	-	8,343,581	68,211	-	8,411,791
Mortgage Balance	(3,755,431)	-	-	(3,600,752)	-	-	(3,600,752)
Payments against Mortgage	-	312,000	-	-	312,000	-	312,000
Interest included in Payments Made	-	-	(157,321)	-	-	(149,893)	(149,893)
	(3,755,431)	312,000	(157,321)	(3,600,752)	312,000	(149,893)	(3,438,646)
<b>TOTAL UNRESTRICTED FUND BALANCES</b>	<b>4,786,244</b>	<b>417,175</b>	<b>(145,321)</b>	<b>5,058,097</b>	<b>326,252</b>	<b>(95,893)</b>	<b>5,288,456</b>
<b>TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED FUND BALANCES</b>							
	Balance Dec 31, 2021	Receipts	Expended	Balance Dec 31, 2022	Receipts	Expended	Balance Dec 31, 2023
<b>Church Program Reserve Funds</b>							
Programmatic Reserves	235,558	12,000	(25,774)	221,784	11,949	(123,888)	109,845
<b>Designated Restricted Church Program Accounts</b>							
Early Childhood Ministries	1,008	31,087	(9,468)	22,627	38,487	(7,154)	53,960
Youth (including Scholarships)	26,089	12,957	(5,500)	33,546	12,942	(8,192)	38,296
Around the Cross	4,572	8,906	(3,636)	9,842	6,263	(878)	15,227
Pastor's Discretionary	34,806	7,837	(21,636)	21,007	6,624	(7,209)	20,422
Thrivent Receipts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fund Balance	66,475	60,787	(40,240)	87,022	64,316	(23,432)	127,905
<b>Designated Restricted Building &amp; Property Accounts</b>							
Capital Replacement	169,866	106,500	(77,260)	199,106	59,400	(68,706)	189,800
Building Fund	133,722	78,979	(84,000)	128,701	77,899	(84,000)	122,600
Memorials	9,517	10,537	(2,309)	17,745	1,192	-	18,936
Fund Balance	313,105	196,016	(163,569)	345,552	138,491	(152,706)	331,337
<b>Designated Benevolence Accounts</b>							
Housing Projects from Endowment	-	2,000	-	2,000	-	-	2,000
Mission Projects from Endowment	3,444	750	-	4,194	749	(3,000)	1,943
ELCA World Hunger	-	20,801	(20,801)	-	13,501	(13,501)	-
COOL Food Pantry	-	23,703	(23,703)	-	21,538	(21,865)	(327)
PADS	7,898	10,444	(9,485)	8,857	8,011	(4,002)	12,865
ELCA Disaster Response	-	9,000	(9,000)	-	3,000	(3,000)	-
Waukegan to College	-	12,200	(12,200)	-	-	-	-
Feed My Starving Children	-	7,221	(7,221)	-	2,500	(2,500)	-
Habitat for Humanity	-	5,000	(5,000)	-	3,000	(3,000)	-
Lutheran Social Services of Illinois	-	2,800	(2,800)	-	3,386	(3,386)	-
Olivewood	-	739	(739)	-	687	(687)	-
Visitor Care Bags	-	295	(295)	-	235	(235)	-
Compassion Closet	-	1,178	-	1,178	-	-	1,178
Covid Meals	-	-	-	-	260	(260)	-
Sagrado Corazon	-	2,100	(2,100)	-	-	-	-
Healing Waters	1,742	1,200	-	2,942	-	-	2,942
Rosebud	11,205	4,761	(10,401)	5,565	7,816	(10,000)	3,381
Fund Balance	24,289	104,191	(103,744)	24,736	64,682	(65,436)	23,982
<b>TOTAL TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED FUND BALANCE</b>	<b>639,427</b>	<b>372,993</b>	<b>(333,327)</b>	<b>679,094</b>	<b>279,438</b>	<b>(365,462)</b>	<b>593,069</b>
<b>PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED FUND BALANCES</b>							
	Balance Dec 31, 2021	Additions	Expended	Balance Dec 31, 2022	Additions	Expended	Balance Dec 31, 2023
<b>Columbarium Fund Balance</b>							
Total Subscriptions	47,620	4,000	-	51,620	8,400	-	60,020
15% Retained for Perpetual Care; 85% to Building	(40,477)	(3,400)	-	(43,877)	(7,140)	-	(51,017)
Expenses relating to Columbarium	(1,385)	1,385	-	-	-	-	-
	5,758	1,985	-	7,743	1,260	-	9,003
<b>Mission Endowment Funds</b>							
ELCA Pooled Trust #1 - Opened 1999	75,000	-	-	75,000	-	-	75,000
Endowment Activity	19,269	(8,254)	(3,379)	7,636	5,322	(3,369)	9,589
	94,269	(8,254)	(3,379)	82,636	5,322	(3,369)	84,589
ELCA Pooled Trust #2 - Opened 2017	60,150	10,000	-	70,150	-	-	70,150
Endowment Activity	13,228	(6,900)	(2,000)	4,328	5,147	-	9,475
	73,378	3,100	(2,000)	74,478	5,147	-	79,625
<b>TOTAL PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED FUND BALANCE</b>	<b>173,404</b>	<b>(3,169)</b>	<b>(5,379)</b>	<b>164,857</b>	<b>11,730</b>	<b>(3,369)</b>	<b>173,217</b>

**HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES**  
**Actual for year ended December 31, 2022**

	<b>2022</b>			
	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Reserves &amp; Designated</b>	<b>Columbarium &amp; Endowment</b>	<b>TOTAL ALL FUNDS</b>
<b>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</b>				
Member Contributions				
Operating Support	893,535	-	-	893,535
Special Benevolences	-	104,191	-	104,191
Building & Capital Replacement	-	136,016	-	136,016
Program Receipts				
Early Childhood Ministries (ECM)	1,747,205	31,087	-	1,778,293
Other Programs & Activities	14,900	-	-	14,900
Other Restricted Fund Receipts				
Programmatic Reserves	-	-	-	-
Designated Church Program Funds	-	29,699	-	29,699
Columbarium Reserve for Perpetual Care	-	-	1,985	1,985
Additions to Endowment	-	-	15,932	15,932
Building Use	6,975	-	-	6,975
Outside Grants	261,726	-	-	261,726
Programmatic Transfers from Reserve	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>2,924,341</b>	<b>300,993</b>	<b>17,917</b>	<b>3,243,252</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>				
Benevolence				
ELCA Benevolence	89,353	-	-	89,353
Special Benevolences	-	103,744	-	103,744
Administration Expenses	-	-	-	-
ECM Salaries and Benefits	1,326,986	-	-	1,326,986
Church Staff Salaries and Benefits	772,818	-	-	772,818
Administration	118,738	-	-	118,738
Program Expenses				
Early Childhood Ministries (ECM)	87,236	5,930	-	93,165
Worship, Programs & Activities	76,965	12,361	-	89,326
Other Restricted Fund Expenses				
Programmatic Reserves	-	25,774	-	25,774
Designated Church Program Funds	-	9,136	-	9,136
Columbarium Expenses	-	-	-	-
Draws from Mission Endowment	-	-	26,465	26,465
Capital Replacement & Maintenance	116,132	110	-	116,242
Fixed Asset Additions	20,213	92,272	-	112,485
Mortgage	312,000	-	-	312,000
Other Non Budgeted Expenses	11,209	-	-	11,209
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>2,931,651</b>	<b>249,327</b>	<b>26,465</b>	<b>3,207,443</b>
<b>NET SURPLUS (LOSS)</b>	<b>(7,311)</b>	<b>51,667</b>	<b>(8,548)</b>	<b>35,808</b>



**HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES**

**Actual for year ended December 31, 2023 & Budget for 2024**

	<b>2023</b>			<b>2024</b>
	<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Reserves &amp; Designated</b>	<b>Columbarium &amp; Endowment</b>	<b>Budget</b>
<b>SUPPORT AND REVENUE</b>				
Member Contributions				
Operating Support	811,836	-	-	811,836
Special Benevolences	-	64,682	-	60,000
Building & Capital Replacement	-	108,491	-	84,000
Program Receipts				
Early Childhood Ministries (ECM)	1,978,146	38,487	-	2,016,632
Other Programs & Activities	45,603	-	-	33,350
Other Restricted Fund Receipts				
Programmatic Reserves	-	11,949	-	11,949
Designated Church Program Funds	-	25,829	-	-
Columbarium Reserve for Perpetual Care	-	-	1,260	-
Additions to Endowment	-	-	7,101	-
Building Use	6,700	-	-	6,000
Outside Grants	-	-	-	-
Programmatic Transfers from Reserve	110,000	-	-	72,846
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>2,952,285</b>	<b>249,438</b>	<b>8,361</b>	<b>3,210,084</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>				
Benevolence				
ELCA Benevolence	81,185	-	-	83,850
Special Benevolences	-	65,436	-	60,000
Administration Expenses				
ECM Salaries and Benefits	1,367,845	-	-	1,417,999
Church Staff Salaries and Benefits	828,351	-	-	788,506
Administration	124,328	-	-	124,380
Program Expenses				
Early Childhood Ministries (ECM)	109,906	7,154	-	118,200
Worship, Programs & Activities	84,156	7,209	-	77,525
Other Restricted Fund Expenses				
Programmatic Reserves	-	123,888	-	123,888
Designated Church Program Funds	-	9,069	-	9,069
Columbarium Expenses	-	-	-	-
Draws from Mission Endowment	-	-	-	-
Capital Replacement & Maintenance	92,647	2,953	-	103,000
Fixed Asset Additions	2,458	65,753	-	30,000
Mortgage	312,000	-	-	312,000
Other Non Budgeted Expenses	3,211	-	-	3,211
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>3,006,087</b>	<b>281,462</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,115,460</b>
<b>NET SURPLUS (LOSS)</b>	<b>(53,802)</b>	<b>(32,024)</b>	<b>8,361</b>	<b>-</b>

**HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION**  
Year ended December 31, 2022

<b>2022</b>			
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Reserves &amp; Designated</b>	<b>Columbarium &amp; Endowment</b>	<b>TOTAL ALL FUNDS</b>
<b>ASSETS</b>			
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Cash Onhand & Bank Accounts			
Petty Cash	400		400
Operating Fund	333,954		333,954
Money Market Account	-		-
ELCA Mission Investment Fund	-		-
Firstrade Securities Equity Account			-
Restricted Fund	679,094		679,094
Columbarium Fund		7,743	7,743
ELCA Mission Endowment Fund		157,114	157,114
Total Cash Onhand & Bank Accounts	334,354	164,857	1,178,304
Other Current Assets	(3,758)		(3,758)
<b>Total Current Assets</b>	<b>330,596</b>	<b>164,857</b>	<b>1,174,546</b>
<b>Fixed Assets (at Original Cost)</b>			
Land & Improvements	552,497		552,497
Buildings & Structures	6,852,524		6,852,524
Furniture, Fixtures & Equipment	938,560		938,560
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	<b>8,343,581</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>8,343,581</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>8,674,176</b>	<b>164,857</b>	<b>9,518,126</b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>			
<b>Current Liabilities</b>			
Accounts Payable	15,327		15,327
Payroll Taxes	-		-
Current Portion of Mortgage Payable	170,453		170,453
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	<b>185,780</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>185,780</b>
<b>Long Term Liabilities</b>			
Mortgage Payable (4.25% due 12/31/2038)	3,430,299		3,430,299
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>3,616,079</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,616,079</b>
<b>Fund Balances</b>			
Unrestricted	5,058,097		5,058,097
Temporarily Restricted	679,094		679,094
Permanently Restricted		164,857	164,857
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>5,058,097</b>	<b>164,857</b>	<b>5,902,047</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>8,674,176</b>	<b>164,857</b>	<b>9,518,126</b>

**HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**STATEMENTS OF CASH ACTIVITY**  
For the year ended December 31, 2022

<b>2022</b>			
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Reserves &amp; Designated</b>	<b>Columbarium &amp; Endowment</b>	<b>TOTAL ALL FUNDS</b>
<b>CASH BALANCE, START OF YEAR</b>	325,825	639,427	1,138,656
Net Surplus (Loss)	(7,311)	51,667	35,808
Transfers between Fund	12,000	(12,000)	-
Change in Other Assets & Liabilities	3,839	-	3,839
<b>CASH BALANCE, END OF YEAR</b>	<b>334,354</b>	<b>164,857</b>	<b>1,178,304</b>

**HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION**  
Year ended December 31, 2023

**ASSETS**

**Current Assets**

Cash Onhand & Bank Accounts

Petty Cash	400			400
Operating Fund	121,268			121,268
Money Market Account	-	558,117	1,260	559,377
ELCA Mission Investment Fund	200,430	4,065		204,495
Firstrade Securities Equity Account	1,061			1,061
Restricted Fund		30,888		30,888
Columbarium Fund			7,743	7,743
ELCA Mission Endowment Fund			164,214	164,214
Total Cash Onhand & Bank Accounts	323,159	593,069	173,217	1,089,445

Other Current Assets

**Total Current Assets**

**Fixed Assets (at Original Cost)**

Land & Improvements	555,904			555,904
Buildings & Structures	6,902,102			6,902,102
Furniture, Fixtures & Equipment	953,785			953,785
<b>Total Fixed Assets</b>	8,411,791	-	-	8,411,791

**TOTAL ASSETS**

**LIABILITIES AND EQUITY**

**Current Liabilities**

Accounts Payable	8,303			8,303
Payroll Taxes	-			-
Current Portion of Mortgage Payable	169,127			169,127
<b>Total Current Liabilities</b>	177,430	-	-	177,430

**Long Term Liabilities**

Mortgage Payable (4.25% due 12/31/2038)	3,269,519			3,269,519
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	3,446,949	-	-	3,446,949

**Fund Balances**

Unrestricted	5,288,456			5,288,456
Temporarily Restricted		593,069		593,069
Permanently Restricted			173,217	173,217
<b>Total Equity</b>	5,288,456	593,069	173,217	6,054,742

**TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY**

**HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**STATEMENTS OF CASH ACTIVITY**  
For the year ended December 31, 2023

**CASH BALANCE, START OF YEAR**

Net Surplus (Loss)	(53,802)	(32,024)	8,361	(77,466)
Transfers between Fund	54,000	(54,000)	-	-
Miscellaneous Adjustments to Prior Year	(157)			(157)
Change in Other Assets & Liabilities	(11,236)	-	-	(11,236)

**CASH BALANCE, END OF YEAR**

2023			
General Fund	Reserves & Designated	Columbarium & Endowment	TOTAL ALL FUNDS
334,354	679,094	164,857	1,178,304
5,288,456	593,069	173,217	6,054,742
8,735,405	593,069	173,217	9,501,691

2023			
General Fund	Reserves & Designated	Columbarium & Endowment	TOTAL ALL FUNDS
334,354	679,094	164,857	1,178,304
(53,802)	(32,024)	8,361	(77,466)
54,000	(54,000)	-	-
(157)			(157)
(11,236)	-	-	(11,236)
323,159	593,069	173,217	1,089,445

## Auditors Report

The Holy Cross Audit Committee completed its independent internal audit for the financial year 2022. The audit scope included a review of the congregation's revenue and expenditure processes and related financial controls, as well as an examination of deposits, donations, giving statements, expenses, payroll, general ledger records and more. The Audit Committee concluded that appropriate controls governing the financial operations process appear to be in place and operating as intended, and that the 2022 books and records of the congregation appear to be materially accurate in all respects. In addition, Holy Cross' financial systems and platforms were found to be modern and transparent. The Audit Committee is grateful for the work of Tom Miller and Beth Ann Koenemann for their attention to detail and professionalism on behalf of our congregation.

The 2023 statements found in this annual report are unaudited. Holy Cross will conduct its audit program and review its 2023 financial statements during the first half of 2024. An audit report will be available to the church council and the congregation by July 1 with the results of that activity.

Please get in touch with an Audit Committee member or Steve Oelschlager if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Ryan, Tim Skelton, and Chuck Boucek  
Holy Cross Audit Committee

## Mission Endowment

In 2000, Holy Cross created the Mission Endowment Fund, seeded by a gift from the Paul and Irene Bruggemeier Family. This fund supports ministries beyond the operating budget of the congregation. An initial gift of \$75,000 established the Endowment. Additional donations from Holy Cross members have been added since 2000 and designated to scholarships. These funds are invested with the ELCA Foundation Pooled Trust, with the earnings being distributed each year in the following categories:

- College Scholarship support for congregation members
- The Holy Cross Music Ministry
- Ministry opportunities beyond the congregation Discretionary
- Needs determined by the Pastors

The concept of this fund is to preserve the original amount, only distributing the dividends each year. Our Mission Endowment Funds are invested with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund (MIF). These investments are utilized across the ELCA to assist in areas of new mission development. Holy Cross benefited from such investments when it was first organized in 1979.

With the distributions this year, we have distributed cumulatively since the inception of the endowment fund the following amounts:

Scholarships	\$ 63,189
Music Ministry	\$ 22,355
Social Ministry	\$ 15,232
Pastor's Discretionary	<u>\$ 8,714</u>
Grand Total	\$109,490

In 2023, the Holy Cross Mission Endowment fund earned \$3,369 in dividends.

In accordance with the Fund #1's guidelines, one third of the dividends (\$1,123) supplemented by additional gifts of \$1,177 (for a total of \$2,300), were awarded in scholarships to the following recipients:

Kara Cannon, Ashley Cervantes, Aubrey Cervantes, Kevin Cervantes, Alexander Delatorre, Katherine Haidvogel, Daniel Koenemann, Abigail Neptun, Anika Neptun, Lindsey Partlow, Robby Partlow, Sarah Rosten, Mark Samonds, Ryan Schlitt, CJ Villani and Sarah Villani

One third of the earnings (\$1,123) were distributed to the Holy Cross Music Ministry.

Two thirds of the remaining third of the fund's earnings (\$749) were distributed to ministries beyond the congregation, and the remaining portion of the earnings (\$374) were distributed for Pastor's Discretionary needs.

A second fund has been established with a generous gift from Brad and Lana Meyer to benefit housing ministries. To date, \$70,150 has been donated.

Principal has been preserved for both funds making a combined market value with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund, as of November 30, 2023, of \$164,214. Including recent gifts not yet invested with MIF, the end of year balance for 2023 is \$164,214.

## **Staff Support**

Staff Support is one of four committees mandated by Holy Cross Lutheran Church's constitution. Duties of the committee are to "develop job descriptions and compensation proposals for any persons employed by the congregation for Congregation Council approval" and to "perform other duties as the Congregation Council may direct". This committee initiated the pastoral transition process, A Path Forward, more than three years ago and has continued this involvement throughout 2023. Members of Staff Support in 2023 were Eric and Jenifer Christensen, Andy Eidson, Mark Fedyk, Katie Ormson, Mark Remissong, and Harold Sargent.

I want to thank Katie Ormson for her service, as she resigned during the year.

The committee was active throughout the year. Highlights include:

- 1) Supporting Ralph Freye, who led creating and filling the Choir Director position. Thank you, Ralph! Darrin Rose started August 20—Welcome Darrin.
- 2) Supporting and guiding the process to fill the Directory of Youth and Family Ministries position. Thank you Amanda Komashka for co-Charing the recruiting team with Pastor Chris. Welcome to Edwin Andrade who started September 1.
- 3) Supporting the Senior Pastor Transition Team as an advisory council supporting Pastor Bob, Pastor Chris, Deaconess Katie and the Congregation. Members of that team were Jen Christensen (Chair), Jeannine Phillips, Dave Klein, Sarah Accettura, Susan Beck, Sarah Grayer, Tim Jackson-Skelton, and Gary Johnston.
- 4) We paused and are restarting the Innovation Team approach in January 2024. We intend to review meeting ministry needs in perhaps nontraditional ways that better match lifestyles of our members.

Respectfully submitted,  
Andy Eidson

## **Transition Committee**

The Transition Committee (Sarah Accettura, Susan Beck, Sarah Grayer, Gary Johnston, Dave Klein, Tim Skelton, Jenifer Christensen, and Jeannine Phillips) was formed in 2022 to support Pastors Davis and Neptun forge a new path, serving together as Holy Cross' Co-Pastors prior to Reverend Davis' sabbatical, and subsequently as Sr. Pastor Neptun and Pastor Emeritus Davis.

The team met regularly with the Pastors during the first year of the transition, engaging in thoughtful conversations. At the end of the summer, the team determined that the ongoing needs of the Pastors were being well served through their ongoing dialog with one another and the support of the Staff Support Committee. As such, the Transition Committee concluded serving in this support capacity.

The transition progressed very smoothly and is being used by the Synod as a model for other congregations considering a similar path.

Submitted by: Jenifer Christensen, Chair

## Church Community Builder Software

Holy Cross regularly connects to more than 3,500 people through physical mail, email, texting, and phone calls. We do this to keep members, friends, and guests aware of worship services, faith formation opportunities, small groups, and ministries to serve those beyond our congregation. Between phone numbers, email and home addresses, family members, donations, and your tastes and preferences, we try to keep track of tens of thousands of data bits, no easy task by any means.

Since June 2020, we have been using a church management system called Church Community Builder (CCB) with this challenge in mind. Accessible through the internet and the Holy Cross website, we hope you might help us keep current on what we need to know about you to serve you best. Using CCB and setting up an account is not a requirement, only an invitation for a better link between Holy Cross and you and your family.

You can request an account to CCB at any time by going to the Holy Cross website at *HolyCrossChurch.org* and clicking on the “Sign In” link at the top right corner. When the login window appears, click the “Request Account” link in the screen’s left-middle. You will receive an email from the Holy Cross office, usually within one business day, with additional instructions.

## Holy Cross Smartphone App

In early 2021, we launched a new Holy Cross smartphone app (Android and iPhone) that integrates with CCB. The app provides many conveniences and efficiencies, from the latest worship videos, access to the church calendar and upcoming events, information about your Holy Cross groups, links to Church Community Builder, online giving, and more.

The app is free to use and can be easily downloaded using the QR codes below. Give it a try and let us know what you think.

Apple App Store:



Google App Store:



Please contact Steve Oelschlager at [steve@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:steve@holycrosschurch.org) if you have any questions



## Adult Ministry Reports

### Adult Education: Senior Living Lunch and Learn

In June, Pastor Chris was joined by Vicky Nicholson, Certified Senior Advisor, for a program on how seniors and their families can receive the support they need most to help seniors' quality of life.

### Adult Faith Formation: Sunday Morning Visual Faith Process

This conversational model led by Pastor Bob and Pastor Chris begun in September 2022 continued through April 2023 on Sunday mornings weekly between the worship services for post confirmation age people of faith. The Visual Faith Process utilized Scripture as the basis for topic-explorations to generate natural, vigorous conversations about what it means to follow Jesus today.

### Adult Faith Formation: Community Learning

In partnership with the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), Holy Cross participated in a four session program during February and March utilizing *Martin Luther on the Holy Spirit and the Christian Life* by Dr. Candace Kohli, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at the LSTC. Dr. Kohli led the sessions which were offered live remotely on Sunday evenings, with recorded sessions presented on Wednesday evenings including a live closing recap from Dr. Kohli. In October, Rev. Wayne N. Miller, Bishop Emeritus, led a four-part series via Zoom exploring *Faith, Work, and Economics*.

### Adult Faith Formation Opportunities

#### "The Chosen"

On selected Thursday evenings from June through August, Pastor Chris led a watch party and discussion of season one of "The Chosen" drama television series about the life of Christ, portrayed through the eyes of those who met Jesus.

#### "Fostering Healthy Christian Relationships"

This transformative one-day training session led by Pastor Chris in September offered essential tools and insights necessary to nurture and strengthen our community through a deepened understanding of Christian relationships.

### Book Club

The book club at Holy Cross has existed since 2000 and over the years, the members have enjoyed selecting monthly books and get together for lively discussions generally about the book. The volunteer host/hostess selects the discussion location which may be via Zoom or small groups gathering to Zoom together, then leads the discussion of the book. Reading group guides with discussion questions are often available in the book or online.

During 2023 we read *The Woman They Could Not Silence* by Kate Moore, *The English American* by Alison Larkin, *The Island of Sea Women* by Lisa See, *The Body in the Clouds* by Ashley Hay, *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls, *A Place Called Home* by David Ambroz, *Beneath a Scarlet Sky* by Mark Sullivan, *Quiet Until the Thaw* by Alexandra Fuller, *The Midnight Library* by Matt Haig, and *The Silent Sister* by Diane Chamberlain.

As you can see, the subjects vary widely, often exploring other cultures—including non-fiction, biographical, historical, fiction as well as classics or something just for fun. The upcoming book is always listed in the newsletter, and new participants are welcome to drop in at any time. Check out the December newsletter for the 2024 selection and schedule.

### Care of Creation

This group focuses on local land use and ecological regeneration awareness. In 2023 this was done through monthly newsletter articles, a pollinator education table hosted by the Care of Creation team on Mother's Day, the planting of fifteen native bushes and the installation of three grape vine trellises (Eagle Scout project) on the church property. Additionally, a roadside cleanup of Saint Mary's Road was completed by members of the Care of Creation team and the Saturday morning men's group.

Outlook for 2024 includes the planting of grape vines, additional assessment and planning for another land restoration project, and additional education opportunities.

### Columbarium Ministry

The Christian faith offers a perspective on the way we construct our lives and offers a perspective about the end of our life. The Columbarium Ministry is about some of those end of life decisions that need to be made. The columbarium is identified as the Holy Cross Resurrection Garden and is a dedicated structure on the south side of our building containing niches for the interment of cremated human remains. There is also a Remembrance Wall available for members to honor their loved ones even if their remains are elsewhere.

A special task force and the church council developed documentation that provides clarity about the protocols and procedures associated with this ministry. We are operating with documentation that meets legal standards while

representing the conditions of what will be provided if one chooses to become involved with Holy Cross' "Columbarium Ministry." If more information is needed or a conversation is desired to discuss specifics pertaining to the columbarium ministry, view the Resurrection Garden brochure at [HolyCrossChurch.org/resurrectiongarden](http://HolyCrossChurch.org/resurrectiongarden) or contact the church office.

### **Common Threads & Prayer Shawl Ministry**

The Prayer Shawl Ministry includes shawls and lap blankets made by those in Common Threads and others. These prayer shawls and blankets are blessed during a worship service and passed on to someone in need of comfort and prayer. In 2023, Holy Cross dedicated 25 prayer blankets and shawls to individuals. All shawls and blankets were crafted by participants in this ministry. The group meets monthly, and those who participate in Common Threads may work on personal projects, learn new stitches, and create prayer shawls. Common Threads is always looking for those who will contribute their gift and talent for this ministry, and if you are unable to attend meetings, you may still work on prayer shawls. Patterns can be provided. If you, or someone you know would be comforted by the receipt of a prayer shawl, please contact the church office. The group also appreciates donations received in the form of gift cards to craft stores or cash donations so they may purchase yarn and supplies for this ministry.

### **Green Thumbs**

Many plant-savvy volunteers shared their time and gardening talents with the congregation this year. The Green Thumbs team is instrumental in design, planting and maintaining the planters on the patio, at the entrances and in the beds by the Columbarium and at the main entrance. Our sincere thanks to the *Green Thumb Team* including: Nancy Alban, Wendy Brewer, Sue Dittman, Diane Duffy, Therese Delli Paoli, Ann Johnston, Tracy Kinsella, Bob Nordland, Sue Rudolphi, Judy & Ernie Soltermann, Matthew & Gretchen Towson, and Susan Williamson. For more information or to volunteer for the 2024 growing season, please contact the co-leads: Susan Williamson and Therese Delli Paoli.

### **Men's Ministries**

In 2023, men at Holy Cross participated in the following events and groups:

#### ***Saturday Morning Men's Group***

One of the ways we keep our faith "on the front burner" is to come together with others to share in fellowship, conversation, mutual support, and learning. The Saturday Morning Men's Group provides one such opportunity at Holy Cross. The group regularly has about 15 participants who connect in-person and over Zoom for 90 minutes on Saturday morning. Men interested in attending should opt into the group through Church Community Builder or check the monthly church calendar and join us starting at 7 am.

In January, the group continued discussions based on Rachel Held Evans' book "*INSPIRED... Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*." In March, April and May, discussion focused on *Falling Upward* by Richard Rohr. From July through October, the book *Faith After Dark* by Brian McLaren provided discussion topics, and in November the group began discussion of *'A' is for Alabaster: A Preacher's Alphabet* by Anna Carter Florence.

#### ***Men of Purpose, Principle, & Prayer (MP3)***

MP3 is a men's group that began meeting in October of 2018. The theme begun in 2023 was "*sacred moments*," with the plan being to deconstruct the idea of "sacred" into six components, with the three components for 2023 being "S" for sanctuary/refuge/safe place; "A" for ancient philosophies/lessons passed on from previous mentors; and "C" for ceremony/milestone moments/rites/traditions. In 2024, the components of "R" for relational, "E" for emptiness and "D" for deeper will be covered. Meetings including fellowship, dinner, music and a program were held on July 11, September 19, and November 7. Steve Oelschlager, Phil Kirschbaum, Dale Tippet Jr., Pastor Chris Neptun, and Pastor Bob Davis coordinated MP3.

### **Music Ministries**

#### ***Worship Arts***

Happy New Year, Church! As I look back on this year I am proud to bring you some highlights of the exciting and varied worship opportunities that the music and AV departments have been involved in. While the year started with some small enhancements to familiar practices, the opportunities to get more and more ambitious began to take shape and it's been an absolute pleasure to be a part of this team here.

At the beginning of this year, I was still running our little pickup choir with occasional anthems and performances. It was a lot of fun, but untenable in the long run, so when Ralph Freye accepted the call to drive a choir director call committee I was very glad and continue to be grateful for his work.

Hiring Darrin Rose as our choir director has been one of my favorite developments of the year. He's a world-class talent, and is an absolute joy to work with. I knew he'd be a great addition to the Holy Cross family right away, and seeing how the choir is growing is very encouraging. He runs a great, high-energy rehearsal, and he's skilled at working with veteran singers as well as supporting first-timers too. So please, even if you're only interested in singing part of a choir season,

show up at a rehearsal and take the opportunity to sing with this excellent group we're nurturing. Email [darrin@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:darrin@holycrosschurch.org) for more!

During Lent, our midweek worship took on some more texture with more soloists and musicians joining me in leading the Holden Evening Prayer liturgy, and instead of preaching, Pastor Chris was having great dialogues with many of our ministry partners, which gave us as a community an opportunity to put faces to the names we hear about on Sundays when we hear what services we've been supporting as a community.

This year instead of having the Easter Sunrise service, we had an Easter Eve Festival with decorated sets and special music at most of the stations. We had teams that created a Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark, the valley of dry bones—Darin Chartier built a forty foot whale in the atrium to help tell the story of Jonah, played by Marshall Jowers! It was a huge event, with more than two hundred attending. The ladies of LIFT hosted an ice cream social at the end. Astounding.

We had our last drive-in worship service this year. This is not the end of outdoor worship, just the beginning of a new evolution. We'll have other outdoor worship opportunities this year, and not only on the patio. So stay tuned!

The Around the Cross season has been so much fun. We kicked off with a Beer and Hymns event that Darrin Rose was gracious enough to join us at. It was a really great chance to sing all the famous-and-greats alongside some hidden gems and personal favorites. Rob and Mike from Mojo Daddies did a stellar storytelling-style performance featuring music from their album "A Long Road", which was one of the best Mojo Daddies performances that I've had the pleasure of seeing. The Christmas Party Hop was a blast, with a 9 piece band! Bill Miksch, Mike Dikelsky, Rob Twardock, Emily Young, Karen Kobeck, Darrin Rose, Lisamarie Keskar, Dennis Lieding and I made for a wall of sound and a joyful room full of singing, dancing, and even a couple conga lines!

The end of the calendar year was very exciting indeed, with Elizabeth Davis and Carly Thornberry singing a special piece of music at a service that I was privileged to roll the church's tympani out to accompany Paul on a very exciting piece of organ music.

For Advent we used a liturgy sourced from hymns that haven't seen play for many years—the intention was to bring out some old times music that maybe your grandparents grew up with, while introducing them as "new" to a younger generation. Choruses like "Thank You, Lord", and songs like "Lord Speak To Us That We May Speak" sung alongside the more familiar "Let Us Break Bread Together On Our Knees" was hopefully a nostalgic experience and a welcome update to our liturgical repertoire.

The Sunday School program with music led by Carrie and Jamey Mack was great, and the children who read from the pulpit did a fantastic job. The Bell Choir joined the Adult Choir in a great performance of "Can You Hear the Christmas Bells", which was a request I made of Darrin Rose and Elizabeth Fashimpaur, so my thanks go to them! I was sick with Covid for that Sunday, and Paul stepped in to cover for me, and our AV Club ran the livestream expertly. That same day, Rob Twardock and Emily Young stepped up to support our Blue Christmas service in my absence, which was a resounding success. It's a powerful and beautiful worship experience and I was very sad to miss it.

The Christmas season was beautiful and our singers and musicians deserve another round of applause. Paul Vander Weele and Joanne Glover were joined by Elizabeth Bennett, who played violin and bassoon. Patrick Freund beautifully sang "Silent Night" in German for our 8 o'clock service. Mike and Carol Dikelsky, Rob Twardock were joined by harp and violin on "A Christmas Hallelujah." Dave Stueckemann and Becky Sawle sang a gorgeous duet, and Abby Neptun sang "In the Bleak Midwinter" at the 10 o'clock service. The talent we have access to, and the willingness of our people to elevate our worship by sharing their talents never ceases to astound me.

Our livestream services are a great way to worship when you're traveling or otherwise indisposed, and I'm exceedingly proud of the work that Corbin Chartier has put in familiarizing himself with more and more aspects of what goes on behind the scenes when it comes to planning worship as well as the technical requirements of the live production. His help has proved crucial when I traveled or found myself sick. With him operating cameras, Ryan Berger managing the onscreen displays and Justin Smith directing, we have a great team that is ready to grow. Corbin is moving into a directing role, and we are always looking for volunteers of all ages to come run the technical elements of worship with us.

With our teams ever growing, I look forward to another year of pushing the boundaries of what we can do as a church family, not just in music but in media also. Our promotional videos have become quite a production, and CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare puts out a monthly bedtime story video. Pastor Bob and I have been working on a series of videos that should launch soon, and we are also going to make a suite of training videos for volunteers. If you or someone near you might be interested in performance or media, please send them my way! Email [dale@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:dale@holycrosschurch.org)

Thank you, Holy Cross.  
Dale Tippet Jr.  
Director of Worship Arts

## **Choir**

Coming out of Covid we were all changed for better or worse. As a society we are still yet to see all of its long term effects. But we came out with so many new methods of expression, modes of presentation, and new zeal to confront the road that lay ahead. Since I started as your choir director I have been encouraged by the development of new relationships, shared victories, and spiritual/musical growth. Though there have been challenges, each hurdle has provided new insight. As we look forward to the new year let's keep striving to give God our best and remember when you change the way you look at things the things you look at begin to change.

### *Vision/Mission Statement:*

- Vision: To share the Gospel of Christ through song
- Mission Statement: The mission of our choir is to Enhance the spiritual life of The community Through a wide array of musical experiences
- "Over my head I hear music in the air; There must be a God somewhere!"

### *To the Choir:*

I am encouraged to be working with such a sensitive group of musicians. It has been a joy stretching and growing in our interpretation of a wide range of musical styles. My prayer is that a word has been said, a note has been sung, or a chord has been struck that has resonated within you. Let us continue to grow musically and spiritually.

### *Updates, Milestones, and New Initiatives:*

- Reestablished regular rehearsals for the choir each Tuesday at 7 pm in the sanctuary
- Collaborating throughout department with the contemporary ensemble and bell choir
- Actively seeking to identify instrumentalists within and outside the congregation to add a different layer to music during worship
- We have reclaimed some former members and are actively recruiting
- Working to establish a 2024-25 calendar and 2-year projection of programming within the music department
- Beginning initiatives to engage music departments at local two-year, four year, and public school districts to host ensembles and collaborate. Choir director is connected through professional/personal associations with Department Chairs/Directors of Choral Activities.
  - College of Lake County
  - Carthage College
  - University of Wisconsin - Parkside
  - Lake Forest College
  - District 60, 56, and 121
  - Trinity International University
  - University of St Mary of the Lake
  - Northern seminary
- Identifying more opportunities for community engagement
  - Libertyville tree lighting
  - Community performances/service
  - Collaborating with other music ministries
  - Building relationships with local ensembles
- How can we expand on this?
  - If there are any departments with ideas/connectional opportunities please share them with Dale or myself

### *Upcoming Events/Engagements:*

- 2nd Annual Black History Month Concert Friday, February 16, 7 pm at Shiloh Baptist Church located at 800 S Genesee St., Waukegan IL 60085
- Gospel Concert and Presentation of Robert Ray's Gospel Mass in collaboration with Waukegan Concert Chorus Holy Cross Lutheran Church and Shiloh Baptist Church - Saturday, March 2, 4pm at Shiloh Baptist Church located at 800 S Genesee St., Waukegan IL 60085

### *Open Invitation:*

Come out and join our growing music ministry. Choir rehearsal is each Tuesday night at 7 pm. All are welcome regardless of age or experience.

If planning to attend rehearsal for the first time please contact Choir Director Darrin Rose at [darrin@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:darrin@holycrosschurch.org)

### *Words of Thanks:*

First, giving honor to God who is the head of all our lives I'd like to continue to give thanks to those who made events this year possible starting within our music ministry. Thank you to Dale Tippet, Paul Vander Weele, Carrie Mack and Beth Fashimpaur for your talent, dedication, and wealth of knowledge you bring to our music ministry.

Thanks to the following: Pastor Chris Neptun, Pastor Bob Davis, Council, and Deaconess Katie. Additional thanks go to all the support ministries of Holy Cross that come together to make service and programming successful, especially the media team, custodians, and ushers.

Thank you, Holy Cross family for your generosity and support of the choir and music department as we look to provide more vibrant worship and new opportunities for those looking to praise the Lord through the arts.

Darrin Rose  
Choir Director

### ***Handbell Choir***

Red Rose Children's Choir generously shares the usage of their bells, donated to them by Libertyville High School, with the Holy Cross congregation. The Holy Cross Handbell Choir has been performing with Beth Fashimpaur as the choir director. The Handbell Choir rehearses on Thursday evenings and has performed in church during worship services on numerous occasions in 2023 including Palm Sunday, Pastor Bob's celebration following his return from sabbatical and Advent worship.

Beth Fashimpaur, Director

### ***Organ***

2023 has brought much change and promise to our music ministry. The dynamic concerts of the Around The Cross concert series included my Organ Concert with guest musician Stuart Bogie, as well as esteemed traditional Holy Cross concert presentations. Future concerts will include the much-anticipated Chicagoland Voices, The Gustavus Adolphus Choir, as well as an Organ Concert and more Holy Cross traditions.

Paul Vander Weele, Organist

### ***New Member Breakfasts***

In 2023, we welcomed new members to our congregation in February and September. Part of that welcome is a New Member Breakfast on the Saturday before the Reception of New Members the next day during worship. The breakfast team gathers together and prepares a light breakfast of fresh fruit and pastries that are enjoyed while visiting with the new members. A brief introduction is then given to explain the workings of the church and the faith opportunities available to all members. Member support in 2023 has been provided by: Therese Delli Paoli, Cheryl Miller, Steve Oelschlager, and Kathy Pritts. Breakfasts have been hosted by Pastor Chris. Thank you to all of them for their contributions and for helping our new members feel comfortable and at home at Holy Cross. All are welcome to join this team at any time.

### ***Prayer Ministry***

The Prayer Ministry was formed to lift up the prayers and concerns of all who come in need of prayer. These ministry members pray during the week for people listed on the prayer concerns shared with the Church Office.

### ***Quilting & More***

This creative group meets on most Wednesday mornings from 9 am to noon in the resource center in the basement of the west wing. Ten twin-sized quilts were made and given to families at COOL Family Housing in December, and during the summer two smaller quilts were donated to the organization Quilts Beyond Borders, a charity providing quilts to children in underserved areas of the world. Donations of 100% cotton quilting fabric, either pieces or yardage, are always appreciated. New members are always welcome. If you are interested in participating in this group, contact Deb Sherrock at (630) 267-7802.

### ***Strength and Core (formerly Pilates)***

Physical and mental health are crucial to one's well-being. This class is designed to improve physical strength, flexibility and posture while enhancing mental awareness for everyone, male or female. Instructor Rhoni Ross-Bast leads those who attend class on Monday nights at 6 pm at Holy Cross. The sessions are organized by Jodi Zombolo and are open to all. A floor mat is required for all in person classes and participants should also have a stability ball and small hand weights. Not sure if this is for you? Try a class for free! This past year we had an average of 10 participants and we would love to have more!

### ***Women's Ministries***

#### ***Grounded in Grace: Women's Friday Night Group***

Grounded in Grace is a social opportunity for women of faith to gather monthly for fun and fellowship. This group of both members and friends meets one Friday evening a month, with a brief summer hiatus. The group met throughout 2023 and continued its pilgrimage through a variety locally owned restaurants and breweries. In 2024 we will be partnering with other Holy Cross ministries to add a variety of activities and outings.

### *LIFT (Living In Faith Together)*

This new women's ministry program began in March 2023 with a "*Spill the Tea Party*." Additional events throughout the year included a movie discussion night (*Wild*), a volunteer night at Feed My Starving Children, a Ravinia concert outing (Kenny Loggins), and the Women's Retreat. More than 30 women met for the Women's Retreat at Lutherdale in Elkhorn, Wisconsin on October 20-21, to explore the theme of "Women Talking." Deaconess Katie Freund led discussions about the ways women of faith can talk, care, and support one another and themselves. Thank you to Beth Ann Koenemann for all of the organizational efforts that went into putting these memorable and rewarding events together! New members are always welcome to participate.

### *Women's Discussion Group*

This group of women traditionally meets on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of the month for fellowship, fun and learning. Discussion topics in 2023 included the books *Wholehearted Faith* by Rachel Held Evans and two books written by Anna Carter Florence, *Rehearsing Scripture: Discovering God's Word in Community* and "*A*" is for *Alabaster: A Preacher's Alphabet*.

### **Worship Participant Ministry**

The primary responsibility of the Worship Participant Ministry is to support the regular schedule of services for our church, including all Sunday morning services, mid-week during Lent, and festival observances such as Christmas, Holy Week and Reformation. Worship Coordinators, Readers, Greeters, Communion Assistants, Ushers, Acolytes and Altar Care volunteers all help to make worship a welcoming, inclusive, seamless experience. Holy Cross utilizes our database, Church Community Builder, to provide the vehicle for volunteering to help with worship. Therese Delli Paoli has volunteered to supervise and oversee this sign-up process by sending reminder emails to our pool of volunteers and confirming service dates and times. Volunteers are always welcome, and training for any position is simple and quick. Please contact the church office if you would like to connect to any volunteer position or if you would like additional information about the Worship Participant Ministry options available.



## Ministry Working Teams

### Faith Formation at Holy Cross

One way to understand life and reality is to believe that it is as simple as what you see is what you get, that there is nothing more to our world than what we perceive through our primary senses. A different way to engage with existence is to know that there is something more: In addition to the material world, there is also an underlying spirit and energy and life that animates everything behind the scenes. As Christians, our faith is that there is something more going on, that God is the source of the hidden power of creation, and that Jesus Christ reveals who this God is and what this God loves and intends for us.

Faith is the glue that holds together everything we do at Holy Cross. When we talk about faith formation, we refer to the process that allows people to trust this fuller, more spirited reality. This kind of faith is something we can intuit at times, but it is also something we need to work at to increase our awareness.

Therefore, at Holy Cross, we take seriously the need to form faith in people of all ages. We do this through experiences of worship, learning, service, and shared testimony. Intergenerational relationships are particularly effective at “passing faith” from one generation to another. Sunday school, confirmation, Crossroads High School Youth Group, Emerge Middle School Youth Group, adult education, relational groups, initiatives to serve, and leadership development are a few of the many ways we attempt to help people grow in their faith. Please keep this in mind as you read through the annual report and think about how you can grow in your faith and help others, especially our young people, to mature as followers of Jesus.

### Stewardship

Stewardship is integral to our spiritual journeys and life together at Holy Cross. Without all your gifts of participation, leadership, and financial support, Holy Cross would not be the same, and our impact on the world would be limited. There are many ways to give at Holy Cross, and we keep expanding, improving, and simplifying the tools. Utilizing Church Community Builder, you can access your donation records in real-time. In early 2021, we introduced a new Holy Cross smartphone app with integrated giving options. Other giving alternatives are as follows:

#### *Assisted & DIY Electronic Giving*

Many Holy Cross members make one-time or recurring gifts through our online giving portal ([donate.holycrosschurch.org](https://donate.holycrosschurch.org)). Contribute from your checking or savings account or a credit or debit card. We can also help you configure recurring electronic gifts based on your instructions. Please download and complete the Enrollment and Authorization Form from our website at [holycrosschurch.org/giving](https://holycrosschurch.org/giving) and return it to the church office.

#### *Traditional Envelopes*

All new members are automatically assigned an envelope number and will receive envelopes in the mail every other month. Envelopes can be placed in the offering plate during worship or mailed to the church office. If you use electronic giving and would like your envelopes discontinued, please contact the Holy Cross office at [office@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:office@holycrosschurch.org)

#### *Wills, Trusts, Insurance, Estate Plans, and Other Assets*

Keep making an impact in this world beyond the years you are blessed to be alive. If you would like to consider a legacy gift related to your concerns, passions, and issues that touch your heart, please contact Pastor Bob or Steve Oelschlager.

Holy Cross partners with *Freewill.com* to provide expanded options to receive donations. If you visit our online giving page at [HolyCrossChurch.org/giving](https://HolyCrossChurch.org/giving), you will see new options for gifts of stock and appreciated assets, donor-advised funds, IRAs, and legacy gifts, including estate planning and wills. Many people realize tax advantages by gifting appreciated assets and required minimum distributions (RMD) directly to Holy Cross.

Thank you for your continued generosity. Please contact Steve Oelschlager at [steve@holycrosschurch.org](mailto:steve@holycrosschurch.org) if you have any questions.

## Ministry Events

### Around The Cross Concert Series

Begun in 1997, the purpose of the *Around the Cross Concert Series* at Holy Cross was to supplement the worship life of the congregation. The following performance were hosted by Holy Cross in 2023 as part of the 25th season of the series:

January 22	Paul Vander Weele Organ Recital
February 4	Chicagoland Voices Winter Concert
October 28	Beer & Hymns
November 11	Mike & Rob of the Mojo Daddies
December 9	Christmas Party Hop

### Lent

Each Wednesday during Lent, a representative from one of Holy Cross' hunger ministry partners joined us to share how their organization has worked to address the needs of those who hunger in our community, country and across the globe. The organizations represented included COOL Ministries, Feed My Starving Children, ELCA World Hunger, Northern Illinois Food Bank, and PADS.

Ash Wednesday worship was held on February 22, with midweek Lenten worship services on March 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29, Maundy Thursday worship on April 6, and Good Friday worship on April 7.

In 2023, we were once again able to offer family-friendly fellowship opportunities with Lenten soup suppers before the midweek worship services.

An Easter Eve Festival was held on Saturday, April 8 that allowed us to explore the traditional Easter Vigil in a completely new and contemporary way. Bible stories were brought to life through interactive storytelling and song. The event finished with an ice cream social.

### Blue Christmas - December 17

A worship service of lament and hope, anticipation and longing, restoration and renewal. The service is structured around three distinct movements of "hearing us," "healing us" and "sending us." We provide space for personal and communal reflection. The worship experience provides generous amounts of silence that are woven throughout.

There are years when we hurt at Christmas time and may not be able to navigate through the festivities as others seem to do with joy. It is at such times we need to be mindful and attentive to our feelings and concerns. We need to know that we are not alone in moments like these.

We hope you consider joining us one year or inviting others in the community who may accompany you as you support them. This is a time of year when we long for peace on so many different levels. It is our profound joy to offer the opportunity to journey together with meditation, prayer, music, and acts of restoration that help us entertain a renewed message of hope.

### Fellowship Events

The following fellowship events were scheduled to allow us to socialize in person:

June 3 - Tailgate Party in the parking lot following 5:30 pm drive-in worship service to celebrate Pastor Bob's return from sabbatical  
June 24 - Saturday Night Live on the Patio with food and music following worship  
July 15 - Saturday Night Live on the Patio with food and music following worship  
August 19 - Saturday Night Live on the Patio with food and music following worship  
August 20 - Servant (Volunteer) Recognition Day hosted by Church Council with lunch following worship  
November 22 - Thanksgiving Eve Pie Social

### Global Leadership Summit

Nothing happens without at least one person stepping forward to envision, organize, and lead. As people of faith, we take our call seriously to make a difference and behave as influential leaders. The Global Leadership Summit is an annual event inviting people to learn and get inspired to implement new leadership ideas.

In 2023, we hosted the Global Leadership Summit in person here at Holy Cross on August 3-4. Notable speakers included Craig Groeschel, Condoleezza Rice, Patrick Lencioni, Pat Gelsinger, Liz Bohannon, Erin Meyer, Henry Cloud, and more.

Holy Cross will take a break from hosting the Summit in 2024, but you can still participate by watching the presentations online (August 8-9) or attending other nearby hosting options. Please check [globalleadership.org](https://globalleadership.org) for more information.

### Saturday Evening Worship at Holy Cross

We enjoy a rich worship life at Holy Cross. We utilize liturgical seasonal themes, a variety of styles and music, rich prayer

and confessional traditions, and time with God's Word. In addition to Sunday morning worship, the major festivals, seasonal Advent and Lenten worship services, ecumenical and interfaith worship opportunities, we also offer Saturday Evening Worship at 5:30 pm. In 2023, we were able to worship on the first Saturday of the month during the academic year (September through May) and every Saturday during the summer months of June, July and August. We celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion at all of these services.

### **Saturday Night Live on the Patio**

Three Saturday Night Live on the Patio events were held on June 24, July 15, and August 19. Worship on the patio was followed by dinner and fellowship. The entrées were provided and attendees were invited to contribute sides and desserts. Val Maxwell and Manny Flores again provided their famous brisket dinner for the July event, which is always a highlight of the summer schedule.

## **Community Ministry Partners**

### **Boy Scouts of America Troop 194**

Troop 194 is in the Aptakisic District of the BSA's Northeast Illinois Council. Our district serves the communities of Highland Park, Highwood, Ft Sheridan, Lake Forest, Lake Bluff, Green Oaks, Libertyville, Rondout, Mundelein, Vernon Hills, Deerfield, Bannockburn, Lincolnshire, Riverwoods, Mettawa, Kildeer, Long Grove and Northeast Buffalo Grove. Troop 194 holds meetings from 7 to 8:15 pm on Mondays at the church. We have successfully moved beyond the impacts of Covid-19 transitioning back to in-person Troop meetings with scouts and adult leaders. Monthly committee meetings are virtual, held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month from 7 to 8:30 pm.

Highlights from 2023 calendar year include:

- Our Scouts earned 138 merit badges, a 24% increase from 2022. The Scout BSA merit badge program allows scouts to examine subjects to determine if they would like to further pursue them as a career or vocation. Scouts can learn about sports, science, trades, business and future careers with more than 135 merit badges currently in the program.
- We had three scouts earn scout's highest honor, Eagle Scout. One of those scouts chose to do his Eagle Project for Holy Cross, constructing three grape arbors on the west side of the property. We understand that Holy Cross is excited about populating those arbors with grapes next spring and recommended this project as an opportunity to enhance and build the church community. One additional scout has completed his Eagle project and is on-track to achieve the rank of eagle with-in the first quarter of 2024. We have many scouts progressing toward Eagle and look forward to seeing many of them be added to the ranks of Eagle Scout.
- As a Troop, we participated in six different service projects. These included food preparation with a local charity at Feed My Starving Children, Road cleanup along Winchester Road in Libertyville, fence repairs for an EPA federal grant on public land, invasive species removal with-in the lake county forest preserve and honoring our veterans during Memorial Day flag placement at Lakeside Cemetery in Libertyville.
- We conducted nine camping/overnight weekends. Additionally, 22 Scouts attended a week of summer camp at Ma-Ka-Ja-Wan Scout Reservation in Pearson, WI. Troop 194 inducted seven scouts into the honorary society of the Boy Scouts of American known as the "order of the arrow". The honorary group is composed of scouts and scouters who best exemplify the Scout Oath and Law in their daily lives as elected by their peers. We had three scouts attend and complete the Okpic cold weather training program in Trevor, WI. The Okpic program serves to build confidence in the scouts' ability to camp during cold weather.
- The Troop participated in a High-Adventure Trek this year. Over summer break, six Scouts and three adult leaders completed a rugged 12 day trek at Philmont Scout Ranch High Adventure Camp in Cimarron, NM. The scouts backpacked over 70 miles of adventure starting at basecamp with an elevation 6,700. The challenges of the northern New Mexico wilderness afforded the scouts the opportunity to peak the summits of Mount Phillip (elevation 11,742 ft) and Tooth of Time (elevation 9,003). The midwestern scouts quickly adapted to the change in elevation from the customary 699 ft elevation of Libertyville, IL. The legendary experience from camp continues to leave an enduring legacy as Troop 194 strives to develop the next generation of leader.
- We had four Scouts attend and complete the Scout BSA National Youth Leadership Training (NYLT) course in June. The six-day program is the premier training opportunity across the Scout BSA program sponsored at the council level in northern Wisconsin. The course centers around the concepts of what a leader must be, what a leader must know and what leader must do. The key elements are taught with a clear focus on the "How to..." The leadership fundamental skills are reinforced over the week-long course as the scouts learn and practice leadership.
- We welcomed new Scouts into the Troop during Cub Scout crossover in March and continue active recruitment
- Heading into 2024, our Troop will be 28 Scouts strong and is actively supported by more than 20 civic minded adults. We have planned numerous camping outdoor adventures to include Ma-ka-jaw-an, and a high adventure trek at the Northern Tier base camp in Ely, MN.

Our program and its success would not be possible without the support of Holy Cross Church! We appreciate the church's role as our charter organization and support for our fund-raising efforts, especially the bake/pumpkin/firewood sale in the fall. We would like to thank Pastor Chris for his continued support of Scouting and Troop 194. We look forward to continuing our great relationship at Holy Cross with Pastor Chris. For more info about Troop 194 visit [go194.mytroop.us/home](http://go194.mytroop.us/home)

## **Christian Outreach of Lutherans (COOL Ministries)**

The COOL mission is to give comprehensive assistance to families in need, by reducing hunger and homelessness while encouraging personal growth and self-sufficiency. This year COOL Ministries celebrated its 40th anniversary. The COOL pantry in Waukegan provided meals supporting over 70,000 individuals and distributed just under 1,000,000 pounds of food in 2023. The transitional housing provided a home to 16 families, including 21 adults and 36 children. COOL ministries also provided additional support for our local veterans.

In 2023, Holy Cross was again able to organize and participate in the 24th Annual Spring COOL Plant & Flower Sale. Members supported the annual golf outing and assisted our local veterans with extra donations during the month of November by providing additional toiletry items that were distributed. In December, the Giving Tree collected and distributed more than 120 gifts purchased for families in COOL Transitional Housing program. Additionally, Holy Cross raised funds in November and December toward the purchase of COOL Holiday Meal Boxes for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We are thankful for and appreciate your ongoing support and prayers for COOL ministry in our local community. Overall, Holy Cross distributed \$21,865 in 2023 to support COOL Ministries.

## **ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Relief**

The first Sunday of each month we provide our members the opportunity to support the ELCA World Hunger Effort. Additional informational materials are inserted in the bulletins throughout the year. For more information, visit [elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger](https://elca.org/Resources/ELCA-World-Hunger). In addition to supporting ELCA World Hunger, Holy Cross also offers special offerings for ELCA Disaster Relief to help those affected by wildfires, hurricanes, or other natural disasters. This year, HCLC contributed \$13,501 to the ELCA World Hunger Effort and \$3,000 to ELCA Disaster Relief.

## **Feed My Starving Children**

A Feed My Starving Children ministry was reestablished in November 2023 with monthly packing sessions scheduled several months out. The sessions have been successful service and fellowship opportunities for the participants thus far, with 10 participants joining in the November pack and 8 in December. Packing sessions have been at varying days and times to accommodate all schedules, including daytime, evenings, and weekends. Participants of all ages have found meaningful ways to serve, from food packing to seated labeling to joining the “warehouse crew”.

There is room to grow in 2024. We will continue to advertise opportunities to serve throughout all the church's communication vehicles, look to create partnerships with other ministries (starting with an event with LIFT in February), and establish a spare change collection station in the Fellowship Area. Each month's opportunity will point potential participants to register by emailing Emily Young at [emily.young@allstate.com](mailto:emily.young@allstate.com), who will continue to manage the registration for the group events.

## **Lake County United**

Lake County United (LCU) is a non-partisan alliance of institutions that brings together Christians, Muslims, Jews, and secular organizations to address pressing issues impacting our communities.

As an LCU member institution, Holy Cross is working to bring about:

- Reduction in gun violence through increasing gun safety technology
- Creation of affordable housing for individuals and families
- Mental health resources for communities and individuals

### *Gun safety:*

Lake County United is working locally, regionally and nationally on a market driven approach to gun safety: recruiting law enforcement to test gun locks and other security devices and providing feedback to the developers, as well as encouraging law enforcement and the military to use their buying power to promote good corporate practices among gun manufacturers. LCU representatives meet regularly with Lake County State's Attorney, Eric Rinehart, Highland Park Police Chief Lou Jogmen, president of the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police, and a number of other elected officials to build support for this strategy.

### *Waukegan Affordable Housing:*

LCU has formed a partnership with a local developer and an architect to design and build 25 apartments and 60 townhouses with an emphasis on community space and sustainability on Waukegan property owned by US HealthVest. Of the \$7 million of donations and loans we have raised, State Senator Adriane Johnson is directly responsible for \$3 million and is seeking an additional \$2 million. A portion of that money will be used for demolition of existing buildings. LCU leaders have met with more than half of the Lake County Board Commissioners regarding the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds allocated to the County to supplement construction costs.

### *Libertyville Essential Housing:*

Lake County United continues to work for essential housing on the Winchester House property owned by Lake County. The housing team is doing research and conducting relational meetings with citizens, business leaders, and County Board members.

### ***Mental Health:***

Lake County United remains firmly engaged in expanding non-criminal justice interventions in mental health incidents. One goal is to expand hours of a daytime crisis center in Waukegan (Independence Center). We continue to press for use of Medicaid funds for this, as well as establish locations to serve the entire county as an alternative to jail or hospital emergency rooms (ER). It costs five times more to house a person in jail than it does to provide adequate mental health services. Yet jail and ER are often the only options for people in a mental health crisis.

Lake County United (LCU) is affiliated with 65 independent organizations around the US as part of the Industrial Areas Foundation. Collectively, we have a powerful impact. To learn more, go to [metro-iaf.org](http://metro-iaf.org) and [swiaf.org](http://swiaf.org)

### **Lutheran Campus Ministry Dinner**

Lutheran Campus Ministry at Northwestern (LCMNU) is a welcoming community experiencing, living, and sharing the love of God through scholarship, service, and faith. LCMNU is a student-led ministry that welcomes all of God's people regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, parental status, marital status, disability, citizenship, or veteran status. As one of 180+ campus ministries of the ELCA, LCMNU shares in the mission "to invite people in academic settings to engage more deeply with the teachings of Jesus Christ and the community that bears his name, so that they can discover and fulfill their vocation as disciples." LCMNU currently has one student member with connections to Holy Cross.

In 2023, Holy Cross members hosted dinners in April and November for students at the LCMNU Center in Evanston. These dinners are wonderful opportunities to talk with students and learn how they live out their faith on campus and in the community. We hope to be able to host another dinner or two in 2024 and continue our tradition of hospitality and fellowship for both students and Holy Cross members. If you would like to attend upcoming events with LCMNU, please contact Patty Moyer at [patty@concertedsystems.com](mailto:patty@concertedsystems.com).

### **Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI)**

Holy Cross members supported the LSSI Backpack Drive this year by providing almost 100 backpacks filled with school supplies. LSSI will provide these backpacks to students in need in Chicago for the 2023/24 school year.

### **Olivewood Project**

Holy Cross again held in-person sales of olive wood products from The Olivewood Project in November and December 2023. Sales at Holy Cross in 2023 totaled \$687. This money is sent to a cooperative of Christian carvers in Bethlehem, headed by Michael Zoughbi, to help the carvers earn a living amid difficult circumstances. Special thanks to Holy Cross volunteers who helped with olive wood sales and everyone who generously supported the Olivewood Project with their purchases.

### **PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter)**

PADS of Lake County serves about 400 individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity. It is important to know that over half of these clients are below the age of 18. 2023 began much like 2022.

The Holy Cross PADS Ministry team along with confirmands and their parents packed lunches and provided breakfast items to the PADS client's monthly from January through April. The Ministry team also prepared, delivered and served monthly meals to the clients staying at Shepherd of the Lakes Lutheran Church in Grayslake, until the end of the church hosting season in April. In March we were able to collect and provide PADS central with microwaveable bowls and can openers from our generous congregation. We also presented Eric Foote, the acting PADS Director at the time, with \$1,000 in gas gift cards and \$500 in Jewel grocery cards. September brought a great gift of government and private grants that enabled PADS to house all clients and families in area hotels. This changed the landscape tremendously. PADS can now directly address all the aspects that contribute to homelessness without having to address where people will be sleeping. This model will hopefully expedite clients transitioning into housing and job security.

Holy Cross has partnered with Shepherd of the Lakes and Joy Lutheran Churches to provide 50 warm individually packaged meals to the Super 8 in Mundelein (where over 60 children are staying) every Monday. Holy Cross covers the 2nd and 5th Mondays each month. We are also finding our footing when it comes to supporting and stocking the PADS pantry being housed at First Presbyterian in Libertyville. We have requests going out to our members monthly via the newsletter with a bin placed outside the church office to collect donations. We then coordinate delivery on Wednesday evenings when First Presbyterian has volunteers to collect and sort items.

The PADS Ministry team is working hard to try and meet the needs PADS of Lake County in this ever evolving season of change. All support is welcome and all support is appreciated. Whether it be with your time, pantry donations, meal prep and delivery, or monetary contributions, we will continue to serve those wanting to leave homelessness behind and move forward into our communities. Please consider joining us at: [bit.ly/PADSinterest](https://bit.ly/PADSinterest)

## **Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing - North Chicago Program**

*Year in Review - 2023*

As of mid-2023, most US military bases have relaxed their covid-19 protocols compared to earlier phases of the pandemic, except for ongoing testing and vaccination requirements. Base Commanders still monitor the situation in case of outbreaks. Project Healing Waters North Chicago Program has still experienced intermittent Covid protocols being implemented due to outbreaks at Lovell Veteran's Health Center.

Since its inception in 2016 the North Chicago Program was essentially an "Inpatient Program", However with the easing of the Covid-19 protocols, North Chicago Program has experienced a steady increase in the number of participants and volunteers.

This past January the Evening Program began to take a shift. A therapist from Lovell who treats veterans on an outpatient basis began referring her clients to the North Chicago Program. We continue to grow from two Participants to twenty-four. This re-invention has been realized by many programs across the country and hopefully this triggers a significant growth in Participants locally and nationally. February 2023 marks the seventh anniversary of our Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing- North Chicago Program. The North Chicago Program, which works in conjunction with the Recreational Therapy Department at the James A. Lovell Federal Health Center and is the only program in the Chicago-land area and the state of Illinois. North Chicago is part of PHWFF's Midwest Region which features 18 Programs in the states of Minnesota (2), Iowa (1), Illinois (1), Wisconsin (2), Indiana (2), Michigan (3), and Ohio (7). As many as four new programs could join the Midwest in 2024. The Midwest Region continues to see growth in Volunteers and Participants and leads the nation in this category. The following is a summary of events from this past year:

### **Program Overview – Nationally and Locally**

#### **North Chicago's Day and Evening Program Sessions**

Beginning in January 2023, North Chicago runs two program sessions, one in the day and one in the evening, and again, due to the pandemic and the inpatient based veteran population we serve, some of these sessions were cancelled as part of the Covid-19 protocol implemented by Lovell Federal Health Center. Both Day and Evening Sessions are aligned with Lovell's Recreational Therapy Department. The Day Program is attended by disabled Veterans from WWII to the Cold War in age. They reside on Lovell's Campus in their Community Living Centers known as "The Greenhouses". This session has grown steadily to 20 participants, who regularly attend fishing outings. Amy Lefstadt and Tricia Stewart lead this part of the program.

The Evening Sessions attended by veterans of all ages from Lovell's Outpatient Program, Elizabeth Lacombe leads this program and has been an amazing resource to the Veterans connectivity to Lovell. These Participants will engage in all five-core program activities; fly tying, casting, education, rod building and fishing outings including both day and overnight outings.

#### **Program Growth and New Offerings**

2023 also ushered in a new logo. It was decided that a new logo would be created that would reduce printing costs and also reflect our mission.

In addition to the 69 active registrations in North Chicago, the program saw steady growth in both participants and volunteers. It is hoped that participation in the day sessions will hold steady at 20 veterans during the day.

Volunteer growth has steadily increased with approximately three new volunteers per quarter. This influx of talent will help to provide technical skill levels and a broader level of leadership in the organization. Many of these new volunteers came to North Chicago through spot ads and the growing popularity of the PHWFF.

#### **Volunteer Hours**

This past year program volunteer hours have increased with the addition of planned float fishing trips, such as the Kishwaukee River and White Pines State Park in Rockford, IL. Project Healing Waters has partnered with Oak Heart Lodge, a private lodge located in Newago, Michigan. As many as eight participants and two volunteer trip leads (chaperones) attend a 5-day fishing trip. This year we sent four participants and two trip leads. All expenses are paid except for fishing licenses. Fuel reimbursement is available.

This year we had two participants build fly rods. Rod building is taught by a professional, the finished fly rod builders are awarded an Orvis reel, backing line and new fly line. A certificate of completion is provided, and it is suggested that the finished rod be entered into the national competition. Fly tying and fly-casting competition programs are also being encouraged for the National competition. We hope that the Veterans of North Chicago will participate in future competitions. Rewards for participants that take part in the competitions will be invited to Freedom Ranch in Montana. Requirements for the invitations are completion of the 3 categories of rod building, casting and fly tying.

The outgoing Project Healing Waters North Chicago Program Lead/Midwest Regional Coordinator Jeff Reinke wore many hats, and his shoes will be hard to fill. Jeff logged countless dedicated volunteer hours with additional responsibilities at the regional and national levels. Jeff Reinke continued to serve as Midwest Regional Coordinator while



bringing Jay Dzik Assistant Program Lead up to speed before Jeff transitioned out of his role as Program Lead.

### Leadership Changes and Growth

After 7 years of leadership in North Chicago and increased responsibilities at the Regional and National Levels Jeff Reinke turned the North Chicago reins over to new leaders on October 1. Jeff's term as Field Advisory Council Chair was also completed (now just an Advisor). The organization will be undergoing significant changes toward improving processes and our impact on helping veterans in need. With this change in Jeff's leadership the North Chicago Program will have new leaders with the following roles as we move forward in 2023:

#### *Jeff Reinke – Midwest Regional Coordinator (RC), Field Advisory Council (Advisor) and Board Trustee*

Jeff will remain connected with the North Chicago Program in its transition and as a Volunteer.

#### Project Healing Waters North Chicago Program Leaders:

##### *Jay Dzik - Program Lead (PL)*

Jay will be leading the fly-tying program in addition to his duties of running the program. He will be the face of North Chicago and the main point of contact.

##### *Sam Sides – Assistant Program Lead (APL)*

Sam is now the formal APL who will assist Jay with meetings, scheduling, communication and running the program.

##### *Darwin Adams – Outings and Casting Lead (APL)*

Darwin will lead the fishing outings and continue as the casting director.

##### *Todd Radek and Tal Kisner – Rod Building Lead (APL)*

Tal Kisner will teach rod building going forward as Todd Radek relocated to Florida. Tal will teach our vets how to build their own fly rods and have them enter the PHWFF National Rod Building Competition.

##### *Jackie Levernier – Holy Cross Hospitality (APL)*

Jackie leads and organizes the Holy Cross Hospitality Team.

##### *Dina Lissner Nanberg – Public Outreach (APL)*

Dina will be helping with public relations.

##### *Amy Lefstad – Lovell Liaison (APL)*

Amy will be our eyes and ears at Lovell and will work to connect us to veteran's programs.

##### *John Psomas – VAVS Representative for North Chicago (APL)*

John will be our Programs VAVS representative. We have not had one in the past and John will work with Kenneth Lick at Lovell.

#### *Networking, Public Relations and Fundraising*

Since 2020 North Chicago hasn't fundraised except for efforts made through Facebook Birthday Fundraisers. It is hoped that we can reconnect with our major supporters from the Gary Borger, Elliot Donnelly and Lee Wulff Chapters of Trout Unlimited as well as a donation from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post where volunteer Scott Roane is a member. Orvis – Chicago is a yearly donor through their corporate share program. We are grateful for the generous support of Holy Cross Lutheran Church which has been foundational to the success of North Chicago. Going forward the outlook for North Chicago Program in 2024 is solid.

#### *Summary*

As we come out of essentially a three-year period of challenging times, we have great optimism as we look forward to our new Outpatient Venue (Evening Vets) and reconnecting with our legacy Vets in the Day program. With fresh new leaders and a positive outlook, we look forward to the continued support from our partners at Holy Cross Church, the James A. Lovell Federal Health Center, Troop 194, and Trout Unlimited.

### **Rosebud Indian Reservation**

#### **The Cookie Walk 2023**

Rosebud, South Dakota is one of poorest Indian Reservations. Holy Cross Church has supported this reservation through mission trips and fundraising. The 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Cookie Walk was a huge success because we had so many bakers returning to help support our friends on the Rosebud reservation by preparing and sharing their specialty baked goods. This Rosebud fundraiser was established to provide the Sioux (part of the Lakota heritage) with resources they desperately need daily. Our team's goal is to bring Christmas joy to every girl and boy (age or at heart!) at the Rosebud reservation.

To our congregation: Thank you so very much for your ultra-generous support! You are part of a Christmas miracle! Our team thanks you for caring so much for our Lakota friends. God always finds a way and it is our team's intention to assist the people of Rosebud and, YOU helped us to do just that. Your donations this year totaled over \$4,500 which will be used

for 2024 projects in Rosebud. Along with carryover funds from last year, we were able to make an impressive impact.

The Cookie Walk team chose three valuable ministries to support: The Tree of Life, the Panther's Clothes Closet and the Boys and Girls Club of Rosebud. We are thrilled to be able to work with these ministry partners to help bring hope and light to those at Rosebud! The beauty of our choices is that all three of these organizations work collaboratively in the Rosebud community for the survival and success of all. The Cookie Walk Team believes that we made the best decision to benefit our Lakota families by choosing these organizations.

1) **The Tree of Life** is an organization serving Lakota families located on the Rosebud Reservation with food, clothing, and love. Linda Garriott, Pastor and Director of Tree of Life, and her team serve 300+ lunch meals per day. They are blessed to have enough food and clothing donations; however, they do not have enough food containers to serve the meals to those in need. The Cookie Walk team agreed to send \$4500 to support Linda and her staff to obtain the disposable containers they need. She stated that *"Holy Cross' gift for disposable containers is the best news of the day. We are so excited to be receiving containers which will hold our warm meals for so many! Most people do not understand that it is the small things that make such a huge difference to others."*

2) **Panther's Clothes Closet** is located in and operated by the Rosebud Elementary School. They provide clothing and supplies **anytime** to all of their students. The motto of this organization is *"If the basic needs of their students are met, they are more successful learners and this is why the Panther's Clothes Closet is so essential."* We donated \$2,000 to purchase boys' clothing and essentials as they requested.

3) **The Boys and Girls Club of Rosebud**. Their mission statement is to enable all young people, especially those who need them most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. This Club has three locations that they support: Rosebud, Mission and Parmalee. Rachel Kocek, Executive Director, oversees and manages the needs for their students. The best news she shared is that they were able to purchase an abandoned school building and it is large enough for them to offer many programs such as providing afterschool tutoring, teaching outreach through community involvement, providing transportation for students, and mentoring. They also furnish snacks and meals for their youth. Their hope is to expand services to all ages at their new location. Holy Cross sent \$2,000 to the Boys & Girls Club of Rosebud to assist them with startup of their building as well as their normal operations.

In addition, we financially support our mission liaison, Dorothy Peterson, by sending her a check for \$1,500. Dorothy is extremely instrumental in identifying the needs of the Rosebud community. She continues to counsel families and provides them with many everyday items that we may take for granted such as blankets, food vouchers, and clothing. When we thanked Dorothy, she told us it was the "work of the 'Holy Spirit' that helped guide us to assist the people of Rosebud".

A special thanks goes to Kris DeGregor for once again creating her beautiful and delightful Gingerbread House for us to raffle. Congratulations to all—the winners of the Gingerbread House and those who won one of the many fabulous gift baskets.

Special thanks to Pastor Chris, Pastor Bob, Deaconess Katie and Dale Tippet for their continued support and direction. Additional thank you's go to Ellie Rautenbach, Sarah Accettura, Janet Carr, Beth Ann Koenemann, Greg Kveton, Steve Oelschlager, and Tom Miller. Your valuable talents and support are greatly appreciated.

May God bless you for your generous outreach and support of our Lakota friends located in Rosebud Indian Reservation, South Dakota.

We wish you God's blessings and peace throughout the New Year.

With sincere appreciation...

*The Cookie Walk Team of Holy Cross*

*Karla Boucek, Therese Delli Paoli, Sue Dittman, Melanie Houser, Gail Kelly, Carole Kenney, Amanda Komaschka, Patty Moyer, Joyce Kveton, Judy Fornero-Soltermann and Joyce Twardock*

## **Rosebud Ministry Report**

*Mission Statement: Proverbs 29:18 "Without a vision the people perish." We continue to share Christ's Gospel with the Sicangu Lakota people with the goal to develop in Word and Sacrament a relationship that builds on established Ministry and relationships on the Rosebud Reservation.*

Thank you, Holy Cross ELCA Congregation, for your continued prayers and support for this ministry on the Rosebud. A special thank you: Thank you for your gifts to the people and to me which allowed us to be more actively involved in the community. They are gratefully received. Some of you have special relationships with the families through Facebook, letters, telephone calls, and gifts throughout the year.

### **Accomplishments for 2023**

Holy Cross made it possible to reach people from the Rosebud Elementary School which includes Two Strike families by working through the school's Help Needed fund created by the teachers at the school. We worked through the school counselor and secretary to identify those in need to facilitate providing aid. A friend from Two Strike who works at the school helped us find this avenue to provide gifts of clothing and school supplies to these students. The Boys and Girls Club also received funds from this source. Holy Cross donated money to this fund and Styrofoam food containers to Tree of Life which helped facilitate their meal deliveries to the communities. Thank you to the cookie walk at Holy Cross which provides such a great source of income for the Rosebud ministry.

With adequate funding, we were able to provide meals for children and the homeless in the Two Strike and St. Francis areas. This happened with the help of friends from Two Strike who prepared and delivered the meals.

We held a day camp in July for the Two Strike families where, along with fellowship, there was a fun day of food, Bible study, and games. Pastor David Marshall led the families with worship, song, and prayer. Russ and Delaina Salamon, along with the Trinity Lutheran Church mission team from Rapid City, SD, brought this summer ministry to Two Strike families.

### **Goals for 2024**

- We hope for our mission team to go to Two Strike frequently with a more concentrated ministry consequently with a more effective outreach to the community.
- Strong emphasis on prayer and Bible study.

*Our Lakota friends and neighbors say "Thank You."* They continue to struggle against poverty and the violence that comes from alcoholism and drugs. Suicide is still a huge problem. Education and the contacts that come through Christian ministries are helping in combating this problem. The effective AA groups and the jail ministry continue to be an effective benefit to the community. Thank you to everyone who supports these ministries with your prayers, your gifts, and your presence. You bring strength and blessing to the Lakota people and to those who serve. In times of discouragement, it is often your prayers that help all the people at Rosebud. The face of a child or an elder, a hug, and the call of God on our hearts moves us to continue going forth in Christ's name. A basic need is someone willing to be a support person. A prayer, a phone call, a visit, bring encouragement that we may never realize. Holy Cross Lutheran Church continues to be a good friend to people on the Rosebud Reservation. You are well known as friends with a strong spiritual emphasis in your relationship. God sees your outreach and the people feel your love. Please continue your prayers. They are the most powerful gift we can share and receive in God's work.

"Come Holy Spirit with your Holy power. May the wind of your spirit blow gently but strongly in our presence. In the name of our Lord, may we continue to go forth sharing God's gifts of love, joy, and peace. Amen."

Dorothy Peterson, ELCA Lay Minister to Rosebud  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Rapid City, SD

### **Waukegan to College (W2C)**

Waukegan to College supports first-generation college students (meaning their parents didn't attend college) to follow their dreams by attending and graduating from a 4-year university. Our ultimate goal is to build a college-going culture among the students and families of the Waukegan community. Waukegan to College partners with the school district to provide tutoring, mentoring, advocacy, scholarships, and onsite programs in the middle schools. We begin working with students as young as the fifth graders and support them through their college journey. This past May, we celebrated our graduates, and to date, 87 Waukegan to College alumni have graduated from college. This fall we started the school year with about 232 students total.

Holy Cross members have provided volunteer support to Waukegan to College, and Holy Cross has contributed more than \$27,500 over the years. Members serve as tutors to build proficiency across many subjects, and others provide personal mentorship for the college readiness and application process. As we grow, so do our needs for volunteer support. If you would like to volunteer or just be a substitute when a volunteer needs a break, please contact [volunteer@waukegantocollege.org](mailto:volunteer@waukegantocollege.org) or (224) 572-9221. Learn more about Waukegan to College at [waukegantocollege.org](http://waukegantocollege.org)

### **Willow House. . . Where Hope Lives**

Willow House exists because when a child and family experiences the death of loved one, their life and family is changed forever. Willow House provides grief support services to children, families, schools and communities coping with the death of a loved one. In 2023, Holy Cross hosted Willow House group meetings on the first Monday of most months with a brief summer hiatus. After an intake process, these evenings are open to all in the northern suburban region. For more information about Willow House, visit [willowhouse.org](http://willowhouse.org)

## Children, Youth and Families Ministry Reports

### Milestone Ministries - Deaconess Katie Freund

Our church has a legacy of fostering faith formation through milestone events. These sessions are labeled for particular grade levels, but that's a general guide rather than a limitation. We've had friends, cousins, and siblings join us regardless of age or grade level.

#### *Baptism*

For most of us the formal beginning of our faith journey occurred at the baptismal font. Through the waters of baptism, we are publicly claimed as a Child of God and become a part of God's family. The congregation, parent(s) and sponsors of the individual promise to support this person on their faith journey as they grow in age and wisdom through God's love. By appointment with a pastor.

#### *Toddler Playdate*

This milestone helps build community among families of small children. Rather than a "milestone" where learning or development is implied, this is a chance for our church to open our doors and provide open play, storytime, and a craft to families with children age 2 and under. We want to give families an opportunity to connect to each other and offer up resources for raising a child that knows they are loved by God. We know the first words of faith in a child's life are lived out in the joyful praise in play

#### *Blessing of the Backpacks*

To kick off the 2023/24 school year we provided and prayed over backpack tags for students in our congregation as well as prayer squares to bless all teachers and especially lift up our Early Childhood Ministry workers. Additionally, we raised money to buy backpacks and school supplies that church members packed and sent out for children in our community through Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

#### *Second Grade: Holy Communion*

In this milestone, we learn about the mystery and gift that is Holy Communion. Class includes making bread, learning about the Passover, the events surrounding Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper, what happens in Holy Communion and the general "how-tos" of receiving Holy Communion. Two sessions are offered each year with the fall class celebrating First Communion on World Communion Sunday (first Sunday of October) and the spring class celebrating First Communion on Maundy Thursday. This year, during the fall 2023 session our students had a blast squishing grapes as we talked about how wine and bread are made.

#### *Third Grade: Bible Basics*

At baptism, parent(s), sponsors and the congregation promise to place the Holy Scriptures into the hands of each baptized person. At Holy Cross, we do this in third grade with a class for parents and children to learn together. We cover how to use a Bible, how it is organized, and share favorite Bible verses. The next day we invite families to come to our 10 am worship service as the congregation presents gift Bibles to the students and pray for their continued faith journey. This year we were also able to source a Bible that matches the translation we use with our grade schoolers in an extra large print to adapt for those with visual impairments.

#### *Fourth Grade: The Ten Commandments*

This fourth grade milestone teaches life application for one of the most iconic traditions of our faith. The Ten Commandments are one of the things that parent(s), sponsors and the congregation promise to place in each baptized person's hands. But what does that mean? How does that apply to your family or the life of a fourth grader? We incorporated visual aids from "Godly Play" (a Montessori style curriculum) to show how the laws given to Moses in the Hebrew scriptures are reflected in the teachings of Jesus.

#### *Fifth Grade: Live Your Faith*

As people of God, we're told to follow Jesus, but how? What do you do? This year we chose a service project for kids to participate in that focused within our congregational family. Holy Cross has a vibrant prayer shawl ministry, we opened this ministry up for children's participation with a flannel blanket craft to be given to a child in our community while discussing how church members show care for each other.

### Other Duties - Deaconess Katie Freund

There is never a shortage of opportunities in ministry, especially here in our congregation. During 2023 I was able to represent Holy Cross at a run/walk (I definitely walked) to support Fellowship of Christian Athletes, an organization that is very important to a number of our high school students. Additionally, I had the good fortune to chaperone for our summer high school mission trip to Indianapolis along with Pastor Chris and Pastor Mark from Joy Lutheran. Then in the fall I had the chance to once again be the keynote speaker for our women's ministry retreat, this time at Lutherdale focusing on appreciating our voice as a sacred gift.

## Faith Formation - Deaconess Katie Freund

### Chapel

We're excited to now be offering chapel every Wednesday for our littles at CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare. Our schedule aligns with the local school calendar on a three-year rotation through the lessons. Throughout the school year children learn Bible stories as well as lessons from the curriculum's storybooks that focus on social emotional learning (SEL). These SEL lesson themes include making new friends and telling the truth. We use the *Frolic* curriculum paired with the "First Bible" from Sparkhouse.

### Messy Church

For summer programming we reprised Messy Church, a unique ministry approach developed in Great Britain that we integrated into our monthly summer drive-in worship. This year, we went all in and utilized the full program for our worship services. This was used in scripture selection, sermon topics, musical choices, and special offerings and prayers. Following worship there was a meal and activities coordinating with the theme for adults and kids alike, including things like tabletop games, crafts, prayer stations, conversation prompts for families, and community art projects. Each "Messy Church" Sunday there was also take home resources provided that included activities (like a gratitude scavenger hunt) as well as family discussion guides and devotional prayers.

### Sunday School

The 2022/23 Sunday School year wrapped up last spring with an Easter Eve celebration, and it surpassed our expectations! We wanted to put on a family program event that made the "Easter Vigil" accessible to kids. The Easter vigil is normally very "high church" with a lot of formal liturgy and several hours of somber scripture reading. Instead we took our kids through the building reenacting and telling the stories from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament up through Easter. We had an amazing swell of volunteer support where members of the congregation worked for days (or in some cases weeks) building elaborate sets for our Bible story scenes. There was a whale so enormous I'm certain it could be called life-size, a veritable garden of Eden with towering palm trees, puppet shows and live actors, dancing full sized skeletons in the valley of dry bones, and an ark for Noah fully populated with stuffed animals the kids got to help load on. We had over 125 people come and kids still talk about what they saw a year later.

We kicked off the 2023/24 Sunday School year with Rally day! Registration for our Sunday School program opened and members of our church set up a whole host of lawn games for our children. From the start of rally day, this year continued the volunteerism and strong congregational support from our church.

This year's Sunday School theme has been "Journeying through the Bible", designed for kids from preschool through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Held Sundays (following the local school calendars) we start with our Bible lesson all together before dividing into three age groups for games and crafts. This year we've shifted our start time from 9 am to 9:45 am, meaning that children participate in Sunday school during the 10 am worship service. After the lesson, music, and activities, kids are brought to the sanctuary to rejoin their families at the passing of the peace so families can be together during holy communion.

There is a lot of administrative work and project planning that went into fine tuning our Sunday School program this year. Changes were made to most everything, including registration, volunteer coordination, lesson planning, and feedback facilitation—and that's due to Val Maxwell taking on the task of coaching me in project management. Her guidance has made a clear impact on the effectiveness and quality of our Sunday School program. She also continues to teach me (both directly and by example) how to better coordinate and manage while leading others. I'm very grateful that Val was willing to put in so much time and effort in coaching me, and I'm also continuously impressed by our community that is so abundant with talented people.

Continuing that theme of talented people, we have our Sunday School shepherds as well as Carrie Mack (our children's music leader) and Jamey Mack (our volunteer piano accompanist for Sunday School) to thank for our great Christmas pageant this year. The attention to detail, ability to adapt, and intentionality in planning ahead all paid off. We're incredibly blessed to have a music teacher for our children's ministry—if you saw the pageant and the "tambourine" song, you know what I'm talking about. What a treat to have older kids with well rehearsed speaking parts, small children singing bravely from behind their older siblings, and kids who hadn't been able to rehearse still able to join in costume for that morning as background characters. This year our children really gave back to us, the church, by leading us in worship.

At the 4 pm "family service" on Christmas Eve we had a packed house filled with families, and kids were able to see the Christmas story shadow puppet show. What's more is they were given their own kits to take home which induced the supplies to make their own shadowbox theater and puppets, script included!

If you're still reading this you've heard me mention our Sunday School shepherds a few times, but honestly they can't be mentioned enough. These adults have volunteered to give their time and energy. This school year, the shift in program time means they have also given up their own Sunday morning time in church to help foster the faith of our kids. Our congregation believes in the work of ministry, and we step up and support each other. A way we have tried to express our gratitude to our shepherds is by giving them a (pretty short) book titled "Bible Stories for Grownups" and sending them

audio recordings with reflections on chapters within. My hope is not to give anyone “one more thing to do” - but to show that we truly see and appreciate the work they put into making Holy Cross a welcoming place for our kids to grow in their faith.

## **Family Ministry**

### **Confirmation - Pastor Chris Neptun, Deaconess Katie Freund, Edwin Andrade**

The 2022/23 confirmation year ended strongly with a field trip to the Oriental Institute museum at the University of Chicago campus and one night ending class with a game of giant inflatable “human whack a mole”. We have closed the book on the three year long confirmation program, and the last class of the “old” format was confirmed alongside the first class of the “new” format. That meant we had over 30 kids who were confirmed on Reformation Sunday this year.

This fall we offered the first session of our “new” confirmation class, which is open to 6th, 7th, or 8th grade students. Confirmation is now seven weeks long with intensive three hour classes of instruction, devotion, and shared meal for seven Sunday evenings. We’ll be offering fall and spring sessions, and the coursework includes assigned readings, homework, and weekly quizzes. The commitment is cut down from three years to seven weeks, but our hope is that we can model the expectation of full participation for our students when they choose to go through the confirmation process. But don’t worry, we’re not getting rid of the fun field trips and game nights. You’ll still find these opportunities available to middle schoolers through our middle school youth group.

## **Youth Ministry**

### **Emerge – Middle School Youth Group - Pastor Chris Neptun and Edwin Andrade**

Holy Cross now has a middle school youth group named *Emerge*! Until this fall, middle school faith formation and fellowship occurred with instruction for Confirmation. Because the format for Confirmation instruction has changed and Edwin Andrade is our new Director of Youth and Family Ministries, Middle School ministry looks more like what we offer for our high school students through Crossroads. The idea behind the name *Emerge* is rooted in our commitment to our youth to read, learn, and share the Bible. We know these stories can spark their imaginations and curiosities. We want their faith to grow, shape their lives, and continue as they mature. As it did for the prophet Samuel, God speaks to us even at a young age, and Samuel responds, “Speak, your servant is listening.” God is still speaking.

Emerge meets for three event types: INVITE, NURTURE, and SERVE.

INVITE – Come for a fun event and bring a friend.

NURTURE – Learn about Bible stories and how they apply to your life.

SERVE – Share your time and effort to make a difference.

Our students are much like we are, hungry for the more profound things of God. If you are a middle school student or a parent of one, we invite you to join us for the opportunity to discover the God who creates, loves, and walks alongside them.

### **Crossroads High School Youth Group - Pastor Chris Neptun and Edwin Andrade**

Why Crossroads? Students at Holy Cross are well-supported with their faith development during middle school with their confirmation journey. Holy Cross continues to offer the same commitment to senior high youth. Ages 14 to 18 are critical times for young adults who are facing increased social pressures and independent decision-making. This is a critical time to cultivate and reinforce Christ-centered relationships. It is a great time to explore the deepening questions about faith, life, and that intersection!

Holy Cross employed two teams to support our students. One team made up of parents and church leaders formed to pray, plan, and act. The second team carried out a search and hiring process for a full-time Director of Youth and Family Ministries. Thank you to all the leaders who took part in each of these teams for your commitment. Thank you to the parents who encouraged their students to attend any of the events to grow in faith and relationship with God.

### **Search Team**

- Co-Chairs - Amanda Komashka and Pastor Chris
- Search Team Members – Carole Kenney, Andrea Young, Lucy Earls, Penelope Earls, John Villani, Jeannine Phillips, Nathan Phillips, Jessica Brown, Libby Brown, Deaconess Katie Freund



### Crossroads Team and Events

- Adult leaders - Pastor Chris Neptun, Steve Oelschlager, Andrea Young, Nikki Spencer and Becky Sawle
- Focused on engaging and building relationships with the 80 Holy Cross high school students and their friends with food and fun.
- January – Feed My Starving Children Pack
- March – Telestrations Game night
- June – Fellowship of Christian Athletes “Running With Faith 5K”
- July – Mission Trip to Indianapolis
  - Group Ministries *Week of Hope* – “*Forged*”
  - Four Holy Cross High School students and one Jr High Student
  - Partnered with youth from Joy! Lutheran Church in Gurnee
  - Served in food pantries, relief organizations, clothes closets, retirement centers
  - Learned about how difficult situations in life shape our faith
- August – Kickoff Cookout event and event planning for 2023/24 program year
- September – Welcomed Edwin Andrade
- October – Richardson Corn Maze
- November – Local park adoption and clean up event: Timber Creek
- December – Gift wrapping fundraiser at The Cookie Walk and Christmas Party

### High School Graduation Recognition

Graduation from High School is an important milestone and time of transition for students and families. We celebrated this milestone in worship with a prayer and blessing of those who graduated and their families during worship on August 6.

## Early Childhood Ministry

2023 continued to see previous traditions return to both Early Childhood Ministry (ECM) programs along with some new events we hope to continue in the years to come. 2023 marked the first year since the pandemic without room closures.

Staffing for Celebration! Childcare continued to be a challenge throughout calendar year 2023. A special thanks to Sam Cooper-Tuttle, Rocky Kupfer and Tania Zombolo as well as all staff members who picked up extra shifts and called on fill in staff to keep the programs running without disruption.

In the summer of 2023, a group of current and former ECM board members met to update and modernize the bylaws for ECM. The outcome includes a new Parents Relations Committee (replacing the legacy ECM Board), Staff Governance Committee (managing the day-to-day operations), and a Strategic Marketing Committee designed to consider strategic challenges and opportunities of the ECM ministries. The team feels the new governance structure and by-laws are set up to guide the future success of our programs. The updated by-laws were approved by the church council on August 9, 2023.

Fall brought the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual ‘Fallin’ into Fun’ family fundraiser event. The event was held on Saturday September 30 at Holy Cross and offered food, a bounce house, the opportunity to take photos on a tractor, crafts and games for the kids, as well as vendors and a silent auction for the adults. The event was a great success and raised over \$2,300 for CrossWays Preschool and Celebration! Childcare. Part of the funds raised will be used to create an infant/toddler playground replacing the garden area in the Spring of 2024. Planning is already on-going to host the event again in 2024.

Matthew Sargent

President, Early Childhood Ministry Parent Relations Committee

# LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

Lutheran Disaster Response shares God's hope, healing and renewal to people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters in the United States and around the world. When the dust settles and the headlines change, Lutheran Disaster Response stays to provide ongoing assistance to those in need.

Lutheran Disaster Response collaborates with other disaster response organizations and religious entities in the United States and around the world. This enables the greatest stewardship of resources and maximum impact of response. They are a welcome partner because they respect the perspectives and strengths of others.

They recognize that every disaster is local. Because of this, they believe every response needs to be rooted in the community; they work to accompany that community from immediate relief through long-term recovery. In their international work they partner closely with companion churches and other Lutheran and ecumenical relief agencies to make sure local needs are being addressed and met. In the United States, they work through their extensive affiliate network and other partners to address these same concerns.

Lutheran Disaster Response strives to help the church continue to be church in the midst of disaster—following Christ's call to bring hope and healing to our neighbor in need. Some key areas of work are listed below.

- Providing emotional and spiritual care for people who have been affected by a disaster and for leaders who respond to a disaster
- Coordinating volunteers through our local affiliates
- Assisting refugees in a holistic way by meeting the varied needs of the community
- Promoting disaster risk-reduction by helping communities build their assets thereby reducing the effects of likely disasters
- Providing long-term recovery efforts by addressing the unmet needs months or even years after a disaster strikes

Among the efforts supported by Lutheran Disaster Relief are:

## *U.S. Disasters*

Whether it be flooding, hurricanes, severe storms, tornadoes or wildfires, Lutheran Disaster Response works with its partners to provide immediate relief, such as water, clothing, gift cards, tarps and other needs, as well as communicating with ELCA synods and community-based organizations to provide support on the long road to recovery with disaster case management, construction management, unmet needs, and emotional and spiritual care.

## *Middle East Crisis*

As the conflict between Hamas and Israel continues, the humanitarian crisis in the Holy Land continues to worsen. More than half of Gaza's residents are displaced, and resources such as food, water and medical supplies are in short supply. The death toll has far surpassed those of previous conflicts in the region in recent decades.

The ELCA has a longstanding relationship with partners in the region, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and Augusta Victoria Hospital. Lutheran Disaster Response has a history of providing support for our partners and will be prepared to answer calls for assistance when the time comes.

## *Eastern Europe Crisis Response*

Millions of people fleeing the violence of Russia's war against Ukraine are moving toward Ukraine's western districts and such neighboring countries as Poland, Moldavia, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. There are major humanitarian concerns for both internally displaced people and refugees. Many of the Ukrainians fleeing their homes need shelter and such basic necessities as food, water and toiletries. Care for people also includes pastoral and psychological support to address the trauma they've endured. Lutheran Disaster Response is accompanying our companions in Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Moldova, Lithuania and the Czech Republic, as well as such ecumenical partners as the Lutheran World Federation and Church World Service, in their humanitarian responses to the crisis created by Russia's war against Ukraine.

**What you can do:** Pray, Give, Connect. Please visit [elca.org/disaster](https://elca.org/disaster) for more information.

## **World Hunger**

By providing immediate relief to those who are hungry, *ELCA World Hunger* meets basic needs and recognizes the universal human right to food. But ending hunger is about more than food. By connecting people with the resources they need to produce food and gain access to clean water, education, health care and sources of income, long-term, sustainable change can be accomplished. To support ELCA World Hunger, donation envelopes are available on selected Sundays, or visit [elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger](https://elca.org/Our-Work/Relief-and-Development/ELCA-World-Hunger)

Through your generosity, God is at work across the ELCA. A portion of your offering, called Mission Support, advances the ministry of our church, helping the ELCA nurture Christian community, raise up leaders, serve our neighbors and strive for justice. Read stories and learn more at [ELCA.org/SOFIA](https://elca.org/SOFIA).



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