

The Vine

New Life Lutheran Church Newsletter

January 2025



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Last year, I spent a fair amount of time as a substitute teacher for the Siuslaw School District. I helped out in grades ranging from 1st grade up through the high school and I was amazed at the amount of energy in the schools. Sometimes the energy was wonderful, other times it felt like complete chaos was barely being contained.

Heading into 2025 feels kind of like entering one of those classrooms for the first time. It could be a wonderful time filled with moments of joy and appreciation. It could be a “hold on with your fingernails until we ride this out” white-knuckle ride.

We know 2025 is yet another year of transition, from the US government right on down through to leadership here at New Life. My great hope for New Life is that you will have new leadership called and installed before the end of this year, but that’s going to take a lot of work.

Back in the day, a church could advertise an open pulpit and be flooded with applications. Those days are gone. Declining church attendance/budgets/volunteers, clergy retirement and burnout, significant drops in seminary enrollment and pastoral vocations, Covid, and general aging of our congregations have coincided to create a tough environment for church vitality.

Still, those of us who love church keep showing up for the blessing of worship and ministry in community. Sometimes it’s chaos, but sometimes it’s wonderful and we’re in it for the wonderful.

For the transition that we hope and pray happens this year, all of the members of the church are going to need to shoulder the following tasks:

- 1) Pray for our church, daily. None of us know how prayer works, but an orientation of prayer rather than worry, gossip or benign neglect is always helpful
- 2) Lift up good things done by the good people who are making church happen. Admire the altar guild. Appreciate the ushers and greeters. Thank the staff. Gratitude creates a powerful culture.
- 3) Keep praying for and checking in on your church beloveds. Make sure the office/pastor knows who could use a call or a visit.
- 4) Communicate questions or concerns directly. Gossip destroys community. If you don’t understand or don’t like something about what’s going on at church, please contact the church council or the pastor directly. Who knows? Your question or concern may be a great idea in disguise.
- 5) Keep showing up. We see you. You matter.
- 6) Keep giving. Yep, we sold a chunk of land this summer that put half a million dollars in the bank. It’s amazing how fast money goes, though, when income doesn’t keep up with expenses.
- 7) Find ways to serve. We need helping hands in so many areas: Transition Team, Deacons, Care Team, Building and Grounds, Mission/Justice, Fellowship, Worship Team. If you’ve got a skill or interest, we can find a place for you!

With these practices in place, 2025 can be an energetically wonderful year. God bless us all, everyone!



Offerings Year To Date 2024

December offerings were	\$16,780
December offerings budgeted	\$8,166
Amt. of offerings received (Jan.-Dec. 2024)	\$104,273
Amt. of offerings budgeted (Jan.-Dec. 2024)	\$98,000

Fellowship Snack Providers - December

We are using the following schedule for fellowship snack providers.

Last names beginning with the following letters will be asked to provide snacks:

January	QRSTUWXYZ
February	A-D
March	E-K
April	LMNOP



Bright Beginnings Christian Preschool Giving Tree

BBCP is a preschool within the Florence community that serves children 3yrs of age to Kindergarten. We have a Giving Tree at our school that is filled with various in-kind and monetary donation ornaments. If you would like to give back to the children in our community, make a donation to the preschool. Each donation to Bright Beginnings Christian Preschool is tax deductible, just ask for a receipt!

The ornaments on our Giving Tree have items like, goldfish, pretzels, cereal, crackers, paper towels, toilet paper, napkins and Clorox wipes, printer paper and construction Paper As well as monetary donations for scholarships and supplies.

Thank you for your support!

Bright Beginnings Christian Preschool is a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organization.
Located at 2100 Spruce St.
Contact Mattie @ 541-590-8010.

Organist Needed

NLLC is still seeking a permanent organist. This person would be responsible for playing the organ/piano each Sunday, including special worship services (easter season, Christmas, weddings). Working closely with the Pastor planning the music for worship service. Please let Wayne Kern or Pastor know if you have any information of someone to fill the position.



Fundraiser!

Looking for the perfect Valentine's Day Gift?

Chocolates!

Bright Beginnings are selling See's Candies!



Jan. 1st thru

Jan. 16th.

Sign up sheet is on the Narthex table. Look for the online link in the weekly blast!



75 year Anniversary

More information to come!

Are you interested in helping? Contact
Pastor Jennifer or the Church office.

NLLC Church Council Meeting Minutes

December 19 , 2024

Call to Order: President Wayne Kern called the Council meeting to order at 4:00 pm. Present were Pastor Jennifer Yocum, Vice-President Roy Hagar, Treasurer Bryant Payne, Sue MacTaggart, Carrie Aburto, Dave Braley and Secretary Lisa Dreher.

Meeting opened with Wayne leading a prayer.

Minutes: Roy made a motion to approve the two November meeting minutes, Carrie seconded, and the motion passed.

Treasurer's Report: Bryant presented the June financials.

President's Report: Security Initiatives. The outdoor outlet has been disabled, and security light has been installed. **Pastor's Office Door.** A security door will be moved to the Pastor's office by Roy and Dave.

Pastor's Report: Advent Events. Jennifer Dill's dance presentation was well attended as were the shared Advent devotions and Vesper services with the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. **Christmas Eve Service:** Helpers are needed to set up luminaires and two people to control the lighting during the service. Claudia will usher and Carrie will assist, Wayne and Beverly will be readers. Carrie and Lisa will set up luminaires and Dave and Roy will control the lighting. **December 29th Service.** The Christmas Carol sing-along service includes the Presbyterian and Methodist churches, and we will have a guest Organist. We will provide cookies for fellowship afterwards.

Learning Hour. Next session will be on Acts or Romans. **Spiritual Renewal Weekend.** Spiritual Renewal weekend is scheduled for the last weekend of March. Pastor Jennifer will be leading. **Pastor's Office Hours.** Hours will be available on Mondays and Wednesdays in the new year.

Old Business: Camp Florence. More clean-up work to be scheduled during the Pre-School Christmas break, we haven't heard back from them yet.

New Business: Transition Team Update. Right now, we have three people on our transition team, and we would like to have a minimum of five members. We may need to start calling members in January to fill the seats. **Worship Team.** There is a need for physical and planning help to organize our worship services and care for our congregation. As our active members are stretched thin, a formal team is difficult to assemble. Sylvianne and Sondra meet with Jennifer to plan the music, Claudia sends cards to the congregation, and Gayle leads our prayer chain. Dave and Roy offered to help with physical set up when needed. What is needed is an advisory committee to discover what would lift up the congregation, meeting every two or three months. **Administrative Catch Up. Constitution Revisions.** The revisions need to be edited, questions remain regarding what is allowed. We are working with 2023 guidelines and 2025 may have new guidelines which may complicate the process further. **Position Update.** Bryant researched the wording of the by-laws regarding the treasurer/bookkeeper/financial secretary overlap, and we are within the guidelines. The collections are taken and deposited by volunteers and not by the treasurer/bookkeeper, eliminating the need to hire a bookkeeper. We need to seek a musician as soon as possible. **Membership Update.** The roster needs to be updated, an accurate membership roll is required for voting. **Annual Congregation Report.** This report is due on March 1, 2025, and is primarily concerned with financials and membership. Bryant will start work on it. **New Computer.** Bryant made a motion to budget \$1,000 for a new office computer, then amended the motion to \$1,500. Sue seconded the motion, Cathy abstained from the vote, it passed with much rejoicing. **Thank you, Outgoing Council Members.** A huge thank you to Sue MacTaggart and Cathy Dietz for their service on the council.

Next Meeting. January 16th at 4:00 pm.

Meeting Adjournment. We closed with the Lord's Prayer. Bryant made a motion to adjourn, Cathy seconded, meeting adjourned at 5:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Dreher, Secretary

NLLC Special Church Council Meeting Minutes

Informational Discussion: Partnership/Transition Process

November 22, 2024

In Attendance: Bishop's Assistant Juan Carlos La Puente, Pastor for Movement and Transition Rev. David Eppelsheimer, Rev. Dr. Jennifer Yocum, President Wayne Kern, Beverly Kern, Carrie Aburto, Vice-President Roy Hagar, Susan Mac Taggart, Dave Braley, Treasurer Bryant Payne, Secretary Lisa Dreher.

Meeting opened at 4 pm with a mediation led by Juan Carlos and a prayer led by David Eppelsheimer.

Discussion: Juan Carlos is here with Pastor David as liaison with the Bishop's Office to explore partnership and map transition team goals. Juan Carlos described the low ratio of candidates available to fill the open positions for church leaders in the Oregon Synod and he shared the struggles of other congregations going through the process in this new atmosphere. The first thing we need to do is get a transition team together to affirm our church identity and create a profile to move forward to seek a partnership with other churches. If the partnership process fails, the work in this first stage can be used to seek a new leader or explore other options.

A candidate will ask if we have explored partnership, isolation is not a good indicator and makes a congregation unattractive. Currently, the interviewees have become interviewers, and they are looking for opportunities with flexibility and a spirit of co-operation. The council has agreed to explore partnership.

There are many partnership types such as one pastor for 2 or 3 congregations with one shared mission. A caveat for this scenario is that it needs to be a cohesive group, not 2 or 3 separate islands under one leader. We are looking for a shared mission bond with others, either merging or yoking is not an option for us right now.

The Partnership process has 3 stages.

- Doing activities together such as Christmas services and events, other holidays, potluck meals, and study groups.

- Deep, profound discussions with other congregations. These will happen after worship service with a group of questions to stimulate conversations customized by each group. The purpose is to begin to understand their faith, become comfortable with their views and discover common ground. Our mission and their mission in this community will need to be examined. This will require a minimum of 3 or 4 deep discussions, then we will decide if want to move on the third step.

- Discernment. This is the last stage of the process and includes sharing of financial statuses, identification of leaders, teams, committees, and resources. A think-tank team with around 3 members from each congregation will need to decide how to share our missions and figure out how to run our shared congregations.

Pastor Heidi will be able to guide us throughout the process. She will be there for us for any direction our congregation decides upon, if not a partnership, then a path of our choosing.

Roy: How long is the average search for a pastor?

Juan Carlos: It takes at least one year based on the 45 searches for new pastors in the Oregon Synod since 2019.

Wayne: When does the year start?

Juan Carlos: It begins when Pastor Heidi starts her work with the transition team. If the partnership does not work, then we look for a pastor.

Wayne: We are in the initial stages of assembling a transition team and are looking for at least 5 members.

Roy: After the holidays, the search for more members will be a priority.

Dave Braley: Will we have 2 separate processes going; one for partnership and one for finding a pastor? Are we looking to share a pastor? We are already taking part in Spiritual Renewal weekends with area churches, and we have been sharing holiday activities with other churches for many years.

Juan Carlos: We need to be in deep conversations, not just sharing actives to be in the partnership process.

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David Eppelsheimer: The need is for developing relationships with the other churches and their members. We need to evaluate our shared capacities, including people, participation, skills, money, and resources. As an example, I worked with a group that sold their building and began having their services in a neighborhood church building. They wanted to merge the two churches but could not name any of the other church's members and knew little about them. A shared space does not guarantee things will run smoothly. "Change moves at the speed of trust. Trust moves at the speed of relationship."

Juan Carlos: The Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran governing boards are unique. We have support from our Bishop in this endeavor and our governing rules are more localized. The other denominations have a more centralized system with control at the upper levels, and we/they will need to work through those channels. Our Bishop's office will work with the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian officials to come to an agreement.

Carrie: Who organizes these meetings with the local churches, is it the transition team?

Juan Carlos: Pastor Jennifer has established relationships with the leaders of the other churches and can help with the organization of the meetings. However, we may need to increase her hours to accommodate the time to do this or get someone else from the Bishop's office. Pastor Heidi may not have the time available to manage scheduling and arrangements. The transition team's focus is on affirming the congregation's identity.

Wayne: The transition team needs to get our profile done first. How do other churches carry out this task?

Juan Carlos: The Presbyterians hired someone to do that for them. The other churches will need to be at the same point of preparedness with their teams. We all need a working profile, then the transition teams can move forward to the deeper discussions. There will be clarifying questions for the Methodists, Presbyterians, and for us to lead the conversations. Who produces the questions? The profiles start the work, from there the transition teams and the pastors will produce the questions. The other congregations will have similar transition teams coming up with plans, questions, and mission statements. Our Bishop's office will be more involved as it gets more complex.

Dave Braley: In times past, a call committee had a list of 18 steps that covered the process of finding a new pastor. Now the transition team does the first 14 steps, and then the call committee does the last 4 steps. Our constitution requires the call committee to be elected by the congregation, and the council names a transition team.

Juan Carlos: Partnership is the priority, not finding a pastor. We will not be working on this unless partnership fails because a call committee is focused on finding a pastor.

Jennifer: I have information on some of the other churches' leadership situations. The Methodists now have a half-time pastor, Deborah Anderson, starting January 2025, and her plan is to retire here. The Presbyterians have a full-time pastor, Greg Wood, and he will be 65 years old this year, he has no plans for retirement. Rev. Dawn Reynolds at the Episcopalian church is retiring. This would be an excellent time to pursue a shared mission with like-minded church members to serve this community. Methodist attendance is around 40, Presbyterians have around 70, Episcopalians have a small, unknown number in attendance, and we are at around 25 in attendance currently.

Wayne: What are the next steps? Where are other churches in this process?

Jennifer: I will contact the other pastors and explore willingness to continue, we are not sure how this will work. But we know they are hoping to work together with us. The next four years will be worrying for immigrants and refugees, and good leaders are critical. The Lutheran Bishop's Office will contact the church leadership of the other denominations and follow up with inquiries to partner with us.

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Juan Carlos: Jennifer will communicate that we are open for exploration, our Bishop's office is aware, and Bishop Laurie will be communicating with the Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Episcopalian leadership.

Dave Braley: The Methodist Pastor is working part-time, and their pastors have been part-time in the past. Our previous call committees found that the candidates wanted full-time positions only. We have the means to support a full-time pastor.

Beverly: Our congregation is aging and shrinking, it is possible that we do not have the kind of energy available for start up programs or church expansion projects.

Juan Carlos: We need to share our resources and figure out what we have to put on the table, but not from a position of superiority. We need to discuss faith, understanding, then resource sharing.

Wayne: How will the next step be enacted? We are interested in a partnership with other churches and a transition team image of our congregation needs to be created.

Juan Carlos: The profile is to explore our image and identity, not to use as a step to search for a pastor.

David E.: We need to focus on partnership, the demographics are different than they were before the pandemic or at any other time when call committees made inquiries. A lot has changed in the past 3 years when we last did a profile.

Wayne: Do we need two tracks?

Juan Carlos: Yes, but we need to communicate clearly that we are looking for information to partnership, not to look for a pastor.

Dave Braley: The Methodists already have a pastor, aren't they out of the running for partnership?

Jennifer: No, the Methodists are still interested in partnering. They are more fluid in their processes than we are. We are one community because we live in this small town, we see other church members all the time in our daily activities. It is where we are worshipping that we can be more cooperative. The pastors are already friends, we trust and enjoy each others company, and these are huge advantages.

David E.: Because of the trust and enjoyment, this sounds like fun. We can learn from each other and rejoice in the opportunity in front of us.

Wayne: Do we need a pastor on board to lead us through the complexities of a partnership?

Juan Carlos: This would not be the best approach to the issue, and we would risk losing a good leader. A Pastor would want to know is why we did not take care of this first before hiring a Pastor? We should do this now.

Roy: What do we do next to move this forward? Do we contact our Bishop and other leaders?

Jennifer: Bishop Laurie is supportive in our desire to partner with the Methodists. The new Methodist District Supervisor is overwhelmed with new duties and her expanded territory, but she is aware of the inquires. The Presbyterians are busy extending their satellite missions in Reedsport, but Pastor Wood is excited at the prospect of partnering with us. There is enthusiasm to work together, lots of opportunities to make use of our shared resources because none of us can do this alone. The Episcopalians have a wonderful musician, Laura Merz, a labyrinth, and an aging building. the Methodists have passionate members and a parsonage, and we have money and a dedicated congregation. There is no sense of scarcity in doing God's work, we are stronger when we partner.

Dave Braley: Being in Florence, a retirement community, we are in a unique situation. Our church attracts many talented and resourceful retirees that are moving here. Yes, there is an ebb and flow with an older congregation, but attracting young families may not be our strength.

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Juan Carlos: Jennifer already has the relationships with the other pastors in Florence. Heidi is willing to continue work with the transition team on exploring the identity profile and mapping. Jennifer may need to increase her hours to be able to start the three stages for partnership.

Jennifer: Pastor Patty, Pastor Greg, and I met last week about organizing a mutual storytelling presentation of our congregations and will meet in January. Everyone wants to get going on this partnership now and there is no sense of competition or superiority among the differing congregations. My background as a Strategic Planning Specialist and Meeting Facilitator Specialist, is an ideal fit.

Wayne: Juan Carlos and David, thank you for helping to clarify this. We are grateful to have Jennifer to facilitate the process, and this is the best time to go forward.

Juan Carlos: I can promise the bishop's office will help with the complexity of this project and will stay in close contact. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me.

Jennifer closed with a prayer.

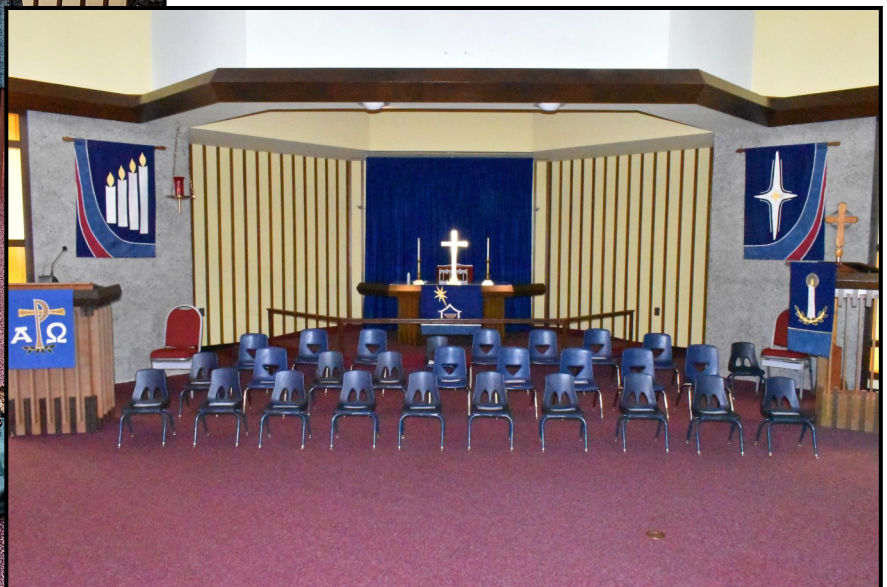
Meeting Adjournment. Meeting adjourned at 5:30 pm.



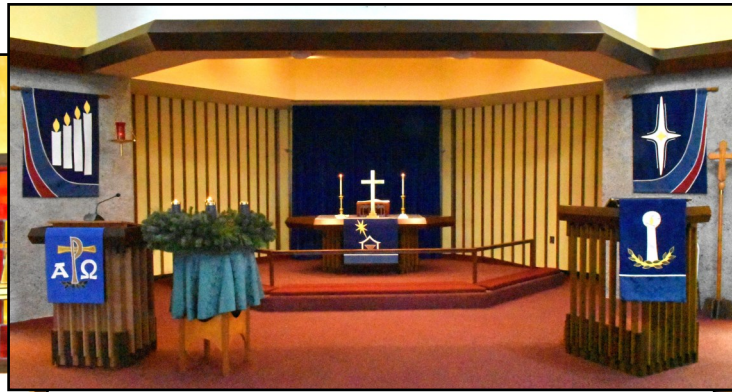
More Decorating Antics to the left.



Empty Chairs waiting for excited Children. Below



*Advent Vespers
Service*



*Sanctuary
Ready for
Advent
Services*



*Decorating Crew
Decisions, Decisions*

