

July
through
September
2026

DHLCompass

Next Steps in Your Faith Journey



Pastor Mike to Begin Sabbatical This August

Pastor Mike Sager will be taking a sabbatical from August until late October 2026. This intentional time away is designed to provide an opportunity for rest, relaxation, spiritual renewal, and personal reflection after years of faithful leadership and dedicated service to our congregation and the ELCA.

Sabbaticals are an important part of long-term ministry health, allowing pastors to step away from the daily responsibilities of church life so they can return refreshed and renewed. During these twelve weeks, Pastor Mike plans to spend time resting, reconnecting with family and friends, engaging in activities that nurture both body and spirit, and researching ideas for church growth and online engagement.

While Pastor Mike is away, church ministries and worship services will continue as scheduled, supported by Pastor Craig, the church staff, the Congregation Council, and guest ministry leaders.

We invite the congregation to keep Pastor Mike in your prayers throughout this sabbatical season, asking that it be a meaningful time of renewal and encouragement. We look forward to welcoming him back in late October, refreshed and ready for the next chapter of ministry together.



Ministry Continues During Pastor Mike's Sabbatical

As many of you know, Pastor Mike Sager will be taking a well-deserved sabbatical beginning this summer and returning in late October. Sabbaticals provide pastors with an opportunity for rest, renewal, reflection, and spiritual growth after years of faithful service. We are grateful that Pastor Mike has this opportunity and look forward to welcoming him back refreshed and renewed.

While Pastor Mike is away, the ministry and life of Desert Hills Lutheran Church will continue as usual. We are excited that Pastor Craig Larson will step into the role of Acting Senior Pastor during Pastor Mike's absence.

Pastor Craig will lead our weekend worship services and provide the sermons each week. He will also be available during the week for pastoral care, ministry needs, and other congregational matters. We are thankful for his willingness to step into this important role and provide steady leadership during this season.

In addition to Pastor Craig's ministry, we will enjoy hearing from guest preachers once each month throughout the sabbatical. These guest pastors will bring fresh perspectives and insights while supporting the ongoing ministry of our congregation.

Please note that Wednesday Bible Study will not meet in August. Beginning on September 9, Pastor Craig will lead the Bible study

gatherings and continue doing so until Pastor Mike returns. Join him on Wednesdays at 9:30 am or 5 pm for "The Rest of the Story."

To ensure a smooth transition, Pastor Mike will receive updates regarding the sanctuary and other significant matters. However, for the most part, he will step away from his regular responsibilities so he can fully embrace this time of rest and renewal.

We encourage everyone to continue participating in worship, Bible study, fellowship, and service opportunities throughout the coming months. Your faithful involvement helps strengthen our church family and supports the ongoing mission of Desert Hills Lutheran Church.

Please join us in praying for Pastor Mike and his family during this sabbatical season, and also for Pastor Craig as he provides leadership and care for our congregation. We trust that God will richly bless both pastors and continue to guide and strengthen our church during this time.

We look forward to celebrating Pastor Mike's return at the end of October and hearing about the ways God has worked through this special season of renewal.

Building & Offices Closed

Our building and church offices will be closed on July 3 and September 7 in observance of the holiday weekends. During this time, regular office operations and activities will be suspended. Normal office hours and building access will resume following each holiday closure.

August Blood Drive

Schedule your appointment at www.redcross.org/give-blood and enter the sponsor code: `deserthills` for the upcoming Blood Drive on Tuesday, August 4, from 8:30 am - 1:30 pm at Desert Hills Lutheran Church.

Wednesday Bible Study

Please note that the Wednesday Bible Study will not meet in August. We encourage everyone to enjoy personal devotion and Bible study during this time. Regular Wednesday Bible Study will resume on September 9.

Celebrating the Dedicated Staff of Desert Hills Lutheran Church

At Desert Hills Lutheran Church, ministry extends well beyond Sunday mornings, supported by an extraordinary staff team dedicated to fostering a welcoming, vibrant, and Christ-centered community. Our staff members bring their talents and compassion to every aspect of church life, ensuring that worship services, Bible studies, and community gatherings operate smoothly.



Under the leadership of Director of Operations Karin Ramige, the operations team faithfully stewards the resources entrusted to our ministry. Karin's financial expertise, along with accountant Margaret Bierd's financial stewardship, ensures church resources are managed effectively. Facilities Manager Mark Soto, along with Conner Rupp and our two newest hires, Anya Burt and Kegan McGehee,

maintains our beautiful campus, preparing spaces for worship and ministry events.

The heartbeat of our daily church life is led by Director of Congregation Support Mary McNichols and her team. They create a warm environment through hospitality, communication, and member support, with Kitchen Manager Bernie Correlez enriching gatherings with his culinary skills. Christine Kelly-Smimmo, our Front Desk Secretary, is often the first welcoming face for visitors, while Debbie Breuer ensures our communications are received through emails and on the website.

As we search for a new Director of Worship, our worship ministry is bolstered by an exceptional team, including Ministry Support Annie Vrooman, Associate Director of Technology Ramsess Gonzalez, Digital Content Coordinator Tim Arnold, and various choir directors and musicians. Their collective effort breathes life into our worship experiences, both in person and online.

Our pastoral team, led by Senior Pastor Mike Sager, along with Associate Pastor Craig Larson, Pastor Barb Rapp, and Chaplain Mark Westrich, provides spiritual and emotional support to congregants facing life challenges. They offer comfort, prayer, and visitation, while Joe Lafata, our Pastoral Team Administrative Assistant, supports the team and congregation.

Every staff member at Desert Hills plays a vital role in advancing our mission and serving God's people. Their dedication is reflected in the care and professionalism they bring to their work, ensuring that Desert Hills Lutheran Church continues to grow in discipleship, service, and community impact. As we look to the future, we express gratitude for their unwavering commitment and service.



Staff enjoying a summer lunch together.



The 2025 Monsoon Concert stage before the musicians began performing

Monsoon Concert

The stage is empty this year, but not for long

The Monsoon Concert, traditionally held each August, will not take place in 2026 due to ongoing construction and structural renovation work within the sanctuary. Recent inspections identified a cracked support beam that requires significant repairs and reinforcement to ensure the building's long-term safety and stability.

While we know this event is a cherished tradition for many, these necessary improvements will help preserve and strengthen the sanctuary for future generations and create an even more beautiful and welcoming space for worship, concerts, and community gatherings.

In place of the annual Monsoon Concert, plans are underway for a special celebratory concert to coincide with the reopening of the newly completed sanctuary. This event will mark an exciting new chapter for our congregation and community, and we look forward to gathering together in the renewed space.

Additional details about the special opening concert, including dates and programming, will be announced once construction is completed. Please watch future newsletters, emails, and announcements for updates.

Thank you for your patience, support, and understanding as we move through this important period of renewal.

GriefShare

Supporting Those in Grief

A new session of GriefShare will begin on September 15 and meet weekly from 2 - 4 pm for 13 weeks. This caring and supportive program, led by Chaplain Mark Westrich, is designed to help individuals navigate the journey of grief after the loss of a loved one.

Each session offers encouragement, practical guidance, and the opportunity to connect with others who understand the challenges of loss. Participants will receive valuable resources and support in a welcoming environment where healing can begin.

Whether your loss is recent or occurred years ago, GriefShare provides compassionate support and hope for the future. All participants are welcome.



GriefShare small group leaders from February 2026