

Semi-Annual Report June 2026



Letter From the Council President

Dear Bethesda family,

STARTING THE YEAR

Our year began dramatically when severe storms swept through Iowa on the night of our first Council meeting. Even so, we were able to continue our work thanks to Zoom. We all hoped that stormy evening would not be a sign of what lay ahead.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Change has been a major theme as we entered 2026 under our new organizational structure. We now have committees rather than boards, while our Ministry Teams remain to be the vital backbone of our congregation. Council members also took on additional responsibilities as committee co-chairs to help guide the transition. I am deeply grateful for their willingness to serve in this way. Feedback has been mostly positive, and I appreciate everyone's support and patience as we continue working through these changes.

MEETINGS AND COLLABORATION

Headwaters (It Starts With You, or HISWY), our all-committee and team meeting, is held on the third Tuesday of every odd-numbered month. The first two gatherings have gone very well and have encouraged strong team collaboration.

We also restarted Executive Team meetings for Council. These meetings take place a week before each Council or Headwaters meeting and help us prepare, stay organized, and keep our attention on what needs to be done.

STAFFING AND SUPPORT

Last year, we welcomed Associate Pastor Jesse, Administrative Specialist Heather Holcomb, Splash Coordinator Elizabeth Matthies, and Collaborative Learning Student Levi Faas to Bethesda. Each has been a tremendous asset, contributing in meaningful ways across the life of our congregation. I thank them all for their dedication and service.

TEAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

So many teams have done excellent work during these first six months, and I am thankful for everyone who has contributed in any way. One example is Saving Suds, which made a significant change this year by moving to Spin City and adopting a new method for distributing assistance to the community. Instead of counting out quarters, the team now provides pre-loaded cards, and reports indicate that this approach has been working very well.

Letter From the Council President

Of course, Saving Suds and many other teams can always use more help. I encourage you to consider volunteering at Bethesda in whatever way you can. It does not have to be a major commitment—even offering an hour or two as you are able can make a real difference in the life of our church.

UPCOMING PRIORITIES

Looking ahead, we have several major projects that will require prioritization and discussion about funding:

- Parking lot repairs
- Kitchen stove/oven replacement
- Commons carpet replacement

Many generous people have already contributed to one or more of these projects, and we hope you will consider helping as well if you are able.

SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Finally, I had the privilege of attending the Synod Assembly in Cedar Rapids this year. Taking part in the election of our bishop was an honor I will not soon forget. It was encouraging to gather with more than 300 church members from across the Southeastern District and to be reminded that we are not alone in our struggles. Other churches are facing many of the same challenges we do, and it was a great comfort to talk openly with others and hear the Synod affirm that they stand with us and are ready to help in any way they can.

With gratitude,
Donna Scherr
Council President



Council President, Donna Scherr, with Bishop Amy Current.



Lead Pastor Bryan Simmons and Associate Pastor Jesse Hershberger at the Synod Assembly.

Letter From the Lead Pastor

¹⁶ "I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the gentiles. ¹⁹ When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you at that time, ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you".

- Matthew 10:16-20

Dear Beloved in Christ,

Christianity, especially in America, seems to have forgotten that to follow Jesus involves being at odds with the ways of the world. The Jesus movement will always be an affront to governors and kings and established religious power because it is always a challenge to the very power that they enjoy. The wolf gets what it wants through strategy, opportunity, and striking when the time is right in order to take control of the situation. The sheep, on the other hand, just is. It grazes and sleeps and doesn't very much pay attention to danger until it is too late. When Christians try to seize control the way the world does through violence, manipulation, and contempt for others, they have become no different than any other group desiring power, even if they assume it to be different because their intentions are "good" and for God. No, they will know we are Christians by our love.

That's why I'm so glad that Bethesda proclaims this love to a weary world! We uplift those in need through our service to them in the Food Pantry, Clothing Closet, and Saving Suds. We welcome the stranger by supporting immigrants and asylum seekers and actively support the Melnyk and Valero families as they are here under various protections. We actively welcome those who do not feel welcome elsewhere but should through our work with Reconciled in Christ and the NAACP. Our weekly podcast explores the Bible as we find God's love revealed in our text study as well as proclaim it through our preaching each week. Our children and youth are taught this love in Splash, Oasis, and Flood, where we encourage these young people to live out that love like Jesus did. Bethesda is a place to be gathered in love, grow in that love, and to go and be sent into the world to proclaim that love. There is no mistake here, God's power is made known in love!



As we take this break over the summer from much of our programming, I encourage you to consider, how can you join Bethesda in what we do for the sake of Good News of God's love for a world that wants to cling to power? How can you gather people into a living relationship with Jesus Christ? How can you grow as a disciple through worship, prayer, and study of God's Word? And how can you go into the world to share the Gospel in word and deed? It's the core of who we are, and it matters in this world.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Bryan Simmons
Lead Pastor

Letter From the Associate Pastor

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. ~Ephesians 3:17-20



Younger youth have music time with Co-Director of Music, Nancy Ewing & Intern, Levi Faas

On Living Water Wednesdays, when our preschoolers and elementary-aged students gather for a time of learning about God through music, one of the most raucous songs is the Sunday School classic "Deep and Wide". If you are unfamiliar, the lyrics go as follows (you may have to use your imagination for the gestures that go along with them): "Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide".

Every time we sing it, we choose one word to remove from our singing, so it quickly becomes "___ and ___, ___ and ___, there's a ___ flowing ___ and ___". Of course, we often mess up and laughter abounds.

While some think this song refers to a temple in Ezekiel 47, I find more meaning in its connection to the above words from Ephesians 3 as I imagine God's love for us overflowing like a fountain, deep and wide into our lives. It is an impossible task to fully grasp the width and length and height and depth of Christ's love for us, and yet that is our mission as a community of faith: to let that immeasurable love in to us, that it would overflow out of the walls of our building and into the world--a world in desperate need of this love and good news. This is only possible when we remain rooted in love: love for God, love for one another, and love for our world.

Over the past year, we have experienced the *depth* of Christ's love through growing visitation and care ministries. Through prayers, conversations, cards, and calls, we have shared our burdens together and supported one another. We have seen the *width* of Christ's love as we continue to reach beyond ourselves. Our food pantry, clothing closet, and laundry ministries are well known and respected as a resource in our community.

We have witnessed the *length* of Christ's love in God's faithfulness across generations. From the most newly baptized infants, to those who have known God's love for decades, it is a gift to see the ways in which our stories of faith continue to unfold. I am particularly grateful to the ways in which all generations support our youngest members and Living Water Wednesday programming. Your prayers, service, and donations make it possible for even the littlest among us to begin to grasp how much God loves them.

Letter From the Associate Pastor

Finally, we have felt the *height* of Christ's love in worship where our hearts and minds are reminded of and refueled for our ultimate mission: continuing to spread the life-changing love of God out into our world. Here is where we boldly proclaim that all are welcome at Christ's table--a sorely needed message in a world that values power and exclusion over welcome and humility.

Going into the year ahead, I cannot wait to see the ways in which God will continue to be at work, in long awaited and planned mission and in ways we have not yet begun to imagine. Rooted in the love of Christ, overflowing deep and wide into our world, I am excited to see how we will continue to Gather, Grow, and Go for the sake of Christ.

In Christ,
Pastor Jesse Hershberger
Associate Pastor

Letter From the Intern

This year marked the beginning of my role as Bethesda's Collaborative Learning Student while I continue my seminary studies at Wartburg. In early June, I was grateful to receive endorsement from the Southeastern Iowa Synod candidacy committee, an important milestone on the path toward ordained ministry. At the same time, endorsement is only one more step in what Eugene Peterson called "a long obedience in the same direction." Looking back, I am reminded that call is not merely an abstract notion of vocation, but must take shape in a particular place, among real, beloved people. For this season, Bethesda has become that place for me.

One of my joys of this past year has been participating more fully in the worship life of the congregation. Whether preaching, leading portions of the liturgy, or visiting with many of you in your homes, I continue to be blessed by the witness and faithfulness of this community. This summer, I also had the opportunity to lead a four-week study on the Psalms, as we explored how these ancient prayers help us bring our whole lives before God in trust, praise, lament, thanksgiving.



Intern Levi Faas rallying the crowd at our combined worship service on May, 16th, 2026.



(From left to right) Amelie Newstrom, Callie Woodcock, & Anna Weber enjoying time at FLOOD's end of year celebration.

Among the most rewarding parts of this year has been working with FLOOD, Bethesda's high school ministry. While I help facilitate conversations about faith and life, the ministry has always been first about relationships. Few people have witnessed those relationships more closely than my wife, Kate, who has become a beloved part of

"I began helping with FLOOD last fall after Levi informed me that I was "more fun than him." Since then, getting involved with this group of high school students has been one of the biggest blessings of my year. They are funny, clever, insightful, silly, and kind. We've gone bowling, held Nerf gun wars, gathered around bonfires, played countless games, and even brought back the Bethesda high school lock-in. It has been a joy to watch these students grow in friendship and faith—and I think they might be having almost as much fun as I am". - Kate Faas



Levi & Kate Faas with Associate Pastor Jesse Hershberger at FLOOD's end of year celebration.

Letter From the Intern

As I look ahead, I am excited to continue deepening the relationships we have formed, growing as a pastoral leader, and discovering where God is already at work among the people of Bethesda. Thank you, all of you, for this opportunity to serve, learn with, and belong to this beautiful community.

Peace,
Levi Faas
Intern



BETHESDA LUTHERAN CHURCH

Congregation Approved Budget for 2026

	2023 Actual	2024 Actual	2025 Actual	2026 Budget
Income:				
Offering Receipts:				
Offering Income	\$ 876,761	\$ 873,237	\$ 875,890	\$ 940,000
Loose Offerings	\$ 4,582	\$ 6,439	\$ 5,605	\$ 4,000
Festival Offerings	\$ 8,050	\$ 9,375	\$ 8,589	\$ 8,000
Total Offerings	\$ 889,393	\$ 889,051	\$ 890,084	\$ 952,000
Non-Offering Receipts:				
Facility Use Income	\$ 22,312	\$ 20,199	\$ 18,920	\$ 20,000
Interest Income	\$ 5,320	\$ 14,572	\$ 15,269	\$ 12,000
Miscellaneous Income	\$ 3,252	\$ 1,397	\$ 4,642	\$ 1,000
Total Non-Offering Receipts	\$ 30,884	\$ 36,168	\$ 38,831	\$ 33,000
Grand Total Income:	\$ 920,277	\$ 925,219	\$ 928,915	\$ 985,000
Expenses:				
Christian Education and Youth	\$ 12,731	\$ 14,934	\$ 7,414	\$ 12,950
Christian Service, Mission	\$ 62,270	\$ 60,616	\$ 62,278	\$ 65,196
Congregational Life and Care	\$ 1,592	\$ 624	\$ 2,199	\$ 3,150
Stewardship	\$ 7,411	\$ 7,105	\$ 8,356	\$ 8,540
Worship, Music & Arts	\$ 9,087	\$ 3,966	\$ 8,062	\$ 12,200
Administrative Support	\$ 103,133	\$ 98,093	\$ 100,401	\$ 92,700
Facilities Management	\$ 131,472	\$ 126,622	\$ 170,466	\$ 166,550
Mortgage: Principal & Interest	\$ 65,460	\$ 65,460	\$ 66,831	\$ 65,400
Personnel	\$ 521,668	\$ 535,060	\$ 507,547	\$ 591,642
Total Budgeted Expenses	\$ 914,824	\$ 912,480	\$ 933,554	\$ 1,018,328
Net Increase (Decrease) in General Fund	\$ 5,453	\$ 12,739	\$ (4,639)	\$ (33,328)
Funds used to balance the Budget				
<i>Growth Transtion Funds used in 2025</i>			\$ 4,639	\$ -
<i>Growth Transtion Funds used in 2026</i>			-	\$ 33,328
Total			4,639	\$ 33,328
OTHER CONGREGATION ACTIVITIES				
<i>Food Pantry Cash Receipts</i>	\$ 51,147	\$ 57,965	\$ 94,133	
<i>Food Pantry Food Expense</i>	\$ (61,544)	\$ (71,607)	\$ (62,828)	
Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ (10,397)	\$ (13,642)	\$ 31,305	
<i>Memorials & Gifts Cash Receipts</i>	\$ 18,687	\$ 18,764	\$ 24,928	
<i>Memorials & Gifts Cash Payments</i>	\$ -	\$ (38,590)	\$ (1,662)	
Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 18,687	\$ (19,826)	\$ 23,266	
<i>Tanzania Mission Cash Receipts</i>	\$ 5,960	\$ 4,800	\$ 12,384	
<i>Tanzania Mission Cash Payments</i>	\$ (7,097)	\$ (4,800)	\$ (16,483)	
Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ (1,137)	\$ -	\$ (4,099)	
<i>Ames Sanctuary & Interfaith Partners Donations</i>	\$ 57,052	\$ 26,324	\$ 50,966	
<i>Ames Sanctuary & Interfaith Partners Spent</i>	\$ (18,393)	\$ (43,653)	\$ (31,371)	
Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 38,659	\$ (17,329)	\$ 19,595	
<i>Ames Interfaith Refugee Alliance Donations</i>	\$ 20,032	\$ 300	\$ 400	
<i>Ames Interfaith Refugee Alliance Spent</i>	\$ (8,158)	\$ (2,455)	\$ (1,500)	
Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 11,874	\$ (2,155)	\$ (1,100)	

BETHESDA LUTHERAN CHURCH

Balance Sheet as of May 31, 2026

	May 31, 2026	December 31, 2025
CURRENT ASSETS		
Cash in Banks	\$ 585,663	\$ 485,007
Accounts Receivable	\$ 1,600	\$ 1,600
Prepaid Expense	\$ 2,565	\$ 19,059
Endowment Funds Committed to Projects	\$ -	\$ -
Total Current Assets	\$ 589,828	\$ 505,666
 PROPERTY & EQUIPMENT		
Land	\$ 44,400	\$ 44,400
Building	\$ 2,102,753	\$ 2,102,753
Furniture & Equipment	\$ 2,060,179	\$ 2,060,179
Duplex House & Land	\$ 74,190	\$ 74,190
Total Fixed Assets	\$ 4,281,522	\$ 4,281,522
Less: Accumulated Depreciation	\$ 2,384,242	\$ 2,384,242
Net Property & Equipment	\$ 1,897,280	\$ 1,897,280
 OTHER ASSETS		
Beneficial interest in the endowment funds of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines	\$ 951,367	\$ 933,444
 Total Assets	\$ 3,438,475	\$ 3,336,390
 LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS		
LIABILITIES		
Mortgage Payable	\$ 584,784	\$ 605,217
Deferred Revenue - Prepaid Pledges	\$ -	\$ 94,676
Total Payables: Suppliers & Payroll	\$ 242	\$ 239
Total Liabilities	\$ 585,026	\$ 700,132
 NET ASSETS		
Undesignated/Restricted Note 1	\$ 177,055	\$ 182,724
Temporarily Restricted (Memorials & Gifts)	\$ 42,224	\$ 36,046
Operating Fund (Cash)	\$ 366,384	\$ 266,237
Total Cash in Banks	\$ 585,663	\$ 485,007
Designated by Council (Endowment Fund)	\$ 956,367	\$ 933,444
Revaluation of Fixed Assets	\$ 1,311,419	\$ 1,217,807
Total Net Assets	\$ 2,853,449	\$ 2,636,258
Total Liabilities & Net Assets	\$ 3,438,475	\$ 3,336,390
 Note 1		
UNDESIGNATED FUNDS/RESTRICTED		
Christian Service & Mission Funds (Tanzania Fund)	\$ 6,440	\$ 2,051
Christian Service & Mission Funds: (Food Pantry)	\$ 74,373	\$ 79,702
Growth Transition Fund	\$ 45,488	\$ 51,427
ASIP & AIRA Funds	\$ 50,754	\$ 49,544
Total Undesignated Funds/Restricted	\$ 177,055	\$ 182,724

BETHESDA LUTHERAN CHURCH

Statement of Revenue and Expense

January 1 to May 31, 2026

INCOME:	May 31, 2026 Actual	2026 Budget	% of Budget
Offering Income	\$ 505,645	\$ 952,000	53%
Other Receipts	\$ 13,045	\$ 33,000	40%
TOTAL RECEIPTS	\$ 518,690	\$ 985,000	53%
EXPENSES:	2026 " Net" Expenses	2026 Budget	
Christian Education and Youth	\$ (70)	\$ 12,950	-1%
Christian Service, Mission	\$ 32,633	\$ 65,196	50%
Savings Suds Note 2	\$ (25,543)	\$ -	0%
Congregational Life and Care	\$ 2,609	\$ 3,150	83%
Stewardship	\$ 2,540	\$ 8,540	30%
Worship, Music & Arts	\$ 627	\$ 11,200	6%
Administrative Support:	\$ 41,870	\$ 92,700	45%
Facilities Management	\$ 82,684	\$ 166,550	50%
Mortgage Payments	\$ 27,275	\$ 65,400	42%
Personnel	\$ 229,215	\$ 592,642	39%
Total Expenses	\$ 393,840	\$ 1,018,328	39%
Net Congregation Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 124,850	\$ (33,328)	
Tanzania Mission: Receipts	\$ 7,201	\$ -	
Tanzania Mission: Spending	\$ (2,812)	\$ -	
Tanzania Reserve Funds Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 4,389	\$ -	
5% Endowment Funds Received in 2026.	\$ 46,672	\$ -	
Congregation Contributions received in 2026.	\$ 43,322	\$ -	
Endowment Funds Invested & Spent in 2026.	\$ (40,960)	\$ -	
Endowment Funds Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 49,034	\$ -	
ASIP & ARIA Funds Received from Congregation & Grants	\$ 11,550	\$ -	
ASIP & ARIA Funds Spent	\$ (10,340)	\$ -	
Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 1,210	\$ -	
Food Pantry Cash Receipts	\$ 13,133	\$ -	
Food Pantry Food Expense	\$ (18,461)	\$ -	
Food Panty Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ (5,328)	\$ -	
Memorials & Gifts Receipts	\$ 10,232	\$ -	
Memorials & Gifts Expense	\$ (206)	\$ -	
Memorials & Gifts Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 10,026	\$ -	
Net Cash Inflow (Outflow)	\$ 184,181	\$ (33,328)	Note 1

Note 1: \$45,488. Balance of Growth Transition Fund to offset Budget Deficit of \$33,328.

Note 2: \$18,076. of Savings Suds is unspent at Dec. 31, 2025.

BETHESDA LUTHERAN CHURCH

Christian Service & Mission Report as of May 31, 2026

	<i>Prescribed</i> BUDGET %	2026 BUDGET \$'S	2025 ACTUAL \$'S	2026 BUDGET %
SE Iowa Synod Mission Support - Iowa City	55.0%	\$ 35,362	\$ 14,734	54.2%
Benevolence Discretionary Fund - per Council	2.0%	\$ 900	-	1.4%
<i>ELCA PARTNERS</i>			\$ -	
Bethesda/Tanzania Ministry	7.0%	\$ 6,101	\$ 6,101	9.4%
Iowa Lutheran Camp - EWALU	3.0%	\$ 1,929	\$ 965	3.0%
Iowa Lutheran Camp - Lakeside	3.0%	\$ 1,929	\$ 965	3.0%
Lutheran Services of Iowa - Ames & Waverly	3.0%	\$ 1,929	-	3.0%
Reconciling Works	2.0%	\$ 1,286	\$ 643	2.0%
<i>LOCAL & ECUMENICAL PARTNERS</i>			\$ -	
Ames Interfaith Refugee Alliance	0.5%	\$ 321	-	0.5%
Lutheran Sanctuary Interfaith Partners	0.5%	\$ 321	-	0.5%
AMOS	2.0%	\$ 1,286	\$ 643	2.0%
Bethany Life	1.0%	\$ 643	\$ 643	1.0%
Center for Creative Justice - Ames	1.0%	\$ 643	\$ 643	1.0%
Friendship Ark Homes - Ames	2.0%	\$ 1,286	\$ 343	2.0%
Good Neighbor Emergency	3.0%	\$ 1,929	\$ 965	3.0%
Hope in Christ Backpacks	1.0%	\$ 643	\$ 643	1.0%
Martha's House of Hope	2.0%	\$ 1,286	\$ 643	2.0%
NAACP	2.0%	\$ 1,286	\$ 1,506	2.0%
The Bridge Home - Ames	2.0%	\$ 1,929	\$ 965	3.0%
Wings of Refuge	1.0%	\$ 643	\$ 643	1.0%
Youth Service (YSS)	1.0%	\$ 643	\$ 643	1.0%
Pastors Discretionary Fund	5.0%	\$ 1,615	\$ 645	2.5%
<i>Local Outreach Fund (csm d-102)</i>	1.0%	\$ 1,286	-	2.0%
TOTAL	100%	\$ 65,196	\$ 32,333	100%
TOTAL OFFERINGS		\$ 952,000	\$ 505,645	
% of Offerings		6.85%	6.4%	

BETHESDA LUTHERAN CHURCH

Financial Support for the Venezuelan Family Beginning 2023 and projected to July 31, 2026

REVENUE	TOTAL
Donations by BLC Families	\$ 123,892
Donations by ASIP	\$ 17,000
ELCA Grant	\$ 5,000
Total	\$ 145,892

EXPENSES	
Lease Payments	\$ 45,962
Utility Payments	\$ 4,498
Medical & Misc. Payments	\$ 25,584
Legal Fees	\$ 22,138
Other Payments	\$ 5,575
Total	\$ 103,757

BALANCE	May 31, 2026	\$ 42,135
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FUTURE EXPENSES	
Lease payments	\$ 2,830
Utility payments	\$ 200
Medical & Misc. expenses	\$ 2,000
Legal Fees	\$ 8,000
Total	\$ 13,030

ESTIMATED CASH AVAILABLE	\$ 29,105
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Saving Suds

1st Thursday each month Choose one of two shifts: **3:45 - 5:15** OR **5:15 - 7:00 PM**

@ SPIN City Laundromat
Give out detergent and snacks

SIGN-UP TO VOLUNTEER!

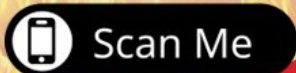
tinyurl.com/SavingSudsVolunteer



Our Annual Barbecue Cook-Off
& Ice Cream Social is
July 26 at 5:30 PM!



Compete or eat at the Barbecue Cook-Off & Ice Cream Social! Sign up online or at the Welcome Center.



Competitors arrive at 5:00 PM to set up!

Save the Date for the 70th Annual Scandinavian Coffee & Craft Fair

Saturday, October 17
9 AM - 2 PM

Help with Scandinavian Coffee History!

Laura Miller is working on the history of the Scandinavian Coffee and is looking for interesting stories from past years. If you have one or more, contact Laura at lwmiller0@gmail.com.

Bethesda Lutheran Church
GATHER...GROW...GO

