

NEWSLETTER

BUILD. SERVE. STAND.



JOIN US FOR WORSHIP
Sundays at 10am

SHORELINES
Dec. 2025 - Feb. 2026

PASTORAL UPDATE



Last year, I read an article about awe. What it was, why it was so important to the human experience, and how to experience it more. Scientists were trying to measure awe, and they named six core characteristics when someone is feeling awestruck: a diminished sense of self, time alteration, physical sensations like chills, a feeling of connectedness, perception of vastness and the struggle to comprehend it.

They are still studying it, but what they have found is that it has immense benefits to our physical and mental well-being. Awe deactivates our default mode network—the part of our brain responsible for self-perception. This is what allows us to step outside our thoughts in order to be fully present in the moment. It also activates the nerves that are associated with compassion and altruism. The experience of awe turns our focus away from ourselves, giving us perspective and connectedness. Surely, awe is a spiritual practice and a spiritual encounter. I decided to have “awe” as my word of the year, which for me simply meant I would try to be intentional about having more awe in my life and noticing when I felt it.

Sometimes, this happened spontaneously, when I wasn’t expecting it. A thunderstorm with the craziest lightning I have ever seen. My family of six running outside to see the Northern Lights, all shouting with excitement. Paddleboarding on a calm lake, no motors to be heard. One hundred ducks spread out evenly across the water. A sustained conversation with my children that reveals how much they have grown up. Listening to someone on hospice talk about their hopes for the rest of their time. The choir rehearsing an anthem to an empty sanctuary.

Awe isn’t just unexpected and spontaneous, though. It can be cultivated and curated. I also experienced that this year. Traveling to California to see the Redwoods, where no picture I took could capture the awe my whole body felt. Attending sold out concerts with thousands of other people, all singing the same songs and flashing our phones in the dark. Live sporting events, where I screamed with delight when we all won a free chicken sandwich in the fourth quarter. Hearing the Minnesota Orchestra, holding a newborn, receiving people’s private prayer requests every Monday. All these were experiences of awe for me this past year.

As you look towards the end of 2025 and to the beginning of 2026, I encourage you to think about incorporating more awe into your life. Sing with other people, in church or at a concert. Ride your bike to a new view in your neighborhood. Explore a new place in nature. Have coffee with someone who inspires you. Crank up the music. Look up at the stars. Look down at your own hands. Whether you travel abroad or you stay at home - awe surrounds you.

In awe of you and this faith community,

Pastor Brooke

BROOKE HEERWALD STEINER
LEAD PASTOR

brooke@excelsiorumc.org
office: 952.474.5471 ext 1

BUILD. SERVE. STAND.



ADVENT SERMON SERIES

The Grinch Who Stole Advent

This Advent, we will journey with a familiar green curmudgeon to explore the meaning of Advent. For four weeks, we'll look honestly at the things that try to steal our joy, reflect on how God reshapes our hearts, and find a way to sing even when life feels thin or uncertain. No matter what the Grinch says or does, the message will always come through: a light shines in the darkness, and nothing can overcome it.



3pm - Family Service*

5pm - Modern Candlelight Service*

9pm - Reflective Candlelight Service

We can't wait to gather with you as we celebrate the birth of our Savior! Join us for worship services filled with joyful music, beloved Christmas carols, a message of hope, and our traditional candle lighting. We encourage you to invite a friend, neighbor, or family member—there's a place for everyone to experience the wonder of Christmas together.

*Nursery care is available at the 3pm and 5pm services.

CLERGY RENEWAL GRANT UPDATE

We are delighted to share that our congregation has been awarded a Clergy Renewal Grant through the Lilly Endowment. This program was created in order to give pastors extended time for rest, learning, creativity, and spiritual renewal, and to help congregations grow during that time as well. Congregations apply through a highly competitive process, proposing a theme and plan. Our theme is **"Immersive Storytelling"**, focusing on how stories shape faith, identity, and community. The grant covers both Pastor Brooke's renewal activities and the congregation's parallel experiences (guest preachers, pastoral coverage).

Pastor Brooke will be on leave from April 20 to September 8, 2026. During this time, she will step away from day-to-day pastoral responsibilities to engage in travel, reflection, and creative work related to immersive storytelling and invest time in her family relationships. At the same time, our congregation will have its own opportunities to explore the stories that shape who we are as individuals and as a church. More specifics will be shared in the months to come. Reach out to Pastor Brooke or the leadership team with any questions in the meantime.



CHILDREN'S Ministry



Sunday School Update

We have had a strong start to our children's ministry this fall. Sunday School has been consistently well attended and we have welcomed some new families. We rely on our wonderful volunteers to help our mornings run smoothly. Our Sunday School students have spent the fall learning Old Testament stories in fun and interactive ways. We will move onto New Testament stories as we begin rehearsals for the Christmas pageant.

Christmas Pageant

This year's Christmas pageant will be *The Grinch and the Gift of Christmas*, where Cindy Lou Who and the other Whos of Whoville will help teach the Grinch the true meaning of Christmas. Every child or youth who would like to be a part of the program is welcome. Rehearsals begin November 30th during Sunday School and dress rehearsal is Saturday, December 20 at 10am. The pageant will be presented on **Sunday, December 21st** during the 10am service. Following the pageant, stick around for Christmas Fest to enjoy crafts, treats, and fellowship.



Fun Fall Activities

In addition to Sunday School, our fall children and family events and activities included Fall Kick Off and Blessing of the Backpacks, Degler Farm pumpkin patch and hayride, Trunk or Treat, Children's choir, Gratitude Festival, and Children's Interactive worship services.

YOUTH Ministry



We are having some great conversations in Youth Group this fall and expanding our hearts and minds! Our curriculum is from *Shine: Living in God's Light*, and we are currently going through the unit called *Seeking Justice Together* which explores justice and righteousness defined this way - "Biblical justice is not just about fair punishment for wrongdoing but about restorative justice, which involves caring for the vulnerable and changing systems so that injustice does not happen in the first place. Biblical righteousness refers to making right relationships, where people are treated with dignity and respect because they bear the image of God."



Each week we start with this verse from Amos 5: 24 - **"Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."**

We explore welcoming everyone and overcoming the challenges we face when caring for or being welcoming to people in our lives. We look at the needs people have, whether physical, emotional or spiritual, and how each type of need is important and how we might play a role in helping someone with a need. We are learning to open our eyes to laws and rules that exist that benefit some but are not for the good of all, and how it requires us to be courageous to speak up against these injustices. We can impact the world around us even in small ways. "Power with" is an

incredible force for good and can be a tool for change, while "power over" can be used as a weapon and result in great harm. The ways we use our own power can have a significant impact on the well-being of others.

We dive into these meaningful topics by watching video clips, acting out skits of Bible verses, and having interactive and engaging conversations. Each week there are moments of inspiration and fun learning ways to build community, serve others and stand for justice in our lives!



Celebrating New Members

We're delighted to welcome several new members to our church family! Each brings unique gifts, stories, and experiences that enrich our community. Take a moment to get to know them and join us in offering a warm EUMC welcome. We look forward to growing in faith, fellowship, and service together.



Rick and Julie Jacobsen: Rick and Julie are excited to begin a new chapter together after Rick's recent retirement. Rick enjoys cooking, traveling, crossword puzzles, and tackling "Julie projects." A graduate of auctioneer college, he brings a lively spirit to everything he does. Julie fills her days with walking, watercolor painting, attending a drawing class, connecting with friends, and spending time at "Grandma School." She also loves riding her Vespa scooter. They have four daughters, three sons-in-law, and seven grandchildren, and they cherish EUMC's vibrant life and community.

Sarah and Hoon Park: Sarah and Hoon live busy lives with their three children—Greta, Alton, and Joey. Sarah spends her days working, chauffeuring kids, tackling home projects, and biking—she even once took her family biking across Norway! Hoon enjoys listening to podcasts while washing dishes, cheering for his beloved Texas sports teams, and talking fantasy football with his son. He also misses the barbecue from their former home in Austin and is on the hunt for a local favorite. They were drawn to our church by the rainbow flag and colorful doors that reflect a welcoming spirit.



Marlene and Vern Lindquist: Marlene and Vern moved from Montana to be closer to their two daughters and five grandchildren in Blaine and Victoria. Marlene enjoys walking the neighborhood paths, quilting, hand stitching, reading, and playing Wordle with her family. Vern can often be found with a cup of coffee, reading both Minnesota and Montana newspapers, practicing archery, and connecting with friends. A former college instructor, he once taught more than two dozen courses and crafted twelve wood bows and hundreds of arrows. They were drawn to EUMC by the mission, the music, Pastor Brooke's messages, and the warm, welcoming community.

LEADERSHIP

Hello EUMC Community!

As we move deeper into this season, I'm grateful for the ways our church continues to show up with faithfulness, hope, and steady commitment to one another and to our wider community. God truly is moving through this congregation – in small daily ways and in big planning conversations alike.

Capital Campaign & Facility Discernment

Over the past two months, the Leadership Team has continued thoughtful planning around our current capital campaign - Foundational Generosity. Through listening sessions and small group feedback, we've heard strong alignment about caring well for our building and making progress on debt reduction. Resurfacing the parking lot and protecting the exterior (especially the roof) rose as top priorities – investments that strengthen our mission, support longevity, and signal to our neighbors that we're committed to being here for years to come. This work will unfold in phases, with transparency and ongoing communication along the way.

Celebrating Our Staff & Ministry Life

This fall, we are thrilled to share that we are now fully staffed – and we are already seeing that momentum reflected in worship, Bible studies, youth, and children's ministry participation. We are deeply grateful for the people who make ministry happen so thoughtfully here – and grateful for staff's willingness to help support our building and our ministries!

We also received incredibly exciting news: EUMC has been awarded a Lilly Grant to support a pastoral sabbatical to allow Pastor Brooke some personal time for rest and renewal! Brooke's theme for her time away will be Immersive Storytelling. The grant explicitly states Pastor Brooke to do "what makes her heart sing!" and church leadership will be working closely with Brooke to ensure coverage in her absence and exciting programming for the congregation to supplement the sabbatical!

Community Impact & Service

With SNAP benefits temporarily paused due to the government shutdown, ICA has reached out for emergency food drop sites – and EUMC will now serve as one on Saturdays. This is a living-out-our-faith kind of work – tending real needs right outside our doors.

Our Social Justice team is also preparing for the Gratitude Festival and continuing the important work of relationship building, advocacy, and spiritual formation.

Thank you for being people of grace, generosity, and imagination in this season! God is doing beautiful things here – and we're grateful to be on this journey with you.

With gratitude,
Sarah Nelson

Your Leadership Team:

Julie Newell
Chair

Bill Lester & Phil Pulitzer
SPRC

Sarah Nelson
Communications

Jennifer Brady Johnson
& Beth Firkins
Ministry Teams

Kurt Jewell &
Gabe Wiebenga
Finance

Jim Stromberg &
Lynn Hughes
Trustees

SERVE. OTHERS



OUR COMMUNITY

So-Hi Community Park – Phase II

The So-Hi Playground is thriving—already the site of birthday parties, Family Night Out events, fireworks watch parties, and countless community gatherings. Building on this momentum, we have begun planning **Phase II**, the next major step in creating an even more vibrant community space.

Scheduled for **Spring 2026**, Phase II will feature a multipurpose sport court designed for basketball, pickleball, four square, and other playground games. Plans also include a multi-use activities and shade shelter, upgraded picnic and game tables, additional seating, improved porta-potty access, and expanded spaces for recreation and social connection.

So-Hi Community Park operates as an independent **501(c)(3)**; all fundraising, expenditures, and operating expenses are separate from Excelsior United Methodist Church. EUMC dedicates the land used by So-Hi and ensures that it remains available for public use.

You'll be hearing much more about this exciting expansion after the holidays—including plenty of opportunities to take part in fun, sports-themed fundraising events!



STAND. FOR JUSTICE

OUTREACH MINISTRY UPDATE

It's a busy time for our food ministries and as usual, our church family has stepped up to help our community! ICA asked us to give out emergency bags each Saturday and of course, we said yes. There's been an increase in the use of the little free pantry and in the donations being dropped off. We gave out turkeys on November 12th. Our annual reverse advent calendar will be starting soon. It's such a huge help! And we are finally able to start taking online appointments for the food shelf starting on December 10th! We're hoping this will keep people from feeling like they need to arrive hours early. We'll be giving out gift cards and Christmas cookies to our clients on December 17th. The Outreach team is so incredibly grateful for the support of Pastor Brooke and the church leadership and to all our church family for your incredibly generous donations of money, food and time!

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY UPDATE

Democracy, Immigrants, Christian Nationalism Are Social Justice Team's Topics for the New Year

The Social Justice Ministry Team selected three topics to examine in the new year: defending democracy, supporting immigrants, and examining the rise of Christian nationalism in the United States. The team plans to use videos and documentary films, speakers, and churchwide book reads to examine these issues and then will suggest action steps.

In November, team member Marlys Gapstur Sand attended a training to empower allies to support undocumented people during encounters with Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. She will continue to keep the team informed about needs and more ways to be involved with the sponsor of the training.

Watch the weekly church email for details about upcoming social justice activities. The team's next meeting is Thursday, December 11, at 6:30 p.m., at the church or on Zoom. New members are welcome!

***Being Ellen* Book Discussion**

Author and transgender activist Ellie Krug returned to EUMC to discuss her latest book, *Being Ellen: A Second Chance at Life*, on Nov. 3. The event, sponsored by the Social Justice team, was a great success, with 70 people in the EUMC sanctuary and 28 watching via live stream. If you missed this meaningful and inspiring event, you can watch the video at <https://vimeo.com/1132539161>.





CALENDAR

Calendar subject to change. Check website calendar for current schedule.

Weekly Schedule

Sundays

10am - Worship & Sunday School
Communion on Dec 7, Jan 4,
Feb 1
Interactive Worship on Jan 11 and
Feb 1

Mondays

7:30am - Men's Bible Breakfast
9:30am - Bible Study with Pastor
Brooke*
(*Not meeting: Dec. 15, Dec 22,
and Dec 29)
11am - Brown Bag Discussion
Group

Tuesdays

1:30pm - Walking Prayer Ministry
2pm - Balance & Stretch with
Tiffany

Wednesdays

6pm - Youth Group
6pm - Music Rehearsals (Joyful
Noise Brass Ensemble 6pm, Four
Plus More 6:45pm, EUMC Choir
7:30pm).

Saturdays

8am - Men's Support Group

December Events

December 2 - 12pm Blood Drive;
6pm Dance Ministry; 6:30pm
Leadership Meeting

December 3 - 6pm Parents of
Teens Book Discussion

December 7 - 5pm Primetimers
Christmas Open House

December 10 - 3pm ICA Food
Shelf

December 11 - 1pm Sarah/Lydia
Circle; 6:30pm Social Justice Team

December 16 - 5pm Simpson Meal

December 17 - 3pm ICA Food Shelf

December 21 - 10am Christmas
Pageant & Christmas Fest

December 24 - Christmas Eve
Candlelight Services at 3pm, 5pm
and 9pm

January Events

January 8 - 1pm Sarah/Lydia Circle

January 14 - 3pm ICA Food Shelf

January 15 - 6:30pm Social Justice
Team Meeting

January 18 - 11:15am Contempla-
tive Practice

January 26 - 1pm Cover Girls Book
Group
(Discussing *In Memoriam* by Alice
Winn)

January 28 - 3pm ICA Food Shelf

February Events

February 11 - 3pm ICA Food Shelf

February 12 - 1pm Sarah/Lydia
Circle

February 15 - 11:15am Contempla-
tive Practice

February 17 - 12pm Blood Drive

February 19 - 6:30pm Social
Justice Team Meeting

February 23 - 1pm Cover Girls
Book Group
(Discussing *Dear America, Notes of
an Undocumented Citizen* by Jose
Antonio Vargas)

February 25 - 3pm ICA Food Shelf

FINANCE TEAM REPORT

Closing out 2025, we would like to thank everyone for following through on your commitments. Thanks for your generous support, we were able to finish the year in a very sound financial position. We were able to support all budget commitments for the year while supporting additional opportunities in a few programs.

As highlighted in the previous newsletter, we were able to pay down a significant portion of one loan, reducing our monthly operating expenses. The Foundational Generosity Campaign will help us continue with this objective enabling the use of our budget to do more for our church and community.

Looking to 2026, we will be going through the budget development process through the end of 2025 based on estimates of giving. If you have not had a chance to submit your estimate of giving yet, it's not too late.

We are looking forward to another great year, and again, thank you for everything you do to make EUMC such an amazing community.

-Gabe Wiebenga & Kurt Jewell

If you have questions about your current giving or would like more information about contributing stock, investment funds, or other special gifts, please contact Beverly Eckhardt (952.474.5471 ext. 5 or bev@excelsiorumc.org). She is glad to assist you.



PURPOSE

Loving Beyond Ourselves

VISION

To be known as a nurturing, inclusive and courageous Christian community.

MISSION

Sharing God's love by building community, serving others, and standing for justice.

CONTACT US

Excelsiorumc.org
881 Third Ave, Excelsior, MN 55331

STAFF

REV. BROOKE HEERWALD STEINER

Lead Pastor

952.474.5471 Ext. 1 | Brooke@excelsiorumc.org

JEANNIE SHUBITZ

Music Director

Jeannie@excelsiorumc.org

SARAH HEYD

Youth Ministries Director

952.474.5471 Ext. 2 | Sarah@excelsiorumc.org

KALLIE STROH

Children's Ministries Director

952.474.5471 Ext. 4 | Kallie@excelsiorumc.org

ELIZABETH GUILLAUME

Office Administrator

952.474.5471 Ext. 3 | Office@excelsiorumc.org

BEVERLY ECKHARDT

Treasurer

952.474.5471 Ext. 5 | Bev@excelsiorumc.org

BLAIR PRAX

Custodian

Blair@excelsiorumc.org

JEFFERY FAWBUSH

Instrumentalist & Songwriter

JAMES LeVOIR

A/V Coordinator

ALYSSA SMITH

Nursery Childcare

JAMIE RAHM

Nursery Childcare



Non-Profit Organization
Permit No. 39
Excelsior, Minnesota
U.S. Postage Paid

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

881 Third Avenue
Excelsior, MN
55331

 excelsiorumc.org
 952.474.5471

BUILD
COMMUNITY
SERVE
OTHERS
STAND
FOR JUSTICE