

Living Connected... To GOD & EACH OTHER

February—April
2026



Written by Pastor Susan Debner

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Sunday Worship:

8:30 & 10 AM

YouTube & Facebook Live
(All Age Worship)

Pastoral Staff:

Susan Debner,
Senior Pastor

The Caller Newsletter is

Published by First
Lutheran Church.

Editor: Joyce Weaver,
joycew@flch.org

Beloveds,

At the Annual Meeting last month, we were invited to identify a meaningful experience with the congregation then share it with someone nearby. The person next to me said, "My moment is when I saw and heard the excitement of the Call Committee after they met you." I replied, "My meaningful experience was meeting the Call Committee and learning about First!" This is one of countless Spirit-saturated experiences I have had since joining God's good work alongside you.

Thank you for extending the call to be your pastor, and for the amazing welcome! Already, so much has happened at First, it's challenging to pull it all together for the Caller! Here are things I want you to know:

- I would love to get to know you. Please call, email, or text me to set up time for us to meet, to share our stories of life and faith, to talk about where we see God, and how we see FLC joining God's ever-unfolding work. I will create a form online and on the welcome desk on Sunday mornings for finding times with me, but don't wait for that—Reach out with times that work for you!
- I am also organizing information about people who receive communion at home or in their care centers. If you would like to be on this list and have not already heard from me, or if you know of someone, please call the church. The same is true for hospitalizations or other crises—get permission from folks first, but then reach out to let me know who needs pastoral care.
- I really appreciate direct communication, including when it's about difficult or awkward things. Please reach out with your

questions and concerns: if you wonder why I am or am not doing something, or if something needs my attention, or if something you hear me say sounds off or hurtful (etc.). I am already so impressed with the thoughtful and respectful ways this congregation communicates—it is something I am determined to maintain. It's also foundational to how we live as beloved community.

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus." 1 Corinthians 1:4

- I also have a personal note to share: In the next few weeks, my parents will be moving into assisted living. I would be grateful for your prayers and patience as my family makes this significant transition. My parents are Betty and Bill Debner, and they live 3 hours south of the Cities in rural Iowa. I have 3 siblings who are also shouldering this work, but as many of you know from experience, this can be daunting.
- Each of the notes above begins with "I," but what *I* love most at FLC is how *we* are in this journey of faith and life together. The first weeks of 2026 have been brutal for many in our congregation and community. The only way through this is with each other—something I can see you already know and are already doing.

At the Annual Meeting, I forgot to specifically thank and raise up the work of the staff at FLC, which is regrettable, because the FLC staff are AMAZING. With their support and smarts, I am learning new things every day! I am so grateful to work among such talented, diligent and delightful people.

Joining you joining God,
Pastor Susan

Unfinished

We will be spending the Sundays of Lent with Jonah this year. Our worship series is a deep dive into this ironic, humorous, and often unbelievable Bible story—I encourage you to read it through a few times. Jonah is a quick read—only 4 chapters. You can search it on your phone and get through most of it while waiting in line for groceries or coffee.

What makes Jonah unfinished? The book ends with God asking Jonah a question. Most people prefer God’s universal and unwavering statements, for example: “You are my beloved child. Your sins are forgiven, for I am slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. My mercy is everlasting.”



When we do confront God-questions, we typically prefer the ones asked of God, not the ones God asks of us. It’s a relief, then, that the question from God at the end of Jonah’s story is rhetorical, and the answer feels like an embarrassingly obvious “yes.” Even so, we’re not entirely sure how Jonah would answer

God, given the arc of his story. The question hangs there—unfinished and uncomfortable. Come along for the series this Lent and explore the ways God is Unfinished with Jonah, and with you.

- February 22, Lent 1:**
Unfamiliar Jonah 1:17
- March 1, Lent 2:**
Unstarted Jonah 1
- March 8, Lent 3:**
Unsettled Jonah 2 & 3
- March 15, Lent 4:**
Unconvinced Jonah 4
- March 22, Lent 5:**
Unfinished Matthew 8:23-27

MIDWEEK WORSHIP IN LENT

Ash Wednesday: Feb. 18

3 PM Chapel Worship; 7 PM Sanctuary Worship

Lent Wednesdays: Feb. 25, March 4, 11, 18, 25

6:30 PM Chapel Worship (following soup suppers in MLH)

Maundy Thursday: April 2

7 PM Sanctuary (Holy Week Drama)

Good Friday: April 3

7 PM Sanctuary (Holy Week Drama)



Lent Begins Feb. 18

Ash Wednesday

Worship at 3 & 7 PM

Lent Sundays Begin

Feb. 22

Worship at 8:30 & 10 AM

Lent Wednesdays Schedule

Feb. 18—April 1 2026
5:30-6:30 PM Soup Supper
5:45-6:30 PM Bells Rehearsal
6:30 PM Lenten Worship
7:15-8:15 PM Choir Rehearsal
8 PM Youth Group ends

Palm Sunday, March 29

Worship at 8:30 & 10 AM

Easter Sunday, April 5

Worship times (TBD)



Ash Wednesday Worship Holy Communion & Meal

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the Lenten season for Christians world-wide. In recent years, our church has offered a worship experience at 7 PM. This year we are adding a service in the Chapel at 3 PM in deference to people who do not relish driving after dark. (The sun sets at 5:46 PM this day). Worship will include Holy Communion.



At 4 PM a light meal will be served in Martin Luther Hall under the auspices of the Young at Heart, our senior citizen group. All are invited—YaH has no membership roster. Fellowship and socializing are the goals of this event. We ask for a \$5 donation for this meal.

For meal planning, we ask that you sign up on our YaH bulletin board in the Commons by Sunday, Feb. 15. Additions or cancellations after this date can be made by calling the church or 763-574-2378.



Daylight Savings March 13, 2026

Remember to “Spring forward” for an extra hour of sunshine.

Easter Memorial Garden

...In honor or celebration of a loved one.

You are invited to contribute to the celebratory flower display in the Sanctuary on Easter Sunday. Please sign up at the desk in the church Commons by Sunday, March 29, so that all names for remembrance can be listed in the worship bulletin. Cost: \$14 per flower arrangement, payable to FLC. *Flowers can be taken home after Easter service.*

MUSIC & CONCERTS

Handbell Meditation Concert

Join Krista Riedel and Jeffrey Patry in a concert featuring solo handbells and piano on **Sunday, March 15 at 3 PM**. This concert will feature reflective and meditative music perfect for the Lenten season. Krista Riedel is active in the handbell community playing with the Bells of the Lakes Handbell Ensemble and directing the handbell ensembles at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church, Minneapolis. Come join us for an afternoon of beautiful music. A freewill offering will be taken to benefit the music program at FLC.



Sound Mind Project

The **Sound Mind Project**, founded in 2022 and directed by Michael Shafer, is a community choir that seeks to raise awareness and funds to support causes that directly work with youth in need of mental health support. Through their music and the donations received at concerts, they seek to raise awareness and support for the mental health needs of youth in the community. Join this wonderful choir in a concert at FLC on **Saturday, May 2 at 7 PM**. More information can be found at www.smpchoir.com. See you there!

Singers in Accord Concerts

Singers in Accord will present their Spring concerts in our beautiful Sanctuary on **Saturday, April 25 and Sunday, April 26 at 4 PM**. These concerts will feature conductor and educator Dr. Matthew Mehaffey. Singers in Accord is a choral ensemble created in 2009. The group collaborates with a new conductor, performing artist, or artistic ensemble in each concert to create distinctive concert experiences for its singers and audience members. Hope to see you there! More information can be found at www.singersinaccord.org.



Campanile Handbells to the Basilica

FLC's own *Campanile Handbell Ensemble* has been invited to play at the **Basilica of St. Mary, downtown Minneapolis on Saturday, April 25 at 5 PM**. The Campanile Handbell Ensemble will be the featured ensemble playing for the 5:00 PM Mass that evening. Music will begin about 4:45 PM. Come and support our wonderful Handbell Ensemble at the Basilica of St. Mary!



Exultate Chamber Choir & Orchestra

Join the 30th season celebration in a concert of the *Exultate Chamber Choir and Orchestra* on **Saturday, May 16 at 7 PM**. This performance will feature the pinnacle of choral music, the *Mass in B Minor* by Johann Sebastian Bach. Conducted by Thomas Rossin, Exultate goes beyond the notes on the page to bring you, the listener, the personal response that makes sound into rich, meaningful music – the language of emotion. Join us for this evening of tremendous music. Ticket information can be found at www.exultate.org.

MINISTRY NEWS

PASSION PLAY

This Holy week our ministry team will be acting out the 7 Last words of Christ as a series of One Act Scenes. We will experience the final hours of Jesus life and the characters who were there when he died for us. This drama will be directed by Patrick Tapp with a new script from Nathan Roberts. If you are interested in being in the cast or crew, contact Nathan, nathanr@flcch.org



Meeting Neighborhood Needs

Many are aware of the extreme stress and anxiety being put on our immigrant neighbors right now. If you are looking for a way to support them, here is a link for the Columbia Heights appeal: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-local-CH-families>



We are also inviting increased support for our ministry partner, SACA in this season, as they are also rising to meet the needs of this impossible situation: <https://sacafoodshelf.org/donate>

If you are in touch with a neighbor or a friend who needs help, direct them to either of these agencies or any of the church staff. — *Pastor Susan Debner (she/hers)*

Bible Study “Women of the New Testament”

Come and explore the experiences of the women who knew and loved Jesus, learning from their examples of service, faithfulness and strength.

The Sunday Bible study is offered at 8:30 & 11:15 AM (same study). Please feel free to bring in your coffee or community lunch! All are welcome any Sunday! Questions to Michelle Edwards, 763-300-8419, shell-lyn@hotmail.com

GriefShare Group

Are you or someone you know dealing with a loss. If you are looking for a safe and supportive environment as you navigate through your grief journey, we invite you to consider a GriefShare opportunity at First Lutheran.



Facilitated by Madonna Wagner, the group will focus on weekly topics with helpful ways to cope, and small group discussions. Please email Madonna with any questions or to get started. troyandmadonna@gmail.com

FLC FOOD DRIVE FOR NEIGHBORS

Our church is currently delivering weekly groceries for 20 of **our** families in Columbia Heights who are stuck at home due to recent events. We are especially in need of rice, canned beans, potatoes, milk, eggs, onions, peppers, bananas, oranges, soap, toilet paper, diapers (sizes 1-4), wipes, and women's sanitary supplies.



Please place groceries on the food shelf cart in the church office on Sundays or drop them off during the week. Call the church for evening drop off options. Designate financial gifts “After School” for additional groceries and financial needs.

ANOTHER WONDERFUL DINNER IN THE BOOKS!

We hosted another wonderful Scandinavian Meatball and Lutefisk Dinner on Jan. 17, serving over 800 people.



Thanks to all who came to eat, to those who spread the word about the event, to the staff and to the 100 or so people who worked the week before and the day of the dinner to make it such a success again this year.

It's the special touch from each of you that make our dinner the ‘destination event’ for Scandinavians (and Scandinavian-adjacent folks) from all around the area! Many, many thanks!! We have such a great group of people here at First!

Bultum Lock Down Plan

As we have increased our focus on the safety and protection of our charter school students and neighbors, we have implemented a plan which includes two things:

1. Volunteer patrols during school drop off and pick up times
2. Building wide lockdown should a problem arise *during the school day*

Our volunteers and staff are humbled by the gratitude from students, staff and families at Bultum, including daily offerings of hot tea for the patrols, and a large collection of hand drawn pictures and letters of gratitude from the youngest students.



ATTENTION THRIVENT MEMBERS!

If you have **Thrivent Choice Dollars®** to direct for 2025, please do so by March 31, 2026.

- ⇒ visit Thrivent.com/thriventchoice
- ⇒ Click on “Choice Dollars” and log in
- ⇒ Search the catalog for the Organization
- ⇒ Click on “Direct Now” or call 1-800-847-4836 and say “Thrivent Choice” when prompted.

Dear First Lutheran Family,

I want to thank everyone for your prayers and unwavering support while I was going through my six month journey of grief. It was a hard road and I have appreciated your kindness and the many tender hugs we've shared together. *Sincerely, Madonna Wagner*



Sunday School

continues this year with three classes and 12 volunteers. We are seeing kids learn about Jesus through Bible stories, games, crafts and activities.



Palm Sunday Brunch

March 29

We are hosting a Palm Sunday Brunch Fundraiser for youth ministries at First Lutheran. The event takes place on Sunday, March 29. We need your help! Sign up with Rachel for your preferred shift:

9 AM - 11 AM (Set up and serve)

11 AM - 1 PM (Serve and clean up)



Youth Group - Youth in Grades 6-12 are invited to join us on Wednesday nights for youth group, including a dinner, prayer time together, a Bible lesson, games and free time.



Acolytes and Worship Help

Children and youth have been helping in worship as acolytes, readers, communion assistants and more.

Contact Rachel James if you would like to be involved. rachelj@flcch.org

Family Choir

All ages are welcome to join us for Family Choir! We rehearse 11-11:15 AM February 1 & 8
February 15 (sing in church)
March 8, 15 & 22
March 29 (sing in church, Palm Sunday)

Egg Hunt, March 29

11:30 AM. Sunday School children are invited to an egg-hunt with candy and fun in the church Courtyard!



Earth Day Service Project, Saturday,

April 25, 9 AM - 11 AM

Youth and adults are invited to meet at the Columbia Heights Library to help pick up trash on the sidewalks of Central Avenue.



Adopt a Park Clean-up

Sunday, April 26 (during Sunday School)

Kids, youth and families are invited to join us to clean-up our parks for Earth Day! First Lutheran has adopted Ostrander Park, across the street from church. We'll have a special treat of cupcakes to celebrate.



Join us on a Mission Jamaica Trip this Summer! **Dates:** July 7-14, 2026

Who?: Youth & Young Adults (youth finishing Grade 8 and older) **Cost:** \$600

Embark on a life-changing adventure with Mission Jamaica! This incredible mission trip offers a unique opportunity for youth and young adults to make a positive impact while experiencing the vibrant culture of Jamaica. We will serve at Westhaven Orphanage and stay at YWAM Montego Bay. **Secure Your Spot Today! \$200 Deposit due ASAP.** Contact: Rachel James, rachelj@flcch.org

Mark your calendars for Bible Camp at **CAMP WAPO!**

Join in the excitement at Camp Wapo!

Our 2026 Summer Theme:

Wonder Based on Matthew 19:26 — *"With God all things are possible."*

This summer, we'll explore both meanings of the word wonder: questioning and awe. It will be a week of curiosity, questions, and the wide-open mystery of God's love.

Campers will journey from curiosity to calling — from "What if?" to "Here I am!" — discovering that every question is a doorway to deeper trust, transformation, and relationship with God.

SEEDS CAMP: Completed Grades 1-3 (All campers eligible for \$50 church gift; scholarships up to full amount available) Dates: Aug. 7-9

YOUTH CAMP: Completed Grades 4-9 (All campers eligible for \$100 church gift; scholarships up to full amount available) Dates: Aug. 2-7

ROOTS SENIOR HIGH CAMP @ WAPO: Completed Grades 10-12 (All campers eligible for \$100 church gift; scholarships up to full amount) Dates: Aug. 2-7

Registration for all camps opened on Jan. 15, 2026; reserved spaces close on Feb. 15, 2026. **Register at this link:** <http://lwlbc.com/first-ch>



Mission Jamaica

This February, we have seven people traveling as missionaries to help rebuild Jamaica after the Hurricane. The work includes building Jabode single room homes and roofing and rebuilding Westhaven Children's Orphanage. We appreciate your prayers for safety and good working conditions.



Stories and Strategies for Resisting Dictators around the World -Wednesday, Feb. 11, 6:30 PM

We will hear strategies from around the world that have worked to help slow and ultimately stop dictators & authoritarians. Freedom Trainer Rebecca Ulasich and Fran Benjamin will share their personal stories of world conflict and organizing. This training will help us understand concrete strategies people can do in our everyday lives to prevent dictators from gaining power in our community and our world. Training is focused on adults, but ages 12 and up are welcome.



New Volleyball Net

We have a brand new volleyball net! Thank you to Larry Bugbee and Jody Chandler for installing it. Let us know if you want to play volleyball at church!



First Lutheran Buy Nothing Event—April 18, 10 AM - Noon

Please join us for our next FREE Buy Nothing Project giveaway event (like a FREE flea market, garage sale, swap meet). Please bring any items you want to give away from 9 to 9:30 AM and place them on your table (tables assigned on arrival). You can browse and look for items at other tables during the event STARTING at 9:30 AM. Free items are for PERSONAL USE and are NOT for sale or resale. At the 11:30 AM end of the event, you must take any of your remaining items home or donate them. Contact Nathan Roberts to reserve a table, nathanr@flcch.org.



Amazing Stories from Pet Rescuers!

Four Columbia Heights volunteer pet rescuers came to teach our youth and adults about the important work of saving animals in our community and rehoming rescued pets! And we even got to pet Mira a three legged rescued pup!



SACA & After School Christmas Celebration

Thank you to everyone who donated generously to help make this Christmas a joyful one for so many families in need in our community! This Christmas season we provided over 100 gifts to families at SACA food shelf and our after school program. We also made delicious meals, sang Spanish holiday songs with Emily Olsen de Alvarez, FLC volunteers gave groceries, and Santa Kevin Kaliher came to bring the holiday spirit!



Stories of Finding Work in the Trades—April 22, 6:30 PM

Come, hear from people who have amazing careers in the trades; how they learned their skills and started a career. This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in getting into the trades!

After School Internships

We have spring Internship openings to work with our After School program Tuesdays & Thursdays 4 - 6 PM. This is a great way for someone 18 - 25 to get real life work experience with diverse youth in a school or childcare setting. Nathan Roberts will provide a letter of recommendation after completing 30 hours of supervised volunteering. Dinner included! Please contact Nathan Roberts if you are interested! nathanr@flcch.org

After School Update

This winter has been very challenging for our After School program with many of our Latino students experiencing fear and trauma due to the increased ICE presence in Columbia Heights. Thanks to an increase in donations, we were able to deliver groceries to families afraid to leave their neighboring homes.

From the children who are still coming to our program, we have heard stories of arrests; some of which are said to be with legal residents who spend days in detention before being released.

As many of our neighboring families are experiencing mental health challenges through this ICE surge, please pray for the safety and well-being of the children and their families. They are grateful to First Lutheran for the love and support shown during this challenging time.

Thank you to our amazing After School volunteers and to our Church for helping make this program such a powerful witness to the love of Jesus.

MINISTRY NEWS / FINANCE / NEW 2026 BOARDS & COUNCIL

Recently, I came upon an interesting quote: “Tithing emphasizes the individual’s love for God. In my opinion this quote highlights the importance of financial management as a reflection of leadership and the church’s commitment to God’s mission.”

First Lutheran’s Community has been stepping up to pledge generously for 2026 with 82 pledges totaling \$273,760 for the General Fund and \$72,330 for the Maintenance & Mortgage Fund. These totals do not include any Special Project donations we generally receive during the year. This ensures that we can cover the operational expenses and carry out the ministries dear to this congregation.

The compilation of our financial statements took longer than anticipated as an audit wasn’t conducted during the last three years and corrections had to be

addressed and reconciled. The draft of our compilation report confirms that we have great financial policies in place and our financial statements represent a true picture of FLCCH’s financial status.

For 2026, the Finance Committee and myself will focus on our financial goals and maintenance projects. Among them are the replacement of the water heater (bid is pending Council approval), mechanical updates to an older infrastructure and issues with our elevator. We’ll also revisit the conversation around the interest rate of our mortgage buy down and continue our efforts to make sure the funds in all of our accounts are invested wisely and a solid cash management is in place.

We will also be starting renegotiations with Bultum Academy for the 2027/28 school year. As we continue to have a

great relationship with the students and staff we are hopeful Bultum will stay with us which in turn will ensure the long-term financial success of FLCCH.

Blessings, Jana

Financial Snapshot

Period ending 12/31/2025

General Checking	\$ 137,287
Mortgage & Maintenance	\$ 11,536
Perpetual Reserve Balance	\$ 108,156
Special Projects Balance	\$ 196,628
General Fund CD Balance	\$ 152,029
Memorial Fund Balance	\$ 54,534
Endowment Savings Balance	\$ 91,436
Endowment Investments	\$ 1,167,212
Total Current Assets	\$ 1,895,907
Total Fixed Assets	\$ 2,713,390
Mortgage Loan Balance	\$ 985,563
Total Liabilities (excluding mortgage)	\$ 4,858
Total Equity	\$ 3,569,461
Net Revenue as of 12/31/2025	\$ 49,415

We Welcome our New 2026 Board & Council Committee Members!

ANNUAL MEETING, 1/18/2026

Executive Committee

President: Jeff Beck *
Vice Pres: Karen Palm
Treasurer: John Peterson *
Secretary: Kathy Ballard
Pastor: Susan Debner

Board of Worship

Chair: Dorothy Markowitz
Vice Chair:
Members: Cheryl Ballingrud,
Leesa Betzold, Ruth Dodson,
Pam Hartel, Deb Myhre, Paul
Jarvi, Jeffrey Patry (Staff)

Personnel Committee

Chair: Warren Watson
Members: Wendy Watson,
Karen Palm, John Peterson
(Finance Rep.),
Pastor Susan Debner (Staff)

Board of Hospitality & Outreach

Chair: Larry Bugbee
Vice Chair: Janet Meyen
Members: Jennifer Shull,
Jaime Alvarez, Jane Bugbee,
Karen Peterson,
Nathan Roberts (Staff)

Synod Assembly Voting Members

Kevin Kaliher
Julienne Wyckoff

Board of Finance

Chair: Jay Craft *
Vice Chair:
Treasurer: John Peterson
Members: Terry Swanson,
Karen Palm, Dirk Schmitz,
Dana McHenry-Leuth
Jana Dietering (Staff)

Board of Spiritual Growth

Chair: Michelle Edwards *
Vice Chair: Bruce Shellito
Members: Bob Nelson,
Phil Mattison, Cindy Parker,
Don Rosell, Madonna Wagner,
Pastor Susan Debner (Staff)

Board of Children, Youth & Family

Chair: Kevin Kaliher
Vice Chair: Zoe Tapp
Members: Rebecca Stolba,
Melissa Habeck, Joline
Dittbenner, Kassie Beck
Rachel James (Staff)

Nominating Committee

Jon Lueth, Julienne Wyckoff
Meagan Ferrise

_____ (open)

Memorial & Endowment Committee

Chair: John Peterson
Vice Chair: Chad Habeck
Secretary: Bob Nelson
Treasurer: Christopher Larson
Members: Paul Turner,
Drew Stolba,
Jana Dietering (Staff)

Facilities & Maintenance Committee

(reports to the
Board of Finance)
Roger Johnson, Bruce Shellito,
Larry Bugbee,
Jody Chandler (Staff)

* Denotes 2nd year of service
in this status role.



First Lutheran Church of Columbia Heights (FLCCH) is financed by the generous, direct

monetary gifts of its members and friends.

There are several ways you can bless this mission of Jesus with your gifts:

- 1) Place your **Check or Cash** in the offering plate during the service. Please use an offering envelope so we can give you credit for your gift.
- 2) **Electronic Funds Transfer** from our website, flcch.org (upper right hand corner). You can set up a one-time or recurring donation.
- 3) **Bill Pay**. Follow the directions of your bank or credit union to create

First Lutheran as a Payee at 1555 40th Ave. NE, Minneapolis, MN 55421, and choose to make a regular weekly or monthly offering.

- 4) **Stock Transfer to the Church.**
- 5) For more information, contact Jana Dietering, Finance & Operations Manager, 763-788-9653, ext. 104 or jana@flcch.org



First Lutheran Church
1555 40th Avenue NE / Columbia Heights, MN 55421-3195
WEB: flch.org / PH: 763-788-9653

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**SUNDAY WORSHIP
8:30 & 10 AM**

**10 AM WORSHIP
ALSO AVAILABLE
ONLINE- LIVE
STREAMED VIA
YOUTUBE &
FACEBOOK LIVE**

**SUNDAY MEAL
11 AM - 12:30 PM**

**SPRING
REMINDER!**

**Daylight Savings:
'Spring forward' on
Sunday, Mar. 13!**

RETURN SERVICES REQUESTED

Don't miss Family Worship, Creative Arts, Support & Fun at First!

