



NEWS FROM ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH

148 S Chestnut St. Belle Plaine MN 56011

December 2025

Worship times:

Sunday mornings at 8:00 and 9:30

Wednesday evenings at 6:30

This month:

Tuesday Dec 2nd: W/ELCA Christmas dinner @6:00pm

Saturday Dec 6th: Parents Day Out (3:00-8:00)

Sunday Dec 14th: Sunday School program @9:30am

Sunday Dec 21st: 'Hope in the Darkness' service @5:00pm

Christmas service times:

Wednesday Dec 24: 3:00, 5:00 & 7:00pm

Thursday Dec 25th: 9:00am

****The office will be closed on the following dates:**

December 24th, 25th & 26th

December 31st, Jan 1st

Church office: 952-873-6492

email: office@stjohnbelleplaine.org

Staff:

Pastor:

Sherri Otto

Office:

Amanda Schultz

Accounting:

Monica Braesch

Custodian:

Jen Scott

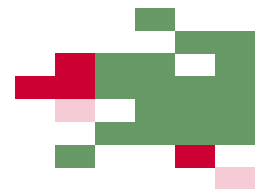
Choir Director:

Allison Vandermark

Organist:

Eileen Hanlon

Accompanist:



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Unapproved St. John Lutheran Church Council Minutes
November 10th, 2025

Vice President Jim Eggers called the meeting to order at 6:03p.m. And Pastor Sherri led us in devotion.

Present:

X	Pastor Sherri Otto	X	Jim Eggers	X	Albert Koepp	X	Amy Franck
X	David Bungarden	X	Jan Effinger	X	Chris Zellman	X	Steve Kelm
X	Jerold Stauffacher		Jaime Petersen	X	Tim Moonen	X	Deanne Fogarty
X	Rob Schultz						

Approval of Minutes:

Council reviewed the minutes of the October 14th , 2025 Council Meeting. Motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the meeting minutes.

The council reviewed the current agenda; a motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the agenda.

Staff Report:

A. Amanda's office report was reviewed by members of the council. In addition to the day to day tasks, Amanda is working on the next steps for the church directory and continues to keep Connect and Confirmation running smoothly for all of the kids and leaders!

B. Pastor Sherri's report was reviewed by the council. Pastor has been very busy presiding at services, planning music, and teaching connect and confirmation. She is active outside of the 4 walls of St. John by meeting with other clergy in the community, making home visits and presiding at Kingsway. She is also hosting a bible study, has started a Care Team, and started a youth choir! If you know anyone that would like to join the care team or youth choir, please reach out to Pastor for more information. Lastly, Pastor shared the "reforming ideas" from Reformation Sunday with the council and council discussed the list and will pick a few common themes to work on throughout the coming months.

Treasurer's Report:

Jerold's treasurer report was reviewed by the council. For the month of October, we hit the budgeted Monthly offerings. We were over the budgeted amount by \$1,158 so that is a step in the right direction. We are a little behind the Budgeted amount for the year \$10,349. Compared to actual expenses for the year we are operating in the black this year. Expenses for the month were a little under budget (\$835), for the year are below our budgeted expenses but are spending a little over \$2000 more than we did to this same point last year.

Balances in accounts as of November 5th are as follows:

- a. Ameriprise Account (Stier) balance: \$119,112
- b. Property Improvement (Savings) balance: \$55,255 (plus \$101,985 & \$75,000 CD)
- c. Technology Fund balance: \$1,432
- d. Foundation Account (Interest from Foundation Investment) balance: \$22,657
- e. General Fund balance: \$13,595
- f. Youth Account balance: \$21,298
- g. Building Fund Checkbook balance: \$7,400
- h. Memorial Fund balance: \$19,658
- i. Jackson Account (Larry Kiewel) balance: \$72,706
- j. St. John Foundation Investment balance: \$192,504

B. The Council also did a Preliminary review of the 2026 Annual Budget. We'll continue to review and refine over the next month.

Transfers:

A. No transfers in or out this month.

Ongoing Business:

A. An All Committee meeting was held on October 27th .

B. St. John received a generous donation of \$3000 from the family of John Woestehoff. The council has decided to spread this generosity by donating \$1000 to the Belle Plaine Food Shelf, \$1000 to Operation Christmas Child with any unused funds going to Belle Plaine Police Departments Toys for Tots. The remaining \$1000 will be added to the general fund to help in covering expenses here at St. John.

C. The Personnel Committee has completed the employee handbook. Due to its length, members of the council have received electronic copies to review individually. We will discuss as a council during Decembers Council meeting.

New Business:

A. No new business

Ministry Team Updates:

A. The council reviewed the Worship and Music Committee Report. They added some beautiful touches during services for All Saints Day and Veterans Day and will continue to work with Pastor and Eileen on music. Watch for details on a “Hope in the Darkness” service on Sunday, December 21st .

B. The council reviewed the Nomination Committees Report. They are hard at work to find nominees for the positions that will need to be filled in January. We appreciate those that have already agreed to their call to serve in these positions at St. John.

Motion was made, seconded, and carried to adjourn the meeting at 8:12p.m.

We closed with the Lord’s Prayer.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deanne Fogarty, Secretary

Introducing Our New Caring and Outreach Team

Over the past months, we have become increasingly aware of how important it is to stay connected with those who may not be able to join us regularly—our home-bound members, those on our prayer list, individuals serving in the military, and organizations throughout our wider community. In response to this need, we are excited to introduce our new **Caring and Outreach Team** at St. John.

This team will bring together different groups dedicated to offering support, encouragement, and connection. Two of these groups are already taking shape:

Visitation Team – reaching out with in-person visits to those who need a friendly face, a prayer, sharing Communion or simply a reminder that their church family is thinking of them.

Card Ministry – sending notes and words of comfort or encouragement to let people know they are held in love and prayer by their church community. Our students have been already writing cards to people and we are so grateful to them!

This is just the beginning. As we grow, we hope to expand the Care Team into additional areas of ministry, strengthening our commitment to caring for one another and for our community.

And this is where you come in! If you have a passion for reaching out to others by visiting or sending cards, please contact Pastor Sherri, Linda Schwichtenberg, Susie Volek or Amanda in the office for more information on this important ministry.

Thank you for supporting this new effort. Together, we can ensure that no one feels forgotten and that the love of Christ continues to reach far beyond our walls.

Finding Hope in Jesus

As I was watching the Vikings game yesterday, I couldn't help but marvel at how many people were packed into the stadium. In my humble opinion, our team wasn't playing very well, and before long I found myself getting bored—glancing down at my iPad, wondering whether Emily and I should go shopping or what chores I ought to tackle at home. Then a strange thought came to me: *If the baby Jesus were born right in the middle of the field, would people stay and watch him grow, watch what plays he would make, watch how he treated the other players or would they eventually get bored and head home?*

These questions were still in my head as I went to sleep and I began to imagine if Jesus was there, would we have set off fireworks for him or have a great half-time show, have a special cheer for him or play music in honor of him. Would the crowds have stared silently at this miraculous child? Or would they cheer and shout and sing songs of joy? Would hope fill their hearts with a sense of wonder and awe?

Some weird thoughts and questions, I know. But sometimes, as a pastor, you go to that place and try to see Jesus in a crowded stadium, a busy mall, a full gymnasium or a congested free-way. You look for places that most people would never think that Jesus would be. A homeless shelter, a jail cell and a park bench where there is heat coming through a city street vent to keep them warm.

It is my belief that in every one of those places, in every one of those hearts, there is a feeling of hope. Hope in what is to come next, hope in the things that can change, hope in a better way and a better life.

Hope...a very powerful word and one that is found at the heart of Jesus.

We are in the season of Advent...a time where we wait for Jesus. It's a story for Christians that has been told a thousand times over and one that I never get tired of. For it is this child that I find my hope...my hope to be a better person, to live a better life, to be a better neighbor to those I know and to those I will meet. To know that things will get better, even when the road is long and rough. To know that I am never truly lost, because Jesus has shown me the way. To know that I am not alone, even when I feel forgotten.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given...And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

I am hopeful for the future here at St. John as we continue to grow, change, and live in community with one another and am excited for what lies ahead, because we know our hope is in Jesus—and that Jesus will be at the center of all we do.

Fill our hearts, dear Lord, with love, joy and peace as we celebrate Jesus' birth together at St. John Lutheran and in the community of Belle Plaine.

Happy Advent and Merry Christmas friends!
May the hope of this season remain with you all!!

Pastor Sherri

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas!

A season of hope and love, Christmas is a joyful reminder that we are given so many precious gifts in this life. Gifts that can't be wrapped and should not be taken for granted. It's a time to celebrate with friends and family and all those we hold dear to our hearts, but also a time to pray for those who will be missing a loved one at their table this year.

This month we look forward to the fabulous Christmas dinner, hosted by the W/ELCA! {{Let me tell ya, I attended last year and it did not disappoint}}. The Sunday schoolers will be performing their Christmas program on the 14th and new this year, we will have a special service on the 21st. The 'Hope in the Darkness' service welcomes all those who are mourning this holiday season and reminds us that hope can shine even in the darkest moments.

May the magic of the season fill your heart with peace, joy and hope!

Blessings,

Amanda

"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope"

-Psalm 130:5

Belle Plaine PD Christmas shop:

The BP PD is sponsoring the 11th annual toy drive that gives new toys to children in need! But it's sooooo much more than that! They also provide hygiene items, BP tiger gear, games, sports equipment, blankets and winter gear. The goal is to provide every child (aged 0-18) with something great for Christmas. Families in need can call the department to make an appointment to 'shop' the basement. We have a donation box here at the church for anyone interested in donating toys, supplies, games, etc. And the department also accepts monetary donations to purchase the BP gear, hygiene items and anything else they may see a need for in the community.

{{Dates of note}}

Dec 2nd ~ W/ELCA Christmas Dinner at 6:00pm

Dec 6th ~ Parents day out!! Our Mission Trip group will be hosting an afternoon of childcare from 3-8 for parents who need time to shop, date or relax! Food & entertainment provided - Reserve your spot by contacting the office.

Dec 14th ~ Bebies with the Bishops: young adults (18-35) of the ELCA are invited to join bishops Patricia Lull and Jen Nagel for an 'ask them anything' event. The event will start at 6:00pm in the Garden Suite at Norseman Distillery.

Dec 17th ~ Connect and Confirmation small group activity night to include caroling, hot chocolate and treat!!

Dec 21st ~ Hope in the Darkness service

UPCOMING:

January 25th ~ Annual meeting: mark your calendars!

Hope in the Darkness Service

Sunday, December 21st, 2025

5:00pm



Sometimes, Christmas can be hard. When everyone is running around shopping, listening to Christmas carols, going to plays or shows, it may feel like you are the only one who is not in the spirit of Christmas.

If you or someone you love has experienced a significant loss, you may be feeling sad and disconnected. Please know you are not alone.

Join us for the Hope in the Darkness service where you can rest in the words, music, candlelight and silence of the night and leave with hope in the Christ Child. We hope you will join us.

May God's peace be with you.



Interpretation of Psalm 23 by our 5th - 8th grade students:

The Lord shall be our Shepherd.
I want God in my life.
God leads me where I need to go and keeps me safe.
He makes me lie down by a tree, by a waterfall.
He's with me wherever I go.
He comforts me whenever I feel fear so that I don't feel it anymore.
When you're going through hard times, God will always be there.
God will help me fix my problems and help me to make good decisions.
Even when you are going through hard times, God is there leading you to righteousness.
God overflows with his kindness and love, watching over you and you will be with him in heaven.
He welcomes me and my enemies.
He will always protect me.
I will follow him my whole life.
God provides for us, even when around enemies.
He gives us more than we need and fills us with love.
I am blessed.

-- 5th thru 8th grade students

December Birthdays

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Robert Stoppelmann	2 DuWayne Dandurand Erik Hoff Joyce Nyblom Andy Steinhagen Nicole Walker Jayden Williamson	3 Deb Brazil Luke Fogarty Diane Gerres	4 Kyle Arola Dominick Fogarty Lois Gustafson Peggy Malz Alexander Meger	5 Dylan Johnson John Schmidt	6 Zach Fahey Michael Gustafson Tristan Lindahl
7 Troy Borresen Allen Latour Tyson Menke Ruby Schultz	8	9 Midge Bessel Deanne Fogarty Eisley Koch Brent Koepp Tammy Koepp	10 Marjorie Grannis	11 Kerry Arola Wyatt Fogarty Taylor Menke Mark Schultz	12	13 Ethan Martin Zachary Olson
14 Laura Buddenhagen Taylor Fimon Alex Johnson	15 Mary Karl Tina Soller Mark Steen	16 Luke Bristlin Chester Gohlke Connor Kopesky	17 Madelyn Eyrich Laurie Hiles Debra Schaefer Amelia Kuenzel Kylee Perry	18 Lori Schmidt Madelyn Siekmann	19 Elanor Stapf	20 Katey Borresen Laura Costello Duane Koepp Hoyt Nagorski Kevin Wolff
21 Steve Gerres Adam Meierbachtol	22 Bruce Schmidt	23 Traci Scheer Erek Arola Eileen Hanlon	24 Megan Holzemer Ira Meierbachtol Brian Siekmann	25 Hannah Konopacki	26 Carissa Schultz Trever Theis	27 Garrett Boblitt Daniel Buerkle Makenna Gerres Morgan Hagen
28 Cooper Stier	29 Jan Campbell Harper Schrot Madison Theis	30 Bob Fimon Deborah Traxler	31 Parker Borresen Mason Gerres Luke Meriwether Chris Schultz			

December Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 6:00pm Personnel 6:30pm boy scouts	2 11am Lutheran home service 1:30 Kingsway service 6pm ELCA Christmas Dinner	3 5pm youth choir 6pm c/c 6:30pm service 7:00pm choir	4 5pm TOPS	5	6
7 8:00am worship 9:30am worship	8 6:30pm boy scouts	9 6:00pm church council	10 5pm youth choir 6pm c/c 6:30pm service 7:00pm choir	11 5pm TOPS	12	13
14 8:00am worship 9:30am worship/ Sunday School program	15 6:30pm boy scouts	16 4:30pm stewardship	17 5pm youth choir 6pm c/c - activity night 6:30pm service 7:00pm choir	18 5pm TOPS	19	20
21 8:00am worship 9:30am worship *NO Sunday school 5:00pm Hope in the Darkness service	22 6:30pm boy scouts	23	24 Christmas Eve 3:00pm service 5:00pm service 7:00pm service <i>*office closes at noon</i>	25 Christmas 9:00am service <i>*office closed</i>	26 <i>*office closed</i>	27
28 8:00am worship 9:30am worship *NO Sunday school	29 6:30pm boy scouts	30	31 New Year's Eve <i>*office closes at noon</i>	<i>*office closed</i>		

~ SUNDAY VOLUNTEERS ~

Alter guild: Laurie Hiles, Deb Brazil

Dec 7

Greeters: Bruce & Susie Volek Lay Readers: Amy Franck Communion Assistants: Kirk Franck, Dave Latzke, Bonnie Vinkemeier Ushers: Albert Koepp, Brian Schmidt, Jonathan Schmidt, Doug Hillstrom, Dave Latzke, Jerold Stauffacher	Greeters: Cindy Schoenbauer Lay Reader: Jan Effinger Communion Assistants: Jason & Monica Braesch, Steve Schroeder Ushers: Chris & Annette Moylan, Steve Schroeder, Lee Sauter
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Dec 14

Greeters: Mindy Chevalier Lay Readers: Mindy Chevalier Communion Assistants: Abby Kubes, Terry Siemon, Matt Stier Ushers: Marc & Mindy Chevalier, Josh Sparby, Lydia Sparby, Abby Kubes, Andy Steinhagen	Greeters: Brent & Wendy Koepp Lay Reader: Children's Christmas Program Communion Assistants: Christmas Program Ushers: Dave & Sara Bungarden, Mason Bungarden, Ron & Diane Rassmussen
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Dec 21

Greeters: Terry & Angie Kahle Lay Readers: Susie Steinhagen Communion Assistants: Susie Steinhagen, Dorothy Koepp, Bonnie Vinkemeier Ushers: Marc & Mindy Chevalier, Josh Sparby, Lydia Sparby, Abby Kubes, Andy Steinhagen	Greeters: Ron & Diane Rasmussen Lay Reader: Caren Grotberg Communion Assistants: Teresa Latzke, Dave Bungarden, Sandy Wolpern Ushers: Dave & Sara Bungarden, Mason Bungarden, Ron & Dianne Rassmussen
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Wednesday Dec. 24th
 Christmas Eve Services:
 3:00 pm
 5:00 pm
 7:00 pm

Thursday, Dec. 25th
 Christmas day service:
 9:00 am

Dec 28

Greeters: Matt & Kristin Lay Readers: Albert Koepp Communion Assistants: Rob & Sandy Schultz, Albert Koepp Ushers: Albert Koepp, Dorothy Koepp, Kevin Koepp, Matt Stier, Bruce Volek, Tim Carlson, Josh Koepp, Dominic Veerkamp	Greeters: Anita Lambrecht Lay Reader: Beth Beuch Communion Assistants: Brent Koepp, Beth Beuch, Renee Meuleners Ushers: Scott & Tricia Ruud, Monica & Jason Braesch, Mike Nagel
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St. John Lutheran Church

All Funds: Statement of Activities Previous Year Comparison

October 1 - October 31, 2025

	10/1/2025 - 10/31/2025	10/1/2024 - 10/31/2024
Revenues		
Total Offering Revenues	35,569.72	31,188.97
Total Product Revenues	0.00	0.00
Total Miscellaneous Revenues	100.00	2,650.00
Total Revenues	35,669.72	33,838.97
Total Cost of Product Sales	0.00	24.12
Total Benevolence Expense	2,100.00	0.00
Total Church/Grounds Maintenance Expense	1,074.93	18,735.50
Total Insurance	5,330.28	0.00
Total Office Expenses	776.38	868.78
Other Expenses	2569.18	1273.36
Total Professional Fees	227.99	737.50
Total Staff Benefits	367.04	112.08
Total Staff Salaries	15,320.95	12,846.59
Total Utilities	1,555.07	467.50
Mission Trip Expenses	0.00	0.00
Total Worship Music & Arts Expenses	180.17	922.00
Total Expenditures	34,658.69	36,782.08
Net Revenue	4,027.31	2,943.11

Property Improvement / Building Fund	10/1/2025 - 10/31/2025	10/1/2024 - 10/31/2024
Income (Donations, Rent, Investments)	\$3,316.33	\$8,917.06
Total Expenditures	\$2,199.99	\$19,668.88
Interest Expense	0	\$0.00
Net Receipts / Disbursements	\$1,116.34	(\$10,751.82)

Offerings	General Fund	Property Improvement
10/1 - 10/7	\$6,568.64	\$998.88
10/5 - 10/11	\$11,297.07	\$450.00
10/12 - 10/18	\$6,445.03	\$941.38
10/19 - 10/25	\$3,347.48	\$250.00
10/26 - 10/31	\$4,607.11	\$664.13

There are many ways to give back, one way is giving back financially.

To schedule a *recurring electronic contribution* via Vanco:

Visit our website: www.stjohnbelleplaine.org

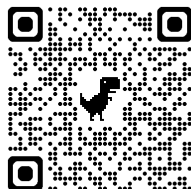
Select the green 'online giving'

Scroll to the bottom and select 'get started today'

Select where you would like the funds allocated

Follow the prompts to set up your account

Or scan the code:



St. John Lutheran Church
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Belle Plaine 56011

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Change Service Requested