

NEWSLETTER

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JOIN US FOR WORSHIP
Sundays at 10am

SHORELINES
March - May 2026

PASTORAL UPDATE



“All Jesus did that day was tell stories—a long storytelling afternoon. His storytelling fulfilled the prophecy: I will open my mouth and tell stories; I will bring out into the open things hidden since the world’s first day.” Matthew 13:34–35, *The Message*

Stories have always been where I turn for rest, renewal, and reconnection—with God, with others, and with myself. When the world feels heavy or life feels rushed, storytelling restores me: through books and films, shared meals and conversations, laughter and memory. We were each created by a storytelling God; our faith is shaped by a storytelling Jesus, who knew that stories unite us, deepen empathy, and make mystery livable. My upcoming renewal leave, themed Immersive Storytelling, is an invitation to linger in that holy work without hurry—to engage stories with all the senses, to learn alongside storytelling communities, and to explore writing, listening, traveling, and remembering beyond the pressure to produce. This time and space will allow me to uncover what has been hidden in my own life, to write new stories with my family and friends, and to return renewed, grounded, and more fully alive to the story God continues to tell among us.

I will be on leave from April 20–September 8, 2026. During this time, I will travel to Oregon and participate in a community storytelling certificate program. I will head to New York City and see stories come alive on stage and on screen. Our family of six will spend four weeks in Europe, exploring Spain, France and Switzerland. In between, I will work with a coach and renew my spirit through healthy habits, rest and reflection. I will also have extended time with family and friends and invest in those relationships.

This grant is generously paid for by the Lilly Endowment Clergy Renewal Program. The purpose of the grant is to provide “an opportunity for pastors to step away briefly from the demands of daily parish life and discover what will make their hearts sing through well-planned purposeful activities. Renewal leaves allow for times of intentional exploration, reflection, and regaining enthusiasm and creativity for ministry.”

You will be in wonderful hands while I am away. Pastor Terry Benedett-Farmer will be the main point of contact during my leave. She will cover all pastoral care, preach, and help coordinate the lay sermon series. She will also hold some office hours each week for anyone who needs to have a pastoral presence or conversation. Two guest preachers will also join you—Pastor Roger Parrish-Siggelkow and Pastor John Ross—each preaching for four weeks.

A group of lay members will coordinate storytelling events where you will each be invited to participate. These storytelling conversations will give you a taste of what I am being trained in and give you space to both share and listen to stories that matter. Our youth will have artistic storytelling events—hopefully both photography and graffiti painting—in summer or early fall. Upon my return, we will collectively plan a storytelling-themed celebration event. May you find stories as refreshing and rejuvenating as I do!

With gratitude,
Pastor Brooke

BROOKE HEERWALD STEINER
LEAD PASTOR

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BUILD. SERVE. STAND.





Lenten Worship Series

Tell Me Something Good: Grounding Ourselves in the Good News this Lent

Lent began as a season when new believers prepared for baptism by learning what lies at the heart of Christianity. Our Lenten worship series returns us to what was central in Jesus' own life and ministry: radical welcome, love of neighbor, care for the vulnerable, feeding the hungry, and nonviolence in the face of injustice. At the core of his teaching is liberation, mercy, grace, and love—truly good news for all—though in our time his words are often softened or distorted. Jesus' ministry can be described as "radical" which comes from the Latin word "radicalis," meaning "root" or "ground." Therefore, the good news should bring us back to our roots. Can we be "good news" people in a world too often burdened by bad news?

This good news is joyful and abundant—like fine wine at a feast, a mustard seed growing, perfume poured out, bread multiplied for the hungry—alive in the world and meant to take root in us. May this Lent ground our hearts in God's expansive goodness and move us to become people who embody and share that good news in a world longing to see, hear, and taste what is truly good.

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LENTEN WORSHIP SERVICES

Soup Dinner & Prayer Stations - March 18

We will gather on March 18 for a community potluck-style soup dinner at 5:30pm followed by guided prayer stations at 6:30pm.

Palm Sunday - March 29 at 10am

Join us for a joyful Palm Processional.

Good Friday - April 3 at 7pm

Join us for a meaningful Good Friday service of reflection, prayer, and music.

Easter Egg Hunt & Community Brunch Saturday, April 4 at 11am

All are welcome! An outdoor egg hunt for children (weather permitting) will be followed by a shared meal. In case of inclement weather or muddy conditions, the egg hunt will be held indoors.



Easter Sunday Worship - April 5 at 9 & 10:30am

Join us in celebrating the risen Christ as we worship together through joyful music, scripture, and an inspiring message. Come experience the hope and new life of Easter as one church family. Childcare will be available for both services. Livestream at 10:30am.

BUILD. COMMUNITY



CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES

Easter Egg Hunt

Bring your basket and join us for our annual Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 4th at 11am. In case of inclement weather or muddy conditions, the egg hunt will be held indoors at EUMC.



Pizza & Movie Night

March 13 from 6 - 8 PM

Join us in the classroom for pizza and Zootopia 2! Parents may drop off kids or stay. Please RSVP to Kallie (Kallie@excelsiorumc.org) if you are planning to join us.



Vacation Bible School 2026

Date: August 3 - 6

Time: 5:30-8pm (dinner is included)

Who: Ages 4 years old to completed 5th grade. Youth in 6th grade and above can participate or volunteer to help! Contact Kallie Stroh if you have questions.



Christmas Pageant Recap

We had a record number of participants in this year's Christmas pageant, The Grinch and the Gift of Christmas. Thank you to everyone who participated and volunteered to help make the Christmas pageant a success!



YOUTH MINISTRY

Our curriculum this winter, Seeking Peace Together, is an empowering welcome. In a world filled with stress, unrest, and violence, we can find peace in our connection to God which is nurtured through prayer, a foundation of peace. Peace isn't just the absence of war or violence. Peace has multiple aspects: peace with God, self, others and creation.

We practiced a Breath Prayer - Breathe In "Loving God/Teacher/God of Light/Healer/Loving Friend..." and Breathe Out "give me peace/help me/comfort me/lead me/give me strength..." We engaged in Paul's letter to the church at Philippi where he tells us God will guard our hearts and minds. Our hearts can easily slip into anxiety, and our minds can easily justify the bitterness and judgment that lead us away from peace. Paul does not want us to turn a blind eye to pain and suffering but encourages us to focus our attention on things that are of God and find gratitude. John chapter 15 illustrates God as a vine grower and the strength of being connected in community with branches rooted in Jesus bearing the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

We will continue to seek peace together in the upcoming weeks. Youth Group takes place Wednesdays from 6:00-8:00pm. 6-12 graders from EUMC and friends are welcome to join us in Youth Group any time! Together is a wonderful place to be!

Ray of Life Event

At youth group in January, we had the great pleasure of helping assemble over 40 solar-powered light kits for "Ray of Life" alongside a group of adult volunteers. These kits were sent to Ukraine to provide essential power and hope in war-torn areas with destroyed electrical grids. Thank you to Colleen Klingelutz for connecting us to this important mission. "Ray of Life" gave us a tangible way to make a difference and send support to the people of Ukraine.





LEADERSHIP

Over the past several months, our leadership conversations have centered on strengthening the foundation of our church so that ministry can flourish for years to come! Last fall, the Leadership Team affirmed the importance of addressing both long-term financial sustainability and the care of our physical campus. Through a feasibility process and early donor conversations, there was broad agreement that investing in debt reduction and essential building needs is not only necessary, but widely supported within our congregation. These conversations laid important groundwork for a future capital campaign and helped clarify shared priorities around stewardship, transparency, and long-range vision.

Building on that momentum, the Leadership Team took steps in December to support safety, staffing, and operations. A comprehensive Safety Plan was adopted to help ensure the well-being of parishioners, staff, and guests, with ongoing review built in. Jim Stromberg was appointed Safety Coordinator, reflecting our shared responsibility to create a space that is both welcoming and prepared. We also took time to celebrate a full and dedicated staff who continue to serve our congregation with care and commitment!

Financially, the church remains on stable ground. We are grateful for a balanced budget and for the ability to pay off our highest interest loan in February.

Exciting ministry and community initiatives continue to take shape, too! Preparations for Pastor Brooke's 2026 sabbatical are progressing thoughtfully, staff transitions have gone smoothly, and plans for the So-Hi Community Park are moving forward with grant support. These improvements will create more welcoming space for adolescents and allow the resurfacing of the lower parking area to serve multiple purposes – sports, gatherings, and limited overflow parking.

As spring unfolds, the Leadership Team says “thank you” to both Sarah Nelson and Jim Stromberg and welcomes Jesse Nelson (Trustees) and Kaitlin Holm (Communications). Leadership remains deeply thankful for the congregation's faithfulness, generosity, and prayers. Together, we continue listening for where God is leading – grounded in trust, guided by hope, and committed to loving our church and community well.

Your Leadership Team

Leadership Chair
Julie Newell

Communications
Kaitlin Holm

Finance
Kurt Jewell, Gabe Wiebenga

Ministry Team Liaisons
Jennifer Brady-Johnson,
Beth Firkins

Staff Parish
Phil Pulitzer, Bill Lester

Trustees
Lynn Hughes, Jesse Nelson

Major Milestone: Loan Paid in Full

We are thrilled to announce that we have officially paid off the **\$214,573** balance on our smaller remodel loan on 02/10/2026. This is a significant achievement for our congregation; being free from this debt allows us to direct more resources toward mission and ministry rather than interest and principal payments.



EUMC's New Safety Team

EUMC is a nurturing, inclusive, and courageous Christian community committed to sharing God's love by building community, serving others, and standing for justice. We proudly proclaim that "God's doors are open to all," and living into that mission means ensuring our church is a safe and welcoming place for parishioners, guests, and staff. In December, the Leadership Team established EUMC's first Safety Team and approved governance documents that lay the foundation for how we will approach safety moving forward.

The Safety Team focuses on overall safety—not just security—including preparedness for medical emergencies, fire, severe weather, and other potential risks. Team members will not be uniformed or carry weapons; they intend to be unseen but prepared to step forward when needed, and professional first responders will be a primary safety resource to the Safety Team and guests.

Initial efforts include reviewing service-time safety procedures, ensuring equipment such as fire extinguishers and the AED are in place, perimeter doors are locked, assisting guests into the building, and monitoring the lobby area during services. As the team grows, it will continue developing response guidelines, offering training to staff and congregants, and expanding its capacity under the leadership of Jim Stromberg and a team of nine members.



So-Hi Community Park

We have been overwhelmed by the incredible community support for So-Hi Community Park and the way it has become a gathering place not only for Excelsior residents, but for families across the broader area. Seeing the park actively used by children, teens, and neighbors has reinforced how important this shared outdoor space is to our community.

We are grateful to share that the park has been awarded a \$104,000 grant from the Hennepin County Youth Sports Association, administered through the City of Excelsior. This important investment allows us to move forward with key elements of Phase 2, focused on creating a welcoming space for adolescents to gather, play, and spend more time outdoors.

With this funding, we plan to resurface the former annex parking lot and complete the sport-court surface to accommodate basketball and potentially pickleball. Additional planning is underway as we seek bids for sidewalks, lighting, a portable toilet enclosure, landscaping, and a shade structure. While the grant provides strong momentum, important features such as landscaping, benches, pathways, and shade structures still require additional funding. We will be reaching out to the community for support as we continue working toward full completion of the master plan by the end of 2026.

To guide this next chapter, we have partnered with landscape architecture firm AFLA to finalize the park's master plan and ensure thoughtful placement of landscaping, gathering spaces, and shade structures.

We are also pleased to welcome two new board members, Eric Snyder and Emily DeRosier, both committed Excelsior residents dedicated to supporting the park's future. Thank you for continuing to champion So-Hi Community Park!

Music Ministry Spring Update

The music ministry at Excelsior UMC is thriving! We have the benefit of being a very visible ministry, which means there isn't much we can share with you that you are not already experiencing each Sunday. What you may not see, and what we would like to call attention to, are the many, many hours and talents freely given by so many of our congregation in order to keep our music program growing and giving. From the sound and A/V engineering, to the slide shows, to the generosity of giving, to the hours of musical preparation and rehearsal that go into the music for any given Sunday, our music program is thriving because of our talented and generous community here at EUMC. We are so deeply thankful for the pianists, the composers/arrangers, the musicians who haul their gear (and their incredible talent) to and from the church, the singers, the technicians who allow us to be heard and seen, the parents who get their kids to rehearsals, and above all, the open-hearted creativity and generosity of our community. The continued success of our music program also relies on its growth - if you have ever considered joining one of our singing or instrumental groups, PLEASE COME and join us for a choir or instrumental rehearsal! Going forward, we will continue to explore ways to extend our music beyond the walls of our church!



Wednesday After School Program

Debra Black coordinates the Wednesday After School Program in partnership with Minnetonka Schools. She shared this update with us:

I've had the honor of partnering with EUMC by offering an after-school program on Wednesdays for children living near the church for at least fifteen years. Most of the children are elementary school aged, but we regularly have middle and high school children stop by for a snack and an update of their lives. Many of them now have jobs nearby.

Each week we start with a snack provided by a faithful group of women from the church. These women have been taking turns bringing healthy snacks each week for well over a decade. The kids are always excited to see what the snacks will be. They talk about coming to the after-school program the entire week at school. It is truly a highlight!

We added a Spanish speaking mom to help us communicate better with our newest students. It has worked out great for everyone. She has been such a nice addition. It helps make all the students feel even more welcome and comfortable.

A former student, who is now an adult, stopped and thanked me. She said that she had a better childhood because of the after-school program. (She even apologized for being such a Smart Alec back when she was a fifth grader, which was completely unnecessary.)

The after-school program, and now the playground, do help the children feel valued and cared for by the community. Many thanks to everyone in the church who helped support this and many other programs. We are truly blessed to have your support!



SERVE.

OTHERS



ICA & Free Little Pantry

The EUMC Outreach Team has been very busy from December through February, focusing on our twice-monthly ICA food shelf (held the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays) and the Little Free Pantry on church property, which is available to the community 24/7. We recently launched an online appointment system for ICA clients, allowing households to reserve 15-minute shopping times between 2-5 pm, and we typically serve 35-45 families at each event. Recently, however, we've seen a decrease in attendance as some families have shared fears about leaving home or gathering in public spaces. In response, volunteers are working hard to provide a safe and welcoming experience, partnering with a local volunteer patrol group that monitors activity near the church during ICA hours. We have also begun offering home deliveries for families unable to attend, bringing food and hygiene supplies to more than a dozen households so far.

The Little Free Pantry continues to be used daily, stocked by dedicated volunteers with shelf-stable foods and hygiene items available to anyone in need. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of our congregation and community partners, including significant donations of diapers and essential items collected at Excelsior Brewing and fresh produce and proteins from a local moms group. We remain committed to ensuring food and supplies reach those who need them and will continue this important work in the months ahead.



The New Simpson Shelter is Up and Operating!

Simpson Community Shelter & Apartments is a new, modern, trauma-informed facility combining shelter, supportive housing, and comprehensive services under one roof. The building includes

- Trauma-informed design
- Accessible and adaptable spaces and sleeping areas
- A health clinic run by Hennepin Health Care for the Homeless
- 24-hour operations, seven days a week, with a staffed front desk
- Accommodations for service partners
- Commercial kitchen and dining room
- Space for volunteer groups to cook and serve daily meals
- Solar panels and geothermal HVAC system
- Green space and balcony

Our church is serving monthly dinners and occasional lunches at the shelter. If you are interested in participating in this ministry, please contact Jane Pole, Jill Jewell, or Jim Gagnon.



FINANCE & STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship Update: Operating Giving and Foundational Generosity Capital Campaign

We continue to see encouraging growth in giving, driven by steady year-over-year increases and generous engagement from newer households. In 2025, offering income exceeded initial projections in a meaningful way, a strong reflection of this congregation's engagement. We are especially grateful to the 80 households who submitted a 2026 Estimate of Giving card, marking an increase in participation over recent years and signaling deep, ongoing commitment.

A total of **\$595,000** has been pledged to the three-year Foundational Generosity capital campaign (2026-2028), positioning us well to move forward with important investments in our future.

2025 Financial Update: Faithfulness in Giving

As we move into 2026, we want to celebrate the incredible ways your generosity is impacting our church's future. Here is a snapshot of our year-end financial position:

2025 Year-End Performance

Our financial health remained strong throughout the year. By closely monitoring our spending and prioritizing stewardship, we ended 2025 with a healthy surplus.

Budget vs. Actual Highlights:

Total Income: \$614,000

Operating Expenses: \$516,900

Net Surplus: \$97,100

This surplus, combined with the successful loan payoff, positions us to enter 2026 with confidence and a renewed focus on our community goals.

Looking Ahead

Your consistent giving has not only kept our ministries running but has also cleared the path for future growth. We are deeply grateful for your partnership in managing the resources God has entrusted to us. *A full, itemized report is available upon request through the church office.*

-Kaitlin Holm, Kurt Jewell
& Gabe Wiebenga



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.

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