



# *Annual Report for 2024*

Final

*Congregational Meeting  
February 16, 2025*

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Celebrate. Share. Renew.

Annual Report Compiled by  
Nancy Kostanski

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# Opening Devotion

## Annual Meeting of the Congregation February 16, 2025

Pastor: Let's gather together and prepare for the Annual Meeting.

### **Devotion for Worship and Service (based on Psalm 95:1-6)**

Pastor: O come, let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.

**Many: Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise with songs of praise.**

Pastor: For the Lord is a great God and rules above all gods.

**Many: In God's hands are the depths of the earth. The heights of the mountains are also God's.**

Pastor: The sea is God's for God made it. God formed the dry land with his hands.

**Many: Come let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.**

### **Hymn of Praise – “We Are Called” (ELW 720)**

Come! Live in the light!  
Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!  
We are called to be light for the kingdom,  
To live in the freedom of the city of God.  
Refrain;  
We are called to act with justice,  
we are called to love tenderly;  
we are called to serve one another,  
To walk humbly with God.

### **Prayer for the Annual Meeting**

Pastor: Gracious God, you are the giver of every good gift. Every week we pray “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven”. Help us live out that prayer in our planning during this Annual Meeting. Lead us and guide us. Bless us with everything we need to do ministry in your name. We offer our hands and our hearts to share your love. We have been blessed. Help us be a blessing to others. In Jesus' name.

**Many: Amen.**

# Agenda for 2025 Annual Congregational Meeting

Call to Order  
Opening Devotion

Phil Roemaat, President  
Eric Silberschmidt

## Quorum Needed for 2025 Meeting ~ 193

### 1. Approval of Minutes

2024 Annual Meeting ..... February 25, 2024  
2024 Election Meeting ..... June 1-2, 2024  
2024 Voting Meeting to Call Pastor Justin Kierzek ..... December 22, 2024

### 2. Approval of the Pastors' Reports

Pastor Sherrie Lorbeck  
Pastor Justin Kierzek  
Pastor Eric Silberschmidt  
2024 Statistics

### 3. Approval of the Congregation Council's Reports

Congregation President ..... *Phil Roemaat*  
Adult Programs ..... *Todd Blatnik*  
Christian Education ..... *Davida Kroepfl*  
Communications & Technology ..... *Bert Perrizo*  
Finance ..... *Tim Herman*  
Group Opportunities ..... *Tiffany Reay*  
Invite ..... *Anna Jansson*  
Property ..... *Al Bengston*  
Servant Ministries ..... *Ellen Vermillion*  
Stewardship ..... *Trisha Smith*  
Treasurer ..... *Adrienne Krueger*  
Worship & Music ..... *Steve Johnson*  
Youth ..... *Nancy Oberhauser*  
Recording Secretary ..... *Leslie O'Connell*

### 4. Approval of Program Staff Reports

Director of Adult Programs ..... *Matt Griepentrog*  
Director of Christian Education ..... *Michelle Aprahamian*  
Director of Program Support ..... *Nicole Krause*  
Director of Music Ministry ..... *Lynn Key*  
Member Care ..... *Jim Ahlquist*

### 5. 2024 Financial Reports

### 6. 2025 Budget Approval

### 7. Elections

**Election of Property Chair** – Al Bengston  
**Nominating Committee** (need 3 to serve this Spring to identify potential candidates for council)  
**Delegates to Synod Assembly** (need 5 – at least 2 male, 2 female)  
Friday, May 30 – Saturday, May 31, 2025 at Brookfield Conference Center

### 8. Old Business – Call Team Update

### 9. New Business

10. Adjournment ..... *Council President*

11. Closing Prayer ..... *Pastor*

## Minutes of UNITY Lutheran Church Annual Meeting Congregational Meeting February 25, 2024

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The Annual Meeting of the Congregation was held in person at both campuses, with live streaming, and via Zoom. Members present in all locations: 211

- **Quorum achieved.**

Meeting called to order by Council President Colleen King at 9:33 a.m.

Pr. John Horner-Ibler led the opening devotion, observing that it is possible to be in many places and, yet, united in the Spirit and in a common purpose.

### **Approval of Minutes**

- Annual Meeting on Feb. 26, 2023

Motion to approve Minutes: MSA (motioned, seconded, approved)

### **Pastors' Reports**

- Pr. John Horner-Ibler
- Pr. Sherrie Lorbeck
- Pr. Muriel Otto
- 2023 Member Statistics & Pastoral Acts

Pr. John reflected on how the relationship between Cross of Life (COL) and Christ the King (CTK) began in 2001-'02 when renovations were happening at the COL campus and space was needed for Vacation Bible School (VBS) that summer. He observed that it took courage for COL to ask for the opportunity to use space at CTK. As things turned out, CTK recommended that we jointly host VBS. Pr. John observed that it took generosity of spirit for CTK to extend the invitation and to be accepting and welcoming. Our strength continues to be a spirit of "doing it together" in so many ways.

Motion to approve Pastors' Reports and pastoral acts: MSA

### **Congregation Council's Reports**

- Congregational President – Colleen King
- Adult Programs – Susie Sprecher
- Christian Education – Davida Kroepfl
- Communications & Technology – Ed Dominski
- Finance – Phil Roemaat
- Treasurer – Adrienne Krueger
- Group Opportunities – Tiffany Reay
- Invite – Anna Jansson
- Property – David Koenen
- Servant Ministries – Jackie Herington
- Stewardship – Trisha Smith
- Worship & Music – Steve Johnson
- Youth – Eric Borkenhagen
- Recording Secretary – Leslie O'Connell

Motion to approve Council Reports: MSA

**Program Staff Reports**

- Director of Christian Education – Michelle Aprahamian
- Director of Adult Programs – Matt Griepentrog
- Director of Music Ministry – Lynn Key
- Member Care – Jim Ahlquist
- Director of Communications – Natalie Kamenick

Motion to approve Staff Reports: MSA

**Introduction of Council Members**

**2023 Financial Report – Phil Roemaat**

- Income Statement – Year ended Dec. 31, 2023
- Revenue and Expenses – Year ended Dec. 31, 2023
- Five-year trend of Budget vs. Actual
- Giving and Spending Pie Chart – Year ended Dec. 31, 2023

Phil summarized that the congregation continues to be in very good shape financially, thanks to the generosity of members in their giving. There was some caution about the budget going into December 2023. Members responded in force, resulting in the strongest giving in December in history. We ended 2023 with a surplus of \$34,480. Phil noted that the allocation of expenditures (p. 39 in annual report) is consistent year over year. As detailed in the Fund Balances (p. 37), we have approximately \$517,000 in cash, putting us in a healthy position. In regard to the Backyard Project, Phil pointed out the Summary of the Backyard Project, Jan. 2019 – Feb. 2024, which provides a snapshot of income and expenses. The project is complete.

Phil reminded the Congregation that the COL mortgage is at a 3.65% interest rate and will be paid in full by the end of 2027 – just three years from now.

- **Allocation of 2023 Surplus (\$34,480):** Phil shared that Council has recommended that 25% of surplus be allocated to Benevolence and that 75% be held in reserve and allocated to anticipated expenses for the Call Process, including travel of candidates and relocation of two pastors.

Phil invited questions on the 2023 budget and surplus. Hearing none, there was a motion to approve the 2023 budget and allocation of 2023 surplus. MSA.

- **2024 Budget:** Phil then presented the proposed 2024 budget, which anticipates a 4% increase in revenue from member giving. He indicated that the budget includes an increase to advance Pr. Sherrie and Pr. Muriel closer to the Synod salary guideline (based on tenure). The budget includes 12.5% for Benevolence, consistent with 2023, and \$5,000 for the Call Process. He also noted that 2024 will be a year of “known unknowns” with the transition of Pr. John and Pr. Muriel and the Call of two pastors. Phil paused for questions.

**Question:** Does the 2023 surplus get applied to the 2024 expenses? **Answer:** No

**Question:** How far are pastor salaries from the Synod guidelines? **Answer:** For tenure of 6-14 years, salaries are to be within 96% of guideline. For tenure of 15+ years, salaries are to be within 92% of guideline.

**Question:** What accounts for the difference between budget and actual for salaries and benefits in 2023?

**Answer:** Open Youth Director position and two staff members coming off of the benefits plan.

**Question:** How do UNITY’s reserves compare with Synod recommendations. **Answer:** It is unknown whether there is a Synod recommendation for reserves. UNITY has one month’s expenses for church operations in reserve.

**Motion to approve the 2024 Budget.** MSA

**Update from the Call Team**

Melanie Varin introduced Call Team members and provided a brief update on the work of the Team to date. She thanked the Congregation for active participation in the recent input sessions to help shape the profile that will be provided to the Synod. She outlined that three committees have been formed: Congregational Input; Ministry Site Profile (MSP); and Communications. Melanie thanked Ann Hill for her active support of the Call Team, creating a dedicated section of the UNITY website with information relevant to the process.

Call Team members Matt Jolliff and Jessica Schrieber provided an update on the MSP. The Synod provides a form for the congregation to describe itself – including who it is, along with mission and vision. Matt and Jessica also shared three options for a key piece – the summary description (limited to 75 words). The Team shared a draft of the MSP today and invites congregational feedback on both the MSP and the summary description. These will be available through the UNITY website. Once finalized, they will be approved by the team, by Council and then submitted to the Synod so that candidates can initiate next steps.

Melanie also shared that the Call Team will search for an interim pastor to provide supplemental support and bridge the transition. She extended thanks to Pr. John and Pr. Muriel for their years of service, adding that there will be celebrations to come.

Melanie closed by thanking the congregation for its prayers and support. She encouraged outreach to any Call Team member with thoughts and feedback.

### **Elections**

**Nominating Team for Spring 2024:** Todd Blatnik, Jim Johnsen, Fred Varin

**Synod Assembly delegates for May 2024 will be:** John Allar, Melissa Bemus, Mary Huss, Aaron Prohuska, Trisha Smith

### **Old Business**

Backyard Project is complete.

### **New Business**

None.

**Motion for adjournment.** MSA. Colleen King adjourned the meeting at approximately 10:18 a.m.

**Pr. Sherrie concluded the meeting with a prayer.**

**Respectfully submitted, Leslie O'Connell, recording secretary**



## 2024 Congregation Voting Meeting, June 1-2, 2024

- The UNITY Lutheran Church Annual Congregational Voting Meeting was held as a series of four short voting meetings following each of the weekend services on Sat., June 1 and Sun., June 2, 2024. There was also a virtual meeting via Zoom on Sun., June 2. Quorum was achieved due to the total number of participants across the services.
- **Nominating Committee** was comprised of UNITY members: Todd Blatnik, Eric Borkenhagen, Jackie Herington, Jim Johnsen, Colleen King (outgoing Council president), Fred Varin, Pr. Sherrie Lorbeck, and Pr. Muriel Otto.
- **Colleen King presented the slate of candidates on behalf of the Nominating Committee:**
  - President: Phil Roemaat
  - Adult Programs: Todd Blatnik
  - Communications & Technology: Bert Perrizo
  - Finance: Tim Herman
  - Servant Ministries: Ellen Vermillion
  - Youth: Nancy Oberhauser
  - Property: TBD

**The following recaps the meeting minutes from each of the five meetings:** Cross of Life campus (5 p.m. on June 1; 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. on June 2); Christ the King campus (9:30 a.m. on June 2); Virtual meeting via Zoom (June 2).

- President Colleen King called each meeting to order.
- Motion to open the meeting. Motioned, seconded, passed. (MSP)
- Colleen presented the slate of candidates put forth by the Nominating Committee.
- Colleen invited nominations from the floor three times. Hearing none, she asked for a voice vote. MSP
- Colleen recognized and expressed gratitude for outgoing Council members: Eric Borkenhagen, Youth; Ed Dominski, Communications & Technology; Jackie Herington, Servant Ministries; Colleen King, president; David Koenen, Property; Phil Roemaat, Finance; Susie Sprecher, Adult Programs;
- Motion to close the meeting. MSP

**Slate of candidates (above) approved as presented by the Nominating Committee.**

- Total number of voting members in favor of the slate exceeded the count needed for quorum.

In the week following the voting meeting, Al Bengston accepted the nomination for Property chair. This will be officially voted on at a future congregation meeting.

**Respectfully submitted, Leslie O'Connell, recording secretary**

## 2024 Congregation Voting Meeting to call Pastor Justin Kierzek December 22, 2024

- Phil Roemaat, UNITY Council president, called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.
- He welcomed attendees from the Cross of Life campus, Christ the King campus, and those joining via Zoom. He noted the sole purpose of this Special Voting Meeting is for the Congregation to vote on extending a pastoral call.
- Voting members were asked to sign in, and those attending in person received a paper ballot. Names of attendees on Zoom were recorded.

### Opening Devotion/Prayer

Pr. Sherrie Lorbeck led a devotion based on a passage from Mark's gospel, chapter 2. She gave thanks for UNITY being led to this milestone day and for the many people who have played a part in the Pastoral Call Process.

### New Business

- Phil extended thanks to the Call Committee, which began its work 14 months ago in November 2023; to the Council members, who met Pr. Justin, had dinner with him, and got acquainted with him as a pastoral candidate for UNITY; and to the Greater Milwaukee ELCA Synod team – in particular, Bishop Paul Erickson and Pr. Kristin Nielsen, who have assisted UNITY through the Call Process.
- Phil recognized Bishop Paul who was in attendance at the meeting at the CTK campus.
- **Quorum:** Nancy Kostanski confirmed that attendance from the three locations surpassed the quorum (at least 193 voting members) required for the meeting.
- **Motion:** Phil presented a formal motion on behalf of the UNITY Council to extend a call to Pastor Justin Kierzek. Second by Mark Miller. Unanimously approved.
- Phil reminded the Congregation that a two-thirds majority of voting members present is needed to approve the call.
- He invited Melanie Varin, co-leader of the Call Committee, to offer remarks in support of the call. Melanie Varin emphasized that this is a very important decision facing the UNITY Congregation. On behalf of the Call Committee, she cited reasons that impressed the committee that Pr. Justin is a “right fit” for UNITY.
  - During the interview process, Pr. Justin was always well-prepared. He did his homework about UNITY, listening to 30+ online sermons. He learned the names of the Call Committee in advance and came prepared for every discussion.
  - He has deep professional experience developing programming for young people and youth. He has a passion for working with them. Confidentially, he planned an icebreaker activity for UNITY youth that was then facilitated by another adult. It was well-received.
  - He enjoys the outdoors, hiking, backpacking, and more – which is a good fit for the active UNITY Congregation.
  - He felt a strong call to ministry after years as an educator. He is conversant in the use of technology as part of the changing norms of ministry.
  - Melanie emphasized that it was crucial for the Call Committee that Pr. Justin would work well with Pr. Sherrie. She noted that the two of them met multiple times, getting acquainted personally and professionally.
  - Pr. Justin also met the UNITY staff, and the staff is supportive of the call.
  - In conclusion, Melanie shared that the Call Committee unanimously presented the recommendation of the call to Pr. Justin to the UNITY Council.

- Melanie opened the floor for questions. No questions were presented at the COL campus, the CTK campus, or via Zoom.
- Phil then informed the Congregation that the compensation for Pr. Justin would follow the Greater Milwaukee Synod Guidelines for a pastor with seven years experience. Due to the timing, the compensation will be included in the 2025 UNITY budget that will be voted on at the Annual Meeting in February 2025.
- Phil invited questions from the floor a second time. There were none from any of the three locations.
- Phil invited questions from the floor a third time. There were none from any of the three locations.
- Phil closed the discussion period. He invited voting members to complete the ballot, and ballots were collected for tallying. Votes of attendees on Zoom were recorded.
- **Voting result: Yes: 292 votes in favor of the call; No: Zero; Abstain: 3. Motion to extend a call to Pr. Justin is approved.**
- Phil noted that the Call Committee will continue its work on a call for the remaining open pastoral position. The Committee may choose to tweak the Ministry Site Profile (MSP) to reflect a call for a pastor who will complement the gifts of Pr. Sherrie and Pr. Justin. The Committee will continue its work with Pr. Kristin Nielsen of the Synod to obtain more candidate names.
- Phil then acknowledged the hard work of the UNITY staff during this time of transition. He noted how tough it is on employees during such a time. He also thanked the Congregation for its patience and commitment to stay together and work together during a demanding transition.
- Phil called for a motion to adjourn. Motion by Mark Miller, second by Jensy Engle to adjourn the meeting. Unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 10:03 a.m.

**Respectfully submitted,** Leslie O'Connell, recording secretary

**UNITY Council:** Al Bengston (Property); Todd Blatnik (Adult Programs); Tim Herman (Finance); Anna Jansson (Invite); Steve Johnson (Worship & Music); Davida Kroepfl (Christian Education); Michael Kroepfl (Youth Representative); Adrienne Krueger (Treasurer); Pr. Sherrie Lorbeck; Rachel Manganaro (Youth Representative); Nancy Oberhauser (Youth); Leslie O'Connell (Recording Secretary); Bert Perrizo (Communications & Tech); Tiffany Reay (Group Opportunities); Phil Roemaat (President); Pr. Eric Silberschmidt; Trisha Smith (Stewardship); Ellen Vermillion (Servant Ministries)

**UNITY Call Committee:** Nelson Brownell, Dave Engle, Mary Huss, Jim Johnsen, Linda Johnson, Matt Jolliff, Logan Kemper, Mark Krause, Davida Kroepfl, Jessica Schrieber, Melanie Varin

## Pastors' Reflections

### Sherrie Lorbeck



I now add 2024 to the list of years I give thanks to God for at UNITY! A year that was pretty much the SAME as all the other years I've experienced here. We gathered together week in and week out for worship in the much the same way, in person at both campuses and now also "live" at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings with the help of our new livestream equipment and camera.

We continued to keep teaching our kids and our youth about who Jesus is and how his life shapes who we are and how we choose to live. They kept adding life, energy and joy that filled our hearts as we listened to them sing or participate in the Children's messages. It's clear to see how they could be on the Invite team by the way they tell their friends how much fun their church is and how they tell their parents they don't want to go home yet! Our Confirmation students told us just how important it is to be a part of our program and that they didn't want to miss out on it by also being involved in other sports and dance. They have already begun to share their gifts in return as they help in worship and spend time serving.

We kept working to find ways to build community with each other and with our partners, through meals shared together, trips taken, and opportunities for learning and fellowship, recognizing how Christ connects us together as his Body.

Throughout this report, you will hear more about all the SAME kinds of things that we do most every year and ALL the people who were and are a part of making those ministries happen and you'll hear of people whose lives are forever impacted by those experiences. I do hope you take time to read through the reports of our Council members and our staff! The life-giving sign of God's work that they embody in words, in numbers on spreadsheets and through pictures hopefully jump out for you to see, hear and be energized by as you turn each page.

At a time when more and more churches don't bother to put the time and energy into a report like this, thinking that no one takes time to read it, we bring this to you as a way to lift up just a few highlights of what you have helped to make possible through your participation, leadership, and support of UNITY. Through it, we share how we have utilized what you have entrusted to us and continue to pray for the Spirit to lead us in the year ahead to discern what God might be calling us to do and to be.

Also, throughout these pages this year, you will hear a fairly consistent theme of change that was woven throughout this past year, but what I also tried to lift up for all of us to remember was that 2024 was much the SAME, because I think that by remaining focused on who we were and what our mission was, also helped us to navigate all the change and difficult good byes that we did this year and to end up at the point that we now are at:

In the black! Able to pull together over 200 people 2 days before Christmas Eve for a MEETING to thankfully call Pastor Justin to serve with us! And, able to take a look at the year now completed and give thanks to God for all that was and all that UNITY was able to do through each of you! To continue to give thanks for the immeasurable gifts shared with us over the years by Gail Anklam, Pastor John, Pastor Muriel and last of all, Natalie Kamenick, Director of Communication who decided to step down from that role so she could be at home a little more for her kids.

More than what I could ever lift up here or in the prayers, ;) because I continue to be amazed by the breadth and depth of it myself. By how many people are involved in our partner ministries. By how many people serve

through all of our teams and in worship, education, caring for our sacred spaces and grounds, and helping to make connections by letting people know where you go to church. Thank you!

The other thing I want to lift up is that all throughout the Scriptures, one of the themes we hear about again and again is the need for leadership succession planning!

Moses began mentoring Joshua to be the one who would lead God's people into the promised land, so that there was continuity between the past and the awareness of what God had done for them along with the ability to listen for God's leading into this new place.

Even Jesus began seeking to prepare the twelve disciples to lead after him from the day he called them into the work of fishing for people. He knew that he wouldn't be with them for too long and didn't want everything he did and preached to come to an abrupt end when he faced the cross. Along the way, he even sent a group of seventy out in pairs of two, to go and proclaim the Good News to every house in every town to help spread the word about Jesus.

From the children who were given front row seating in his lap to hear his teaching to those who experienced first-hand the power he had to bring healing or peace to people's lives, to those who witnessed first-hand how he was different and how he used his power always for the good of others. Jesus was preparing young and old alike to be his disciples, students and followers of his ways, who would eventually become teachers and mentors of this faith themselves.

Unlike the current process for how we elect those to serve as Bishops and unlike the typical length of time that most pastors give congregations notice that they are leaving (4 weeks)! We had already begun preparing at the beginning of this year for this time of such immense transition.

Intentionally being open and communicating it gave people time to absorb the news which then allowed us to have more time to think about how to celebrate not just all the "last" moments together but by being focused on all the "first" things that we share.

By creating an amazingly determined and hardworking Call Team who began working long before the norm of waiting until after a pastor has left, to identify what they each most loved about our congregation, before listening to your answers and questions and then putting all that together to share with potential candidates.

Along the way, Muriel and I had a chance to choose Pastor Eric to come and help us in this time in a way that likely changes daily for him, but I am grateful that he has been able to jump onto this fairly fast paced ministry train of people, activities and one idea after another in the way that we both thought he would.

Plus to bring his genuine self, personality, and his gifts of leadership is a tremendous blessing that may not always be a given from every interim pastor, who may come with a "job to do" or focused on getting to heart of the "issue" that needs to be addressed or who simply may not be interested in getting to know people in thinking that they won't be there very long.

And while I think there's still room for us to forge a new path in the way that we remain connected to those who once served here, I also think God is calling us to bring our experience of the importance of relationship building and the need for visioning succession planning to the larger Church. Lastly, as we plan for what 2025 may look like, may we keep doing much of the same things we ALWAYS DO! Thank you for all the ways you did just that in 2024!

## Justin Kierzek



Having started at UNITY with just eight days left in 2024, you might think it would be difficult to find something to say about the year that was. Maybe that would be true for many churches, but not here at UNITY. As I reflect on those first days and now my first month serving on the pastoral team at UNITY, I find myself struck by the kindness, the warmth, and the invitations to meet and learn about everything going on in and around UNITY.

While I was preparing for interviews as part of the call process, I found myself digging through every menu and link on UNITY's website. Everywhere I looked, I found pictures of smiling faces from young to young at heart. I saw descriptions of small projects and huge programs within the walls of the Christ the King and Cross of Life campuses. I saw all the work happening within our community and extending around the globe. I viewed videos of worship with Pastor Sherrie's heartfelt and deeply meaningful prayers; vignettes with Pastor Muriel dressed in costume as she shared the Good News; and reflections from Pastor John while camping with the confirmation students on the East Coast Road Trip. In all of it, what I saw was a deeply spiritual community who not only speaks the Good News in worship, but lives it and shares it authentically and meaningfully.

At UNITY, 2024 was certainly a year of transition. Pastor John and Pastor Muriel have left tremendously large and indescribably impossible shoes to fill. With that being said, transitions are a part of life and faith. Scripture reminds us of the many times God's people faced seasons of change. From Abraham's call to leave his homeland, to Moses leading the Israelites through the wilderness, to the early church navigating life after Christ's resurrection, we see that God is always faithful, guiding and providing every step of the way. I trust that this is happening with UNITY now.

As we look to 2025 and beyond, my hope and prayer is that this community of faith continues to celebrate all of our joys and successes. I pray that we continue to share our time and talents and serve our community in love for our neighbors. I pray that we are always renewing and discerning God's continued work in and through us in everything we do.

After these first few weeks, I must say that I find myself filled with a mix of gratitude and humility. I am so incredibly thankful for the opportunity to be part of this extraordinary community, and it is my promise to do my best to help continue the work this congregation has found so meaningful while following wherever God might be leading. As we continue to navigate this transition, I look forward to walking alongside all of you with an open heart, open ears, and a deep reliance on God's continued guidance.

As I reflect on 2024, eight days was more than enough time to experience a congregation so full of light and love that it can't be contained. I've seen and felt it in the warm welcome I've received. I've seen and felt it in the invitations and the passing conversations. I've seen and felt it in confirmation classes. Truthfully, I've seen and felt it everywhere I have been in and around UNITY. With love being seen and felt, I'm reminded of what the Bible tells us about it in 1 John: *"And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."* Thanks be to God!

## Eric Silberschmidt, Interim Pastor

*"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118: 24*

I was told that I am supposed to write something for the Annual Report. It's supposed to be a reflection on my time at UNITY. It feels like I've been at UNITY for a while now but I keep bumping into things that I am doing at UNITY for the very first time - like my first Christmas Eve or my first Annual Meeting or my first Lenten season.

I've been asked to describe my time at UNITY at other times. The word I used then was: WHIRLWIND. UNITY can be overwhelming. There have been so many things to look back on and remember and celebrate. I've been a part of vignettes and Jesus Karaoke and VBS. I've led worship outdoors and at both campuses and with candlelight on Christmas Eve. I've even shared my musical "gifts?" while filling in on the handbells and joining the Fellowship choir! I chose the word WHIRLWIND because in all this wild activity I always sensed the Holy Spirit at work - bringing the Church together and then taking the energy and talents we offered to create something new and wonderful.



Well, a little more time has passed. Can you believe that I have served at UNITY for around 8 months already? Now, I think I might choose a different word as I reflect on UNITY in 2024. That word is ALIVE! I've been involved in Interim ministry for a while now. During this "in-between" time, some congregations have a tendency to stop or slow down until the new Pastor arrives. That has not been an issue at UNITY! Thanks be to God for all the ministry happening right here and right now. Thanks be to God that UNITY is alive and seeking to help make God's kingdom come and God's will be done. The pace around here is still a little overwhelming at times but I have been struck that this is a place filled with love and ministry and life! So much has happened around here but through it all UNITY has continued to be a Church family that is ALIVE sharing God's love, leading kids through Sunday School and Confirmation, and doing our best to serve our partners and neighbors both near and far.

There have been a lot of transitions for UNITY in 2024. Many congregations really struggle (in a whole variety of ways) when they lose a beloved Pastor - especially when that Pastor has served that congregation for many years. UNITY lost TWO! faithful servant leaders in 2024 when Pastor John and Pastor Muriel left. UNITY shed tears and grieved the changes, but UNITY also prayed for John and Muriel (and their families) and blessed them for the next chapters of their lives. We thank God for John and Muriel and all their ministry among us. UNITY has also honored them by continuing to be ALIVE in ministry. 2024 was not a year when we took a step back because of all the changes. Instead of struggling, ministry has continued to happen and has even grown in some places! Instead of struggling, offerings have actually grown from 2023!

There is so much to celebrate about what has happened at UNITY in 2024 and now we can pray and plan and dream about what God has planned for us in 2025. We celebrate and give thanks that Pastor Justin Kierzek has been called to serve at UNITY, and we look forward to all the ways we can be in ministry together in the year ahead. I'm asking every member to be a part of the ministry at UNITY. Please pray and plan and dream about what that might mean for you. Together we are a Church family - ALIVE and active and led by God's Holy Spirit!

*"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Psalm 118: 24*



## Congregational President's Reflections

### Phil Roemaat

It is hard to encapsulate all that happened to UNITY in 2024, but in a word – **Change**. We said goodbye to Pastor John, Pastor Muriel, and Gail Anklaam. We had Pastor Eric Silberschmidt join us as an interim pastor. We also had Nicole Krause and Bill Hubert join the UNITY Staff. And last, and certainly not least, we called Pastor Justin Kierzek to be part of our pastoral team at UNITY.



Last year during UNITY's Annual Congregational Meeting, Adrienne Krueger and I were sharing the financial results for 2023 and forecasting what we thought could happen in 2024. We described the 2024 budget as a year of known unknowns. There were educated guesses as to where the budget might come out, but we really did not know. We had to trust in God and each other that it would be OK. And thankfully from a financial perspective, Unity came through in a year of **change** and it was OK.

Going into 2025, I am both proud and optimistic. And while we will have more **change**, I am confident that it will be OK. I am proud that UNITY has made steps to continue the sturdy foundation of who we are when we Celebrate, Share, and Renew. I am proud that we all stayed together and exercised patience during the pastoral call process. And lastly, I am proud that we continue to welcome new families as UNITY is a growing vibrant congregation.

And I am optimistic. I am optimistic that another pastor will join our church. I am optimistic that we can continue to being a welcoming growing church, when many of our brother and sister churches are shrinking and in dire financial straits. And lastly, I am optimistic that while there may be more **change**, we will come through and be stronger into the future.

I would be remiss if I did not mention a few acknowledgements:

- I want to thank the UNITY Church Council. They bring their amazing gifts and help guide UNITY. And while we often agree, they all bring a curiosity and supporting viewpoint to lead the church.
- Thank you to the UNITY staff for all that they have done in 2024. They have gone above and beyond to ensure that we continue to have a vibrant community.
- I also want to thank our UNITY pastors.
  - Pastor John and Pastor Muriel have meant so much to UNITY's history and were incredibly important as Cross of Life and Christ the King came together to become UNITY. Their fingerprints will continue to be on the work UNITY does for many years to come.
  - Pastor Sherrie – thank you for continuing to push forward and be the anchor during this year of transition. I appreciate you continuing to be that source of joy and optimism at UNITY.
  - Pastor Jim – thank you for coming out of retirement to help with Member Care and preaching on occasional weekend services.
  - Pastor Eric – thank you for jumping right into the chaos and ensuring that we did not miss a beat. And I appreciate you continuing as interim pastor while we continue our search.
  - Pastor Justin – thank you for saying yes to UNITY. We are excited to have you.

And lastly, thank you to you, the Congregation. Thank you for the privilege to serve as UNITY's Congregational President. I appreciate you all for your thoughtfulness, patience, and caring during this past year of **change**. Your time, talents, resources, and prayers continue to make UNITY into the special place that it is.



## Sacramental and Member Information for 2024

*"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" Matthew 28:19-20*

### Baptisms

Jan 20 - Leland Fisher Eggert  
Jan 21 - Nelson Alan Wirth  
Mar 3 - Liliana Katherine Morton  
Mar 23 - Celeste Renee Carrathers  
Apr 6 - Elias David Olson  
May 4 - Abigail Elizabeth Halbach  
May 18 - Fiona Whitney Lunak  
May 26 - Vaydaant Ebenezer  
May 26 - Ananya Ebenezer  
June 16 - Florence Mae Bredemus  
June 22 - Kain Zachary Scott  
July 7 - Oliver David Skarie  
Aug 11 - Emry Sophia Zimmel  
Aug 17 - Alexandra Kate Garcia  
Aug 25 - Sal Lucille Otto  
Sept 1 - Logan James Nord  
Sept 28 - Josie Clementine Coleman  
Nov 10 - Oakley Bennett Smith

### First Communion

#### May 18-19

Oscar Bond  
Nolan Fehrenbacher  
Rory Finnigan  
Nathaniel Martin  
Maxwell Roemaat  
Britta Brown  
Brooke Conway  
Annie DeBauchee  
Connor Hahn  
Grayson Harder  
Benny Jansson  
Emma Jolliff  
Griffin Kawa  
Hudson Lerner  
Roslyn Miesfeld  
Sophia Mrachek  
AJ Niederbaumer  
Charlie Rentmeester  
Caroline Roehsner  
Kelsey Rupe  
Jackson Setz  
Jack Silverthorne  
Josie Toussaint  
Robin Cervero-Vrab

#### July 6

Cecelia Weitmann

#### July 28

Charlie Swain

*Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."*

*"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:13-20*

**Confirmation September 14 & 15**

Evan Bublitz  
Melissa Dressler  
Casey Dwyer  
Joey Geske  
Harper Guenther  
Peyton Nodolf  
Robin Nordstrom  
Jack Zimmer  
Ben Zimmer  
Elena Reiter  
Sonora Stark

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 4:7-8*

**Celebration of Christian Marriage**

Alexis Canitz and Nick Mussoline  
Maddy Flynn and Justin Pipol  
Brad Kaatz and Caitlin Hoyer  
Randy Breske and Janet McMahon

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*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39*

**Deaths & Funerals for UNITY Members & Relative s/friends of the UNITY**  
**Family who have died in the past year:**

LaVerne Schaffner  
Barbara Nuland  
Baynard Anderson  
Guy Anklam  
Jeffrey Furness  
Alan MacKenzie  
Boyd Meyers  
Bob Soerens  
Lois Garms  
Ken Schneider  
Robert Lewis Williams  
Jon Maas

## **Hellos (New households welcomed)**

### **Spring 2024 New Members (May 4-5)**

Jon & Katie Bray (Betsy, June & Ada)  
Randy Breske & Janet McMahon  
Dawn Edwards (Emma & Sara)  
Zac & Jordan Lunak (Bradley, Logan, Hollis & Fiona)  
Joel & Julie Miesfeld (Sophie, Ellie, Roslyn & Clara)  
John & Jamie Toussaint (Eleanor, Genevieve & Josephine)  
Joan Vreeland  
Eric & Kathy Weil

### **Fall 2024 New Members (November 23-24)**

Deanna Buth  
Beth & Dean Llanas (Katie, Lauren)  
Joanne Mackenzie  
Luke & Crystal Manganaro (Megan, Rachel, Nico)  
Bryan & Sue Mours

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## **Good-byes**

### **Transferred to other churches or moved**

Chuck & Linda Compton  
Jore & Bill Dreyer  
Jim & Sarah Grube  
Brendan & Amanda Adams - never joined (Max, Jack, Grace)  
Carolyn Pinkerton/Kyle Komorowski (Frank, Eden)  
Aaron Prohuska

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### **In Thanksgiving for Wellington Park Lutheran Church:**

We give great thanks for the people of and the congregation of Wellington Park Lutheran Church, that had been located at 7017 W Medford Ave, Milwaukee since December 21, 1948. For all the Good News they shared over those years and all the ways they sought to respond to Jesus' call of service and love, and to be faithful stewards of all that we have been entrusted with. This includes making the difficult decision to close their doors and sell their building and property in hopes that God might work through that to plant new seeds of faith in way yet to be seen.

## Reflections of Ministry Team Chairs

### ADULT PROGRAMS

**Todd Blatnik**



First, I would like to thank Patricia Pelzel, Tracy Karrels, Jen Nowak, Matt Griepentrog, Pastor Sherrie and Pastor Eric for their continued time and support in the Adult Programs Committee in 2024. They have all had key contributions and ideas in growing the Adult Forums, small groups, Bible studies and events. This has been exciting for me and greatly appreciated as I stepped into the role for my first time this year.

We continue to grow and continue to look for new ideas from all of you. A couple of new ideas that are in the works in which we have started in 2024 and are planning for 2025 include: Theology on Tap, 20Somethings, Sheepshead, Bible Studies along with new things like a Bowling social and adult Boundary Waters trip to look forward to in 2025. In addition, the strength of the small groups continues to stay strong with the individual group leadership. Just a few to highlight are Men's Breakfast, Quilting group, Lunch Bunch group, Sew Comfy group, Grief group, Book Groups, Photography group and more. We have also been looking into new fresh ideas for the adult forums that typically involve information / educational topics involving finance, life experiences involved in all phases of adulthood, technology, travel and others.

We look forward to your ideas for topics, your feedback and your participation in Adult Programs going forward. Feel free to reach out to Matt Griepentrog or myself if you have any suggestions or just want to learn how to get involved. You can also watch our church calendar for upcoming events along with the monthly newsletter, bulletin announcements or on the website. All adults are welcome, no matter what phase of life you are in, to join our committee, share your ideas and / or come and participate in program opportunities to engage with others in our UNITY church family.

Todd Blatnik  
Todd.blatnik@wi.rr.com

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

**Dauida Kroepfl**

*Many hands make light work.* ~John Heywood, an English playwright and poet

- We have a strong and growing Christian Education program at UNITY. I am thrilled to see so many kids attend the various events and I am in awe of the many people who volunteer to make each event a success.
- Along with the Pastors and Staff, it takes 8 volunteers each week to teach Sunday School classes (during all the in-person services) for preschool through 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and 7 parent volunteers to lead small groups each week for our 2-year confirmation program for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
- In addition to the “classroom” time, our program offers many ways for children to be involved and to give back. Pastors and Staff are always looking for opportunities to have our children help. Once opportunities are identified, it takes volunteers to coordinate activities. Volunteers might work “behind the scenes” with setup, shopping, baking, and organizing materials while others are needed to teach or lead small groups and event rotations. There are so many ways to support Christian education at UNITY.
- Currently, we have 6 active members (Becky Conway, Korrin Gumieny, Katie McInnis, Kristin Kemper, Jessica Loomis and Becky Van Deraa) on our Christian Education Team, who contribute in numerous ways to support the program alongside our Christian Education Director. While our program is strong, we continue to prioritize its growth, which means we are looking for more volunteers to join our team and to sign-up for teaching Sunday School.



Continued on next page

**Annual Activities with volunteer opportunities**

<b>January</b>	<b>February - April</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Servanthood Blitz</b></li> <li>● <b>Food Pantry birthday party supplies</b></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Sleep-under and lock-ins</b></p>
<i>10-12 volunteers</i> rotation leaders, rotation helpers, snack (buy, serve, clean) coordination, setup, cleanup, purchase supplies	<i>18-20 volunteers</i> Plan itineraries, purchase supplies, check-in table, lead games, lead crafts, sleep overnight

<b>May</b>	<b>June - August</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Food Pantry Cereal Drive</b></li> <li>● <b>First Communion</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Sundae School</b></li> <li>● <b>ABC Sunday School</b></li> <li>● <b>Teacher Orientation</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Confirmation Camp</b></li> <li>● <b>East Coast Road trip</b></li> <li>● <b>Sunday School camp</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>VBS</b></li> </ul>
<i>10-12 volunteers</i> Load vans, drive cereal to the Food Pantry, setup the domino run Lead classes, prepare bread ingredients, lead craft, teach how-to acolyte, order cakes, cut/serve cake, complete certificates	<i>25-30 volunteers</i> Buy/serve sundaes, teach classes in the summer	<i>15-20 volunteers</i> Plan itinerary, buy food and supplies, pack vehicles, drive students, sleep overnight	<i>65-75 volunteers</i> curriculum, passages, songs, crafts, games, schedules, rosters, name tags, signage, t-shirts, buy/serve snacks, setup, clean up, site leaders, crew leaders, family night meal and games

<b>September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>November</b>	<b>December</b>
<b>Rally Weekend</b> <b>Confirmation</b> <b>Bible presentation</b>	<b>Autumn Fest</b>	<b>Advent Fest</b> <b>Christmas Program</b>	
<i>12-14 volunteers</i> Assist kids as needed, answer parent questions, support teachers, cut cake at each service, take pictures	<i>6-8 volunteers</i> Plan itinerary, buy food and supplies, lead game, lead craft, select movie, setup equipment, serve food, clean-up	<i>65-75 volunteers</i> Plan crafts, create sign-ups, buy supplies, create signage, take pictures, make cookies, buy or make food, make coffee/tea/lemonade/cocoa, assemble platters, warm-up food, serve food, replenish food, dishes, clear out hall, setup, clean-up, lead crafts, help little kids, help craft leaders,	

UNITY is strong because of the collective support from our Pastors, Staff, and Members. Without all the support given to the Christian Education program, it would not be able to grow. I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to UNITY, and to work alongside so many caring and dedicated volunteers. It is a blessing beyond words to see kids feel at home at UNITY!

## COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY

Bert Perrizo








This year the Communication & Technology team continued to support the staff's technological needs. We continue to work with the staff to maintain what's firmly become UNITY's third virtual campus. If you aren't familiar, I would recommend you check out our web site and see all of the great information available:

<https://unitybrookfield.org/index.php>

In 2024, our team transitioned from the produced online worship to live-streaming our 8:30 am service each week. A lot of time and research went into making this successful transition. There were some challenges during the installation and initial weeks, but we were able to post each of the week's services. I would like to specifically thank all the 8:30 service volunteers that have supported the live stream. You can view the current week's service along with all the previous weeks at this link:

<https://unitybrookfield.org/worship.php>

As we look forward to 2025, our committee will continue to support our staff and the technology tools that we use. These efforts are a team effort, and I would like to extend a big Thank You to our team that helps with their varied talents: Ed Dominski, Pat Dowling, John Ehlers, Duane Maas, Alan Krueger, Bill Hubert, and Brad Wilkins. We will continue to review the staff's needs in the ever-changing technology landscape. We are always looking for new ideas and team members that are interested in joining. Whether you like gadgets, bits and bytes, sound systems, photography/videography, or just lending a hand, please contact me if you're interested in joining our team [bert.perrizo@gmail.com](mailto:bert.perrizo@gmail.com) 262-227-0690 (call/text) or contact any staff member. In the event you prefer to connect via your mobile device, below are the QR codes to the links I referenced above plus a few others. Just scan one with the camera on your phone and follow the link (you may need to zoom in to the one you want). – Bert

UNITY Web Site	UNITY Online Worship	UNITY Announcements	UNITY Facebook	UNITY Vimeo	UNITY Securely Donate
					

## FINANCE

**Tim Herman, Finance Chair & Adrienne Krueger, Treasurer**



We are thrilled to share that 2024 ended the year with a surplus! This result is amazing in light of the pastoral transitions in 2024. While other congregations have experienced a 10 - 25% decrease in attendance and giving when a pastor leaves, UNITY's giving for 2024 was slightly higher than in 2023. During this transition process, the staff has worked incredibly hard to keep things running smoothly and continue to provide a great place to worship. We thank the staff for their hard work and you for your continued support of UNITY's staff, programs, and ministries.

In December, Pastor Justin Kierzek accepted the call for UNITY. The call team continues the search for another pastor in 2025, and UNITY continues to look for a director of communications and a youth director. While the searches continue to fill these important positions, UNITY is in a great place financially. The rest of this report provides an overview of the 2024 results and the budget for 2025.



### 2024 Results

For 2024, UNITY went into the year with a small budgeted surplus with giving of \$1,256,539 and expenses of 1,256,517. Actual giving was \$1,210,700, and expenses were \$1,207,232, which resulted in a small surplus of \$3,468. Actual giving in 2024 was slightly higher than in 2023. This result is an incredible achievement with the pastoral transitions in 2024. Most expenses were similar to 2023; the largest area of savings relative to budget was benefits for staff. Once again, the Congregation made it a huge December with \$240,684 of giving.

Church Council recommends using the \$3,468 surplus from 2024 plus releasing \$15,000 of the \$30,000 reserve for 2024 pastoral moving expenses that were not required when we called Pastor Justin. Church Council recommends using the \$18,468 to share 10% (\$1,847) with our partners via benevolence and the remaining \$16,622 be used for staff bonuses. This will leave \$15,000 in reserve to help manage for unknowable expenses, such as pastoral moving costs.

The church's balance sheet remains strong. Total operating cash is \$352,139. The operating reserve is the church's safety net and contains about one month of operating expenses. UNITY used the remaining Employee Retention Credit (ERC) funds in 2024. Lastly, while not on the balance sheet, the balance of the COL mortgage is \$171,290 as of December 31, 2024, with an interest rate of 3.66%, and maturity date of November 9, 2027.

### 2025 Budget

Church Council's proposed budget includes a small surplus with budgeted giving of \$1,247,021 and expenses of 1,246,959. For 2025, the budget includes a 3% increase in giving compared to 2024. There was a 40% response rate to the stewardship appeal with an average increase of 6% in the amount pledged for 2025. The budgeted 3% increase in giving takes into account the results of the stewardship appeal and assumes no changes to giving from those who did not respond. The budgeted expenses for 2025 include adjustments to staff pay to bring them to where we think they should be. With the ongoing pastoral call process and the open staff positions, there is a bit of estimation for salaries and benefits. The Finance team will continue to be vigilant and approach 2025 with a flexible mindset. Taking all this into account, we are projecting a break-even year for the church in 2025.



## Reflections of Ministry Team Chairs

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### About the Finance Team

The Finance Team works closely with the UNITY Church Council to plan, monitor, and account for the financial affairs of the church. We develop the budget in consultation with the other UNITY teams, oversee accounting for and depositing of the offerings each week, conduct a limited financial review of prior years' record keeping, and advise the Council on other financial matters as needed.

The Finance Team holds regular meetings with team members monitoring all areas including legal, banking, real estate, and insurance. The current members of the team are Penny Berglund, Michelle Duerr, Kevin Grabowski, Greg Schreiber, and our pastors. We thank them for their support and continuing to help UNITY with their own unique talents, knowledge, and experience. We are a nerdy, yet fun, group who really care about placing the church in the best possible position for both the church's short-term and long-term goals. If any member of the congregation has an interest in joining UNITY's Finance Team, please reach out.

We give special thanks to Matt Griepentrog and Craig Nelson, for all that they do to keep our accounts in order and reconciled. Tracking the finances of a church with an annual budget of more than \$1,200,000 is a ton of record keeping.

Last, thanks to all of YOU as a congregation for your generous giving and commitment to UNITY's mission.

With gratitude,

Adrienne Krueger & Tim Herman

## **GROUP OPPORTUNITIES (GO)**

**Tiffany Reay**

“The GO committee stands for Group Opportunities, and we are organizers for social fellowship activities for the entire congregation across the campuses and the ages ranges. We have been trying different sorts of picnics, games and activities. In 2024, we introduced a Crazy Uncle Night for all members, sponsored celebrations for Pastor John, Pastor Muriel, and Gail Anklam, and we finally did our group walk on the trails behind CTK. If this sounds interesting, I encourage you to reach out - we are always looking for more folks on board.”



Tiffany Reay

## INVITE

### Anna Jansson



As we reflect on 2024 and recognize that it was a year of quite a few big changes for our UNITY community, we can, at the same time, celebrate that within all that change we continued to have new households join our church family! Our new member classes, which take place twice during the year, are a time in which those attending can learn more about UNITY'S leaders and staff, core beliefs, serving opportunities, and all that UNITY has to offer. It's also a time that we are able to learn more about our joining members and what their interests and needs are.

During the spring 2024 new member weekend we welcomed eight households and during the fall new member weekend we welcomed 5 new households. We are so very grateful for these new friends and all the ways that they are now a part of our church family.

In 2024 the Invite Committee also worked on putting together simple Visitor Welcome Bags that now sit in the narthex at each campus. These bags are meant to be given to anyone who is visiting either campus as a way to welcome them and share a little bit about who we are at UNITY. We are hoping that visitors who receive these bags feel welcomed in a new thoughtful and meaningful way.

Please let us know if you would like to be a part of welcoming and helping UNITY visitors and/or planning and joining us for new member classes! We are always looking for warm, friendly members to share all the wonderful things about UNITY with those checking us out and thinking about joining!

## PROPERTY

Al Bengston



As someone who works for Lutheran Social Services helping to take care of all kinds of issues that arise at all their properties around their greater Milwaukee area, I want to thank Denny Thompson for all his work each week inside our buildings and around our properties. We save so much by not having to call someone to do basic things like replacing lightbulbs with more energy efficient LED lights and tackling a few plumbing issues too.

In addition, I want to thank all the people who sign up to help mow the lawn or shovel the sidewalks. While we never quite know what the winter months are going to look like, we do need mowing done every week during the summer to keep our yards looking their best. Again, if it wasn't for members, we'd have to pay tens of thousands to pay for this to be done.

Also, I want to thank all the people who come and help at our Spring and Fall clean-up days including Confirmation students, and everyone else who contributes to our list of property needs including our Landscaping team who have been working hard to take down dead trees, plant new ones after last Winter's ice storm and creating a long term plan.

Last of all, I want to thank Raven Epding, only a Senior in high school who has largely been cleaning both campuses each week, with a little help from Leigh Rainer at the COL campus and Karen Sporleder at the CTK campus. It's pretty impressive that given the church's busy schedule each week and her schedule that she can find time to make sure things are clean and set up before the next thing happening, but she does. Having grown up here, it's clear to see that she takes care of our spaces like they are her own, but she is going to be heading off to college pretty soon, which means we're going to need to find someone to fill her shoes. If you or anyone you know of would be interested in cleaning and doing light set-up 10-15 hours a week, please talk to me or one of the pastors.

We have a long list of property needs and wants that we have been slowly taking care of through the existing budget and designated property funds in order to keep overall expenses down.

Our fire protection company and the City of Brookfield fire inspector were able to meet on site at the COL campus to discuss the situation with our sprinkler heads. We have to replace all the wall mounted ones which is required when one fails a sample testing. In addition, we have to re-test a sample of four of the drop down heads. If one fails, then we will need to work on replacing all of the these throughout the building. If by chance, they pass, we won't need to have them tested for another ten years, at which point, they'd likely need to be replaced. Depending on their location, the biggest challenge is getting access behind the sprinkler head, having to cut through the drywall in the ceiling. This would then need to be replaced in areas that are not easy to get at which means we'd contract someone to do it. (We did utilize Ryan King, one of our college students along with some help from Jan Constable and Denny to patch the holes that were made when they replaced the wall mounted ones which were a little easier to tackle.)

We also would like to replace carpeting and paint the offices at the COL campus that are long past their prime and so that Pastor Justin can officially have a nice, "new" office of his own.

## Reflections of Ministry Team Chairs

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We have one bid and are waiting to hear back from others and we have a team of UNITY volunteers ready to start painting. However, we could use a few strong hands to help disassemble office furniture and move them out and back in. Let me know if you'd be able to help in any way.

While we are asking for quotes for everything, we'll likely not be able to do it all including the Fellowship Hall, Kitchen and classrooms, so we'll tackle as much as we can within our existing means for the year.

In addition, at the CTK campus, we'd like to get back to our plans to update the kitchen and start thinking of ways to open up the kitchen/library, so that we can better use our beautiful patio and enjoy the backyard. Again, let me know, if this would be a project you'd enjoy being a part of helping to think through, get bids for and be a part of helping to shape.

Thank you for all the ways you support UNITY and make it a welcoming place for members, partners and visitors alike!

Al Bengston, UNITY Property Chair  
Allanbenst234@gmail.com, 414-322-6445

## SERVANT MINISTRIES

Ellen Vermillion

After serving as the advocate for the Food Pantry with my husband for several years, taking on the role of Servanthood Ministry Chair in August of 2024, seemed like a good way to continue my support of UNITY's mission to serve our many partners.

UNITY has ten Servanthood Ministry partners which include two inner city of Milwaukee congregations, two addiction treatment centers, a homeless shelter, a free health clinic, a food pantry, and a blood center! Each partner has a dedicated UNITY advocate that works with the partner to create meaningful relationships with our congregation. Thank you to our devoted ministry advocates for your dedication to this important ministry.



In 2024, 12.5% of UNITY's giving (\$150,865) was gifted in benevolence to our partners. The Servanthood Ministry Advocates work with the many partners to project and finalize financial support amounts to assist with our partners' operational needs in order for them to continue with the amazing work they offer. Please refer to the 2024 Benevolence Financial Report for giving details. Also, see below for some of the highlights of the needs that were met for our ministry partners through UNITY's generosity and support.

- **Aspen Recovery Center:** UNITY donations helped to fund scholarships to clients to support recovery treatment this year. In addition to financial support, we partnered with clients to make fleece blankets, tile coasters, gratitude journals, and install raised garden beds in Aspen's backyard. UNITY members and Aspen clients also enjoyed a pizza dinner, a cookie decorating activity, and a doggy playdate together. UNITY volunteers made a Thanksgiving dinner in November and gave 47 Angel Tree gifts to clients and staff in December.
- **American Red Cross:** UNITY hosted four blood drives and collected 107 units of blood in 2024 thanks to 123 registered donors. Up to three people can benefit from one unit of blood, so the impact is great with up to 321 people benefitting from this donated blood!
- **Bread of Healing Clinic:** Thanks to UNITY members for many months of volunteering at medical/dental clinics for un-or-under-insured patients. A big thank you also to ten confirmation students and parent volunteers who helped with the pill sorting this fall. And a special note of appreciation to a UNITY member who stepped up to serve as treasurer for the clinic. Benevolence funds to support the clinic and eight Angel Tree gift cards were given this year.
- **Cross Lutheran:** UNITY members participated in the Garden Work Party and our Fellowship Choir sang at Cross Lutheran during a service this spring. In addition to financial support, UNITY donations also help to support the food pantry at Cross.
- **El Salvador:** In February, 24 travelers served at the Mission of Healing Clinic providing in-person medical information and aid to 465 patients. In July, 19 UNITY members celebrated with our Salvadoran partners at Cordero de Dios and Rutilio Grande through worship, games, pupusa-making, and dance parties. Pastors John and Muriel were honored for their dedicated commitment and support to our partners at Cordero de Dios and Rutilio Grande. UNITY continues to support scholarships that provide funds for transportation and tuition for students in grade six through high school.

## Reflections of Ministry Team Chairs

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- **Hephatha Lutheran Church:** UNITY members donated 66 backpacks filled with supplies for students for the start of a new school year. UNITY also purchased diapers throughout the year for the Strong Baby Sanctuary as well as providing lunches served on Saturdays at the Strong Baby Sanctuary. In August, members from Hephatha attended a backyard church service and picnic dinner at CTK. The new van UNITY helped Hephatha purchase was blessed. In October, confirmation students attended a church service at Hephatha and helped serve a lunch. Gloria Dei Bell Choir performed there this fall. 72 Christmas wishes were granted by the UNITY Angel Tree gift donations and many warm winter mittens, hats, socks and scarves too!
- **Hebron House:** UNITY collected and delivered 30 kitchen kits in support of their housing program to assist young adults, provided hundreds of cookies for two different events, cleaned and organized storage areas and, this past summer a group of confirmation students helped with a painting project. UNITY volunteers also helped at Hebron's fundraising gala in November and delivered 17 Angel Tree gifts in December.
- **Serenity Inns:** UNITY members, including many confirmation students, continue to provide meals multiple times each month. This year Serenity was able to open up a new residential treatment center to serve an additional 50-60 men in their recovery. In December, 44 gifts were fulfilled by Angel Tree gift donations.
- **Waukesha Food Pantry:** Thanks to generous financial and food donations, and the many UNITY members who volunteer each month, UNITY continues to support the Food Pantry Serving Waukesha County. The summer and fall bag sales raised \$2449 and \$3411 respectively. This spring the Sunday school students collected hundreds of boxes of cereal and this fall the senior high youth group's scavenger hunt gathered 900 pounds of food! UNITY hosted and helped to sponsor the Food Pantry fundraiser on May 18 and they were able to raise \$40,000 at the event. A recent renovation to improve client services at the Food Pantry, was completed in November thanks in part to a \$14,000 donation from UNITY.
- **Lutheran World Relief:** The Thanksgiving collection of \$3,824 was donated to support areas that were directly affected by hurricanes Milton and Helene.

### Partner Advocates

American Red Cross	Marilyn Ranney	ranneymarilyn@gmail.com
Aspen Center	Cindy Boyd	dcboyd1985@sbcglobal.net
Bread of Healing Clinic	Diane Dressler	ddressler@wi.rr.com
Cross Lutheran Church	Justin Kuehl	justin.kuehl4@gmail.com
ES: Cordero de Dios	Julie Hoesly	jrhoesly@gmail.com
ES: Rutilio Grande	Michael Horner-Ibler	michaelhorneribler@gmail.com
Food Pantry of Waukesha	Melanie Rooney	melrooney7@gmail.com
Food Pantry of Waukesha	Bill Rooney	billrooney017@gmail.com
Hebron Housing Services	Jane Boorse	janeboorse43@gmail.com
Hephatha Lutheran Church	Shirley Denu	srden2@gmail.com
Serenity Inns	Brian Flynn	bflynn@aol.com

## STEWARDSHIP TEAM

Trisha Smith



The Stewardship Team is a strong, diverse team that represents both campuses and different stages of life. The team's work has been a place to showcase the strengths of each team member. Together we have creativity, organization, a drive to accomplish our tasks, and some tech savvy. We all bring a passion to highlight the good works of UNITY and encourage members to use the gifts God has provided us to support UNITY.

God's gifts of time, talent and financial resources were the focus of the Stewardship Team in 2024. As part of promoting members' involvement and connection to the church, the Team used educational efforts to help explain how our requests fit into UNITY's current and future needs.

In the Spring of 2024, we did a time and talent drive that explained how many volunteers are needed each weekend (72) and how many ways there are to connect through service, bible studies and small groups (over 120). The drive resulted in some laughs during the T&T video (who wouldn't want a church usher tattoo?) and in a modest increase in members submitting a time and talent form. The team's experience with the drive is that the form may be too formal or daunting. In 2025, we hope to retool the form and seek ways for personal invitations to connect someone with a service or small group opportunity.

In November and December of 2024, we held the annual pledge drive. All of the Stewardship Team members had participated in the 2023 drive, so we had some experience that made it easier to pull together the 2024 pledge drive plan and materials. We selected "Celebrate the Past and Commit to the Future" as our theme to reflect on the many blessings and sweet memories the congregation had in 2024 and to highlight how UNITY remains strong and vibrant as we head into 2025. The core church membership gave a stellar response, with timely pledges and the majority of the submitted pledges committing to roughly the suggested 6% increase. Overall, the drive had a lower response rate than last year's drive. We had 263 commitments for 2025 compared to 298 commitments for 2024. Perhaps the lower response rate was due to all the church activities occurring during the drive or that asking members to share reflections from 2024 and hopes for 2025 took away from the financial part of the drive.

If you have any feedback on the pledge drive or if you would like information on getting involved with our passionate and fun team, please reach out to me.

Best wishes,  
Trisha Smith



## WORSHIP & MUSIC

Steve Johnson



2024, what a year for worship! UNITY Music grows and thrives (think Brass Quintet on Easter and of course, our fabulous Praise Band, Handbell Ensembles and choirs)! All the music this year during Advent and Christmas was fantastic.

This year we began Livestreaming our 8:30 service at the Cross of Life Campus. We have four dedicated high school students who rotate this worship role and are doing a fantastic job. It has been working very well.

Because of our inviting, friendly and multiple formats of worship, we have gained many new members and there are more ready to join. Visitors love the friendliness not only of our pastors and staff, but also of you, the congregation of UNITY. I know we have had a few volunteers from our visitors who aren't even members yet. That's because of you!

Speaking of volunteering. Please consider being a volunteer at worship. We need more people to do so, especially since attendance at all services is growing. Contact Nancy Kostanski at [nancy@unitybrookfield.org](mailto:nancy@unitybrookfield.org) and she will get you all set up and trained.

UNITY is a great place for worship and every year since we have become UNITY, we have become stronger as a congregation and it is great to see in person numbers increasing.

Always remember, if you are unable to worship with us, you can always listen online to the entire service or the sermons are available on the same webpage at this address: <https://unitybrookfield.org/worship.php>

Have a wonderful and blessed 2025.

Steve Johnson  
[steve.johnson61@gmail.com](mailto:steve.johnson61@gmail.com)

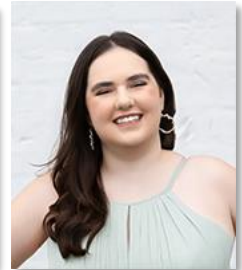
## YOUTH

### Nancy Oberhauser



2024 saw many changes throughout UNITY, including in our Youth programs. We were blessed to have Eric Borkenhagen on council for the first half of the year, and his term ended right before his family's out-of-state move. And while looking for a full time Youth Director proved to be somewhat challenging, we were fortunate to add Ryan Johnson as a part-time Youth Director. Ryan is a great fit, bringing enthusiasm and energy, having grown up and participated as a youth in our programs not so long ago. He is creative, engaging, resourceful, and truly embodies the welcome that we hope to extend to our high school youth.

In addition to Ryan's leadership, we are fortunate to have added Michael Kroepfl and Rachel Manganaro as Youth Council Representatives. Ideally, we would like to have a full-time Youth Director on staff, but we are thrilled to have Ryan now and look forward to filling the role as a full-time position down the road.



Most Sunday evenings during the school year are filled with opportunities for youth to meet up and have fun together. We've had a great variety of activities including Crazy Uncle, Nerf "Capture the Flag", Gameshow night, Christmas lights walk, Haunted House & Hayride, Ice skating, and the popular Christmas White Elephant exchange. (Yes, the Hannah Montana poster continues the tradition and is a sought-after gift.)

We are grateful for the Senior High students that have provided helping hands and hearts again during Vacation Bible School. I also appreciate the ways they help out in church and support the annual fundraising for our summer trips.

The summer trip in 2024 was the ELCA National Youth Gathering in New Orleans. Pastor Sherrie and 16 kids & adults joined the energizing worship services alongside 16,000 others, hearing the message that that no matter what we face, we have been created by God to be who we are. They also shared their talents by serving in the community.

The "Kickin' It With Jesus" Soccer team was well attended, and in Session 1, this coed Rec soccer team placed second overall, with hopes to continue their wins in Session 2.

In the new year, we are looking forward to our annual Ski Trip to Devil's Head, and our Summer Trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

I'd like to close with a note of thanks to our incredibly talented, kind-hearted, and hard working youth. In spending time with them, I appreciate that they have so many demands on their time, yet they frequently find a way to stay connected with their peers. And that couldn't happen without the support and encouragement of their families. So thank you all & I look forward to a great 2025.

## Reflections of UNITY Staff

### DIRECTOR OF ADULT PROGRAMS

**Matt Griepentrog**

When I take a moment to reflect back on the past year at UNITY, the first thought that comes to mind is “wow, there was a LOT that happened this year!” I think if someone were writing a summary of our year together in the style of a Gospel writer, it would sound a lot like the book of Mark. In Mark’s Gospel, he takes us from event to event without hesitation, using the phrase “and immediately.” That’s what 2024 at UNITY felt like!

We were able to journey through Lent together and explore our theme “bloom.” The Adult Programs team did a wonderful job of creating different one-time small group experiences around our theme, including bourbon tasting, garden planting, pretzel making, and board games. It was a great opportunity to meet new people and look at our faith through a unique lens.



AND IMMEDIATELY we began our time saying goodbye to Pastor John. Working alongside Pastor John was exciting, refreshing, energizing, and fulfilling. He will be missed in many ways, but I am so thankful for the time he was able to lead this place.

AND IMMEDIATELY we welcomed Pastor Eric to UNITY. He has been such a gift to us as a staff and to our congregation as a whole! He has jumped into all kinds of unconventional roles, even appearing in Jesus Karaoke!

AND IMMEDIATELY we launched into trip season. In the past I have traveled on many of these trips, so for me it felt very different! This time around I was part of the crew holding down the fort, making sure things went smoothly while our travelers experienced life on the road together. It was wonderful to hear their stories and see the connections that they all made. Also this summer, it was a special highlight to organize and attend a Lake Country Dockhounds game, where we got to watch UNITY’s own Mitch Mueller pitch in the game - and also catch the first pitch thrown out by Pastor Sherrie! It is always super cool to see people who “grew up” at UNITY do amazing things as they enter adulthood.

AND IMMEDIATELY we began our time saying goodbye to Pastor Muriel. The way that Mo was able to connect with people in our congregation was really special. We definitely miss her warm spirit and laugh here in the office!

AND IMMEDIATELY we launched into our fall schedule. It has been great to see new groups like the Sheepshead group blossom - what a great way to experience, what I must say, is a game with a little bit of a learning curve! If you’ve never played before, but always been curious how, this is the perfect place to give it a try!

AND IMMEDIATELY we prepared to welcome Pastor Justin to UNITY as our new pastor. I look forward to getting to know him more, and I know he is excited to use his gifts to serve God here with us.

In all these things, I am thankful to God for how we have been guided through this crazy year! Thank you for all the ways you have supported UNITY both inside our walls and beyond!

## DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Michelle Aprahamian

**“The unfolding of your words gives light” Psalm 119:130**

There are not enough words to say thank you for your support and generosity for our UNITY kids and families.

We are so grateful to our 32 volunteer teachers in our Sunday school program and to all the congregation members who give so generously that allow events like the Servanthood Blitz, Lock-ins, First Communion, Vacation Bible School, Fall movie night, Advent Fest, and our beloved Christmas program. Although it has been a year of transition, we are so thankful for the love and support of Pastors Sherrie, Muriel and Eric, and Davida Kroepfl, Education Council Chair. Most importantly, thank you to the congregation for your unwavering support and for making sure our kids know they belong, and their light will always shine! God Bless all of you and may God continue to walk with us into 2025.



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**“LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS SO THAT  
THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS AND GIVE GLORY TO  
YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN” MATTHEW 5:16**

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144 KIDS  
REGISTERED FOR  
SUNDAY SCHOOL  
160 KIDS IN  
ATTENDANCE



JANUARY 15, 2024  
40 KIDS, GRADES 2-6  
SERVANTHOOD BLITZ



BIBLE WEEKEND  
25 UNITY KIDS  
RECEIVED BIBLES

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**“YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. A TOWN BUILT  
ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN” MATTHEW 5:16**

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## Reflections of UNITY Staff

Our UNITY Vacation Bible School theme was Primero Dios where 180 children, confirmation students and adult volunteers put God first. Our offering supported four elementary school scholarships in El Salvador!

Advent Fest and the Sunday School Christmas Program enjoyed a night a faith, fellowship and crafting with 248 people. *The Greatest Story Ever Told* was shared by 116 Sunday school children!



## DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM SUPPORT

Nicole Krause

Just as UNITY was going through its own transitions, I too was pivoting in my own life. God has a funny way of showing you what is important. And in 2024, He showed me that UNITY was the right place to be. With a background in many areas including, planning, logistics, and funeral service, there wasn't a specific role that felt like the perfect fit. So, we went to the drawing board and made one up! Now you may be asking yourself: what does a Director of Program Support do? In the short, support the needs of other programs! To be more specific, there were 4 main areas I focused on: Servant Ministries, El Salvador, Confirmation and a Grief Support Group.



**Servant Ministries:** With Pastor Muriel being the main staff person in this area, I was fortunate enough to learn a lot from her in the summer before she departed. Our church has been blessed with many opportunities over the years to serve our partners in a variety of ways. I truly did not understand the vast imprint we had until taking on this role. Our impact far surpasses our monetary support; the relationships that we build with everyone in simply priceless.

Our Servant Ministries are a very large and important role in who we are as UNITY. So along with our chairperson, Ellen Vermillion and our 10 advocates (1 for each partner), we work closely together to identify their needs and work together to build lasting partnerships.

I encourage you all to step out of your comfort zone and participate in an event with our partners. The feeling of true companionship and connection shines in each relationship; and can truly be felt when volunteering your gifts and time. We are truly blessed to be able to do the work we do with so many organizations both local and international.

**El Salvador:** Another area that needed support was planning the Mission Trips to El Salvador. Again, I was fortunate enough to pick up a ton of knowledge and experience from Pastor Mo. Going back to El Salvador after my first 2 trips 12 years ago was serene. To see the vast improvements and changes in person was truly remarkable. The final touches of the Medical Mission of Healing Trip are being solidified at the time of writing this. It has been a true joy to get to work hand in hand with our partners internationally to provide life changing medical care as well as life changing relationships together.

**Confirmation:** We are truly blessed to have such a robust and diverse confirmation program at UNITY. As someone who went through the program many moons ago, it's been a real joy to re-learn (some parts!) and teach a new group of young people the importance of church. While parts of the curriculum were a bit fuzzy, what I DO remember about my experience is the connections I made and the opportunities to serve our community. With over 50 students currently in the program, we were met with a new challenge: not all students were able to participate on Wednesday nights. So, we decided to offer a second Sunday night option, and it has been a true benefit to many. We continue to grow the program by adding Pastor Justin as a lead teacher along with Pastor Sherrie. I wanted to extend a big thank you to our adults and students who have been extremely understanding with us as we navigate uncharted waters by adding another night which can sometimes cause logistical hiccups along the way. Your willingness to jump in and be flexible has helped us continue to provide an amazing program to our youth.

**Grief Support Group:** There seemed to be a need for a support group in our congregation. With my experience as a funeral director, and Pastor Jim's in member care, why not co-lead one together; on my first day on staff! The encouragement and love that this group brings to one another is truly astounding. Their strength and courage to carry on in times of great struggle and uncertainty is truly amazing. From what was intended to be a



## Reflections of UNITY Staff

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3-week event has transformed into an 8-month continuous journey. If you are somewhere in the midst of grief and are hesitant or unsure if this group is right for you, please reach out to me. And if a group setting feels overwhelming, I'd be happy to sit and talk one-on-one. If you choose to join this group, I promise you'll be met with compassion, care and unconditional support.

With my spare time, I look forward to revamping our 20-30 Somethings group and continue to jump in wherever help is needed. It feels like the biggest blessing to give back to a place that has given me so much as a member since 1997. 2025 is full of more events, opportunities and ways to serve our amazing community. I look forward to helping those plans turn into incredible experiences for all involved.



**Confirmation Fall Orientation**



**East Coast Road Trip After Caving**



**El Salvador Summer Relationship Trip**

## DIRECTOR OF MUSIC MINISTRIES

Lynn Key

2024 was a year of many transitions at UNITY, with the retirement of Pastor John Horner-Ibler after 27 years, and the departure of Pastor Muriel Otto after 11 years, of faithful service. We celebrated each of them in various ways, including musically, as we sent each off with special offerings, both joyfully and tearfully! There are too many people to name to thank for making these celebrations of their time with us memorable. And for those of you that shared special words/music to celebrate these very special people, even though we might not have gotten to share those in worship, they were shared individually.



This was a great year for making music at UNITY! Our goal each year is to have groups share at each of our weekend service times, so regardless of when you regularly worship, you have the opportunity to enjoy each group live. In 2024, groups also combined in worship a number of times for special offerings: On Easter Saturday, our two children choirs combined to carry us from darkness into light. Then, on Easter Sunday our Brass choir announced the Good News at our 8:00 and 9:30 services, while at 9:30 and 11:00 the Fellowship Choir and Gloria Dei bells combined to share “*Easter Bells, Set Free Your Music*” at the COL campus as we celebrated Pastor John’s last Easter worship with us. A wonderful string ensemble announced the good news at the CTK campus with “*Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring*”, while also accompanying hymns.

We had one last chance to share Jesus Karaoke with Pastor Muriel in June. We had wonderful outdoor concerts in our backyard pavilion, and as the summer came to an end, and Muriel prepared to depart, we were brought to tears by a beautiful duet shared by sisters Robin and Anna Nordstrom, of “*For Good*”.

In December, we celebrated with about 30 singers in the Fellowship Choir, and had full ensembles in our bell choirs. What a joy to have a full group using almost every bell! It was also exciting to see the Hosanna bell choir as a wonderful mix of youth and adults. Children’s choirs continued to add new voices as families have grown and new families have joined UNITY. Christmas Eve was a joyful musical celebration with combined children’s choirs, bells, Praise Band, brass, Fellowship choir, and string ensemble, welcoming baby Jesus.

Many thanks go out to all the musicians who shared their musical gifts throughout the year in many ways. A special thanks to our Praise Band for leading worship often. Deepest gratitude to our wonderful service musician, Greg O’Connell, and to our music directors for sharing their musical gifts with their choirs and the congregation again this past year.

- Janet Day, Children’s Choir Director:  
*Joyful Noise Music Makers* for Preschool through Grade 1, and  
*Celebration Music Makers* for Grades 2 through 6
- Molly Pufall-Brown, Adult Vocal Choir Director:  
*Fellowship Choir*
- Stacey Nordmeyer, Praise Band and Handbell Choirs Director:  
*Hosanna Bells* for Beginning to Early Intermediate Ringers, and  
*Gloria Dei Handbells* for Late Intermediate to Advanced Ringers

*When In Our Music, God is Glorified ...*

How oft, in making music, we have found a new dimension in the world of sound, as worship moved us to a more profound Alleluia! Let every instrument be tuned for praise; let all rejoice who have a voice to raise; and may God give us faith to sing always: Alleluia (a song of praise to God!)



## MEMBER CARE

**Jim Ahlquist**



The bulletin each week states: UNITY Member Care is always here for you. You don't have to face life's ups and downs alone. Whether it's an unexpected hospitalization, a recent diagnosis, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, addiction, anxiety, depression, or virtually anything else, the pastors are only a call, text, or email away. Please never hesitate to reach out - - whether we're the only stop you'll make or just the first step in a longer care process.

The need for "Member Care" has certainly increased over the years here at UNITY. A few years ago when I was called to Christ the King, we were considered the old church with lots of home-bound and hospitalized, along with a good number of funerals. Cross of Life was younger, so when it happened, those life events seemed more tragic.

Don't get me wrong, UNITY still has a lot of younger people, but guess what? We are all getting older each day and the need for member care continues to increase. My plea continues...we need more and more visitors and communion people who can form wonderful relationships and see people more frequently. The goal would be visits/communion about once a month.

Thanks to those who are doing this Member Care. To listen to their stories, and to see the fulfillment of the soul from sharing this great gift of God is beyond words.

Can you help? Training is provided, even going along on that first visit. If you are feeling the Holy Spirit nudging you to share in this ministry, please reach out to myself or any of the pastors.

Jim Ahlquist  
jim@unitybrookfield.org  
715-210-2245

# Financial Reports

## Fund Balances

### Year Ended December 31, 2024

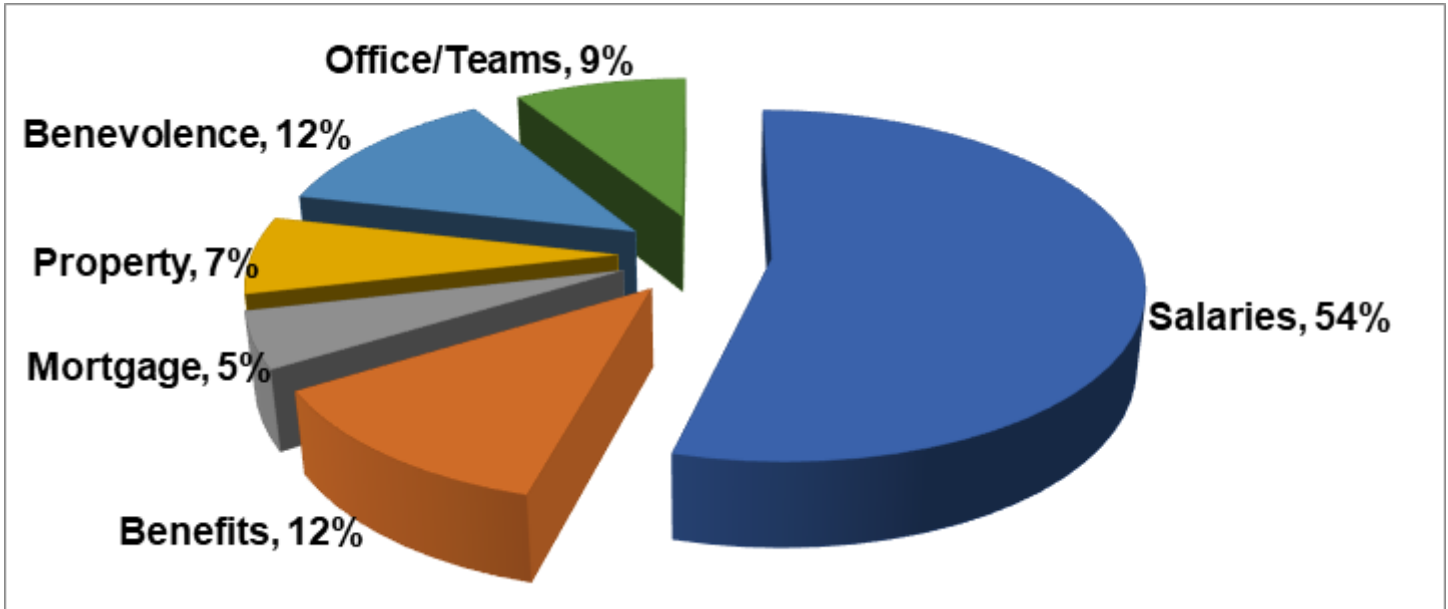
			Fund 10	
	12/31/2024	12/31/2023	Benevolence	Total
			12/31/2024	12/31/2024
<b>Cash &amp; Investments</b>				
<i>Cash &amp; investment accounts</i>				
Petty cash	\$ 875	\$ 875	\$ 875	
Operating cash account-PNC	\$ 67,429	143,866	182,033	249,462
Operating cash account-BMO	\$ 129,059	156,043	(50,814)	78,245
Reserve Fund- CTK	\$ 31	31		31
ELCA Mission Fund	\$ 154,745	48,100		154,745
<i>Total cash &amp; investments</i>	\$ 352,139	348,916	131,219	483,358
Other assets		(0)		-
<b>Total Cash &amp; Investments</b>	<b>\$ 352,139</b>	<b>348,915</b>	<b>131,219</b>	<b>483,358</b>
<b>Liabilities and operating surplus</b>				
Property	\$ 7,200	7,200		7,200
Backyard	\$ 22,152			
Sabbatical	\$ 33,543	25,587		33,543
Memorial fund (COL & CTK)	\$ 29,895	34,580		29,895
Building Use	\$ 10,495	5,929		10,495
Pastors' discretionary fund	\$ 8,454	7,679		8,454
Wellington Park Fund	\$ 30,261			30,261
Music/library/Thrivent fund	\$ 4,155	9,542		4,155
Prepaid pledges	\$ 35,000	38,806		35,000
Operating Reserve (ERC Funds)	\$ 42,103	63,693		42,103
Contingency reserve	\$ 100,624	100,624		100,624
Special benevolence	\$ -		51,041	51,041
Education Fund				
Other liabilities (youth & Tech)	\$ 7,775	4,556	210	7,985
Payroll taxes payable				-
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>\$ 331,657</b>	<b>298,196</b>	<b>51,251</b>	<b>382,908</b>
Beginning balance	\$ 17,013	50,719	33,361	50,374
Year-to-date Surplus/ (deficit)	\$ 3,469		46,607	50,076
<b>Total operating surplus/ (Deficit)</b>	<b>\$ 20,482</b>	<b>50,719</b>	<b>79,968</b>	<b>100,450</b>
<b>Total liabilities and operating surplus</b>	<b>\$ 352,139</b>	<b>\$ 348,915</b>	<b>\$ 131,219</b>	<b>\$ 483,358</b>

## Revenues and Expenses Year Ended December 31, 2024

Unity Lutheran Church - Revenues and Expenses Year Ended December 31, 2024

	Actual 2024	Budget 2024	Actual 2023	Actual 2022	Actual 2021	Actual 2020	Variance to Budget
<b>Revenues</b>							
Recorded offerings	\$ 1,188,637		\$ 1,181,719	\$ 1,156,100	\$ 1,057,483	\$ 1,101,606	
Loose receipts	18,279		23,445	24,730	13,818	20,579	
Other income	3,785		3,047	618	305	3,741	
<b>Total without PPP</b>					<b>1,071,606</b>		
PPP Loan Recognition					117,125		
<b>Total revenues</b>	<b>1,210,700</b>	<b>1,256,539</b>	<b>1,208,211</b>	<b>1,172,916</b>	<b>\$ 1,188,731</b>	<b>\$ 1,125,926</b>	<b>(45,839)</b>
							-
<b>Expenses</b>							
Benevolence	150,865	157,067	149,916	129,882	\$ 128,556	\$ 129,051	(6,202)
Salaries	653,642	655,000	612,958	562,685	531,989	555,778	(1,358)
Benefits	146,510	182,000	166,308	192,095	184,080	184,459	(35,490)
Debt service	62,053	62,000	62,053	62,053	62,295	67,949	53
Office administration	23,067	24,000	24,278	22,614	16,746	16,061	(933)
Contingency/operating reserve					117,125		
<b>Teams</b>							
Education	9,784	10,750	8,599	8,350	7,670	1,447	(966)
Adult Programs	2,639	2,000	1,188	1,651	750	1,145	639
New Members	1,947	1,400	985	1,143	1,162	465	547
Group Opportunities	2,704	3,000	3,112	3,385	4,288	1,125	(296)
Call Committee	851	5,000		-		-	(4,149)
Property	86,295	91,000	86,767	91,580	93,321	92,360	(4,705)
Servant Ministry	218		281	33		-	218
Stewardship	1,541	1,400	2,088	1,356	1,269	1,905	141
Worship & Music	11,798	13,000	12,828	13,339	13,229	7,444	(1,202)
Youth	12,255	4,500	6,853	3,218	1,705	2,241	7,755
Communications & Tech	41,063	44,400	35,489	40,311	45,124	35,372	(3,337)
<b>Total Teams</b>	<b>171,095</b>	<b>176,450</b>	<b>158,190</b>	<b>164,366</b>	<b>168,518</b>	<b>143,504</b>	<b>(5,355)</b>
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>1,207,232</b>	<b>1,256,517</b>	<b>1,173,702</b>	<b>1,133,694</b>	<b>1,209,309</b>	<b>1,096,802</b>	<b>(49,285)</b>
<b>Income/ (Deficit)</b>	<b>\$ 3,468</b>	<b>\$ 22</b>	<b>\$ 34,509</b>	<b>\$ 39,222</b>	<b>\$ (20,578)</b>	<b>\$ 29,124</b>	<b>3,446</b>

## Giving and Spending Chart Year Ended December 31, 2024

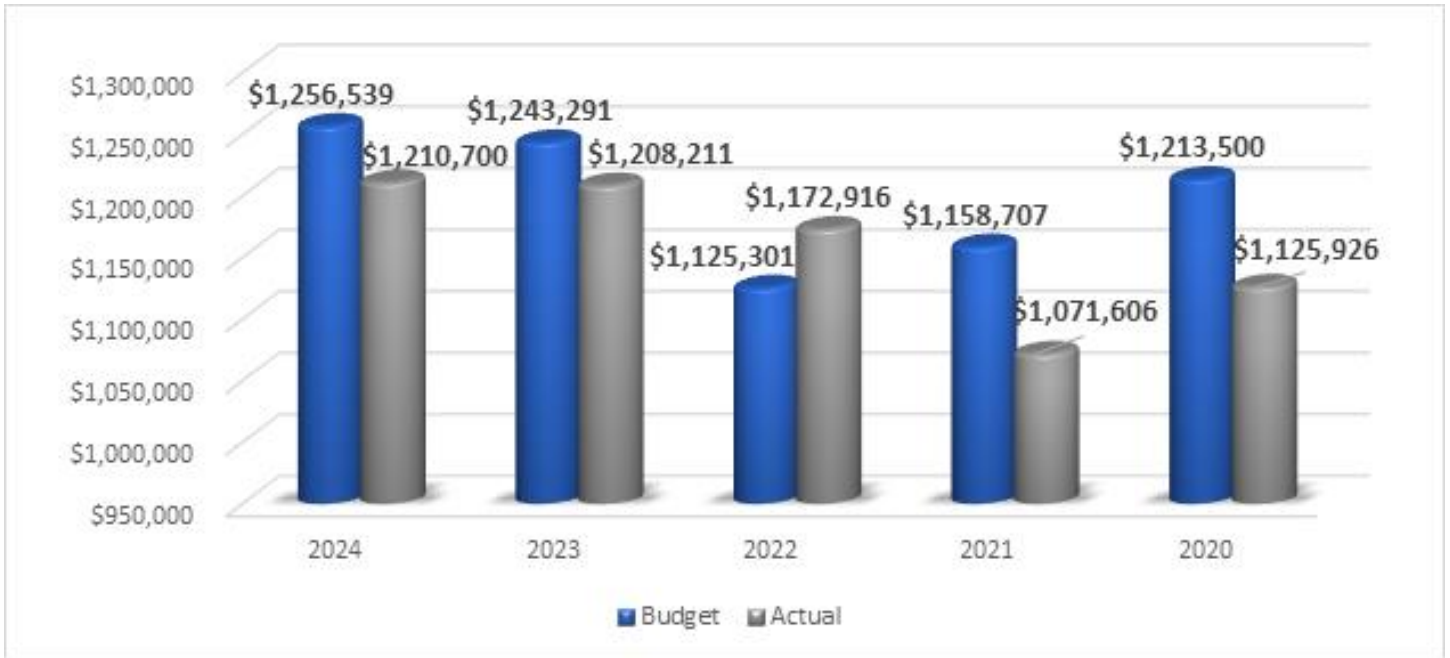


10% to benevolence	\$1,846.90
Staff bonus	\$16,622.10
<b>Total Surplus</b>	<b>\$18,469.00</b>

### Where is the Surplus going?

In conjunction with the \$3,468 surplus, we will also be reallocating \$15,000 of the 2023 surplus that was originally on hold for the call process. This will be giving us \$18,468 for this year's surplus distribution. Unity has always felt very strong about helping our community and has always made benevolence one of our top focuses. We will be giving 10% of the surplus to benevolence. To the Congregation, the Pastors and staff are a huge part of what makes Unity. The staff has been instrumental in assisting us through this transition. The remaining will be distributed to key staff members as bonuses.

## 5 Year Trend of Budget vs Actual



\* Please note at the end of 2024, we officially closed out fund 15 for the Backyard. The remaining funds and any future donations will now be held in the liability account titled 'Backyard'.

## 2024 Benevolence Summary

### 2024 Benevolence Summary

Summary of our Giving		Notes on Giving
a. General Benevolence 12.5%	\$ 150,865	12.5% of operating giving
b. 2024 Surplus		Pending approval by the congregation (\$1,847, reducing the amount needed from reserves)
c. From Reserves	\$ 13,420	To offset El Salvador Scholarships (Jo Ann Tomm/Jim Batdorf Memorials)
d. Member Directed Giving:		
Aspen Center Recovery Program	\$ 654	Events/support for residents
Bread of Healing Clinic	\$ 26,759	Staff RN, vaccine clinics, continuous glucose monitoring
Cross Lutheran Church	\$ -	
El Salvador		
Trip Expenses	\$ 900	Mission of Healing Clinic and Summer Trip
Trip Supplies	\$ 1,500	Mission of Healing Clinic and Summer Trip
Airfare	\$ 31,803	Payments paid by travelers
Scholarships	\$ 8,290	Scholarship Sponsors
Dir Donations	\$ 99	
Hephatha Lutheran Church	\$ -	
Lent Offering	\$ 17,114	Rutilio Grande
Ned Consigny Book Drive	\$ 175	
Hebron House	\$ -	
Sunday School Offering	\$ 499	
Thanksgiving Offering	\$ 3,035	Lutheran Disaster Response - Hurricane Relief
VBS Offering	\$ 1,000	El Salvador Scholarships
Waukesha Food Pantry	\$ 6,023	Bag Sales, Member Directed Gifts
College Scholarships	\$ 4,000	Memorial Scholarships given by Member
Lutheran Disaster Response - Hurricane Relief	\$ 3,824	
Mitten Tree	\$ 150	
Sewing Ministry	\$ 109	
Member Directed Total:	\$ 105,934	
Total Giving for 2024:	\$ 270,220	

## 2024 Benevolence Summary

### Summary of How the Giving Was Used

Aspen Center	\$	10,654	Events/support for residents
Bread of Healing Clinic	\$	43,758	Staff RN, vaccine clinics, continuous glucose monitoring
Cross Lutheran Church	\$	12,000	\$12K outreach programs, joint outdoor worship and lunch
El Salvador:			
Trip Expenses	\$	21,726	43 travelers (24 in February, 19 in summer)
Trip Supplies	\$	2,308	Mission of Healing Clinic and Summer Trip
Airfare	\$	37,428	All travelers with financial support for 2 travelers/3 staff
Scholarships	\$	34,763	42 students + Rutilio transport
Rutilio Grande	\$	17,115	Fence for the school
Cordero de Dios	\$	1,500	Vocational Classes (bakery/jewelry for adults, soccer/music for kids)
Christmas Baskets	\$	1,501	Member Care baskets
ELCA/Greater Milwaukee Synod	\$	38,000	Synod support
Hebron House	\$	8,000	Events/support for residents
Heifer International	\$		Sunday School offering given in January of 2025
Hephatha	\$	12,172	10K Support, Safe Sanctuary, Meals
Sewing Ministries	\$	989	Quilts for partners, pillows for breast cancer surgery survivors
Serenity Inns	\$	7,000	Operating expenses, 2x monthly meals
Servanthood Events	\$	810	Servanthood Blitz
Waukesha Food Pantry	\$	13,233	\$7K operating expenses, Member Directed support, Bag Sales
Misc	\$	263	Blood drive food, book drive
College Scholarships	\$	4,000	Memorial Scholarships given by Member
Lutheran Disaster Response - Hurricane Relief	\$	3,000	Hurricane Relief appeal and Thanksgiving Offering - Remaining amount given in January of 2025
<b>Total Shared/Reserved:</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>270,220</b>	<b>Beyond Ourselves in 2024</b>

## Proposed 2025 Budget

### Unity Lutheran Church - Proposed 2025 Budget

	2025 Budget		2024 Actual	2024 Budget	2023 Actual	2022 Actual	2021 Actual
<b>Total Revenues</b>	1,247,021	3.0%	\$ 1,210,700	\$ 1,256,539	\$ 1,208,211	1,172,916	\$ 1,071,715
<b>Expenses</b>							
Benevolence	149,643	12.00%	150,865	157,067	149,916	129,882	128,493
Salaries	719,704	64,704	653,642	655,000	612,958	562,685	531,989
Benefits	105,412	(76,588)	146,510	182,000	166,308	192,095	184,080
Debt service	62,000	-	62,053	62,000	62,053	62,053	65,143
Office administration	24,000	-	23,067	24,000	24,278	22,614	16,742
Potential staff bonus/pay							
\$15k to property reserves							
Remaining PPP to reserves							
<b>Teams</b>							
Education	11,800	1,050	8,090	10,750	8,599	8,350	7,670
Adult Programs	2,000	-	1,694	2,000	1,188	1,651	750
New Members	2,000	600	2,639	1,400	985	1,143	1,162
Group Opportunities	3,000	-	1,947	3,000	3,112	3,385	4,288
Call	5,000	-	851	5,000			
Property	96,000	5,000	86,295	91,000	86,767	91,580	93,321
Servant Ministry		-	218		281	33	
Stewardship	1,400	-	1,541	1,400	2,088	1,356	1,269
Worship & Music	13,000	-	11,798	13,000	12,828	13,339	13,229
Youth	4,500	-	12,254	4,500	6,854	3,218	2,155
Communications &	47,500	3,100	41,063	44,400	35,489	40,311	45,124
Total Teams	186,200		171,094	176,450	158,191	164,366	168,968
<b>Total Expense</b>	1,246,959		1,207,231	1,256,517	1,173,704	1,133,695	1,095,415
<b>Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	62	\$	3,469	\$ 22	\$ 34,507	39,221	\$ (23,700)

This budget includes:

- 3% projected increase in giving.
- 12% of operating budget allocated to benevolence, while this is a .5% decrease it keeps the actual dollars close to a flat amount. This also does not include directed gifts.
- Increase in salaries includes increasing specific staff's hours, increasing specific staff's pay to be more in-line with equivalent market and 2% increase for remaining staff.
- This also budgets \$50,000 for available positions.
- Benefits include yearly changes as well as budgeting for benefits of new staff.
- The increase for property is to help cover some of the upcoming projected projects.