# First Out Loud

**God's Work. Our Hands. To Serve ALL People.**

**MARCH- 2025 NEWSLETTER**

HE IS RISEN

Siblings in Christ,

I invite you to come for soup supper and hear our last two speakers in our *"Getting to Know Our Neighbors"* Lenten series on April 2 & 9. Soup will be served from 5:30 – 6:30pm and worship goes from 6:30 – 7:00pm. Jeff Olson and Brenda McHugh are our speakers.

Holy Week begins on April 13th with a Palm Sunday service written by author and educator Walt Wangerin. Maundy Thursday (Apr. 17); Good Friday (Apr. 18); and the Easter Vigil (Apr. 19) services begin at 7:00pm. Easter Sunday (Apr. 20) worship begins at 10am. Join us for these beautiful and powerful services as we meditate on the pivotal events from Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem to his Resurrection.

We are planning a New Member Sunday on April 27th. If you have noticed new people sitting in the pews next to you, please introduce yourself to them and make them feel welcome. Then, please introduce them to me as well. God bless you during this most holy time of year,

Pastor Christopher Culuris

## Notes from the President

Hello First Lutheran members -
Firstly, I would like to extend a very Happy Easter to you and your families! Easter services are always such a celebration at FLC with wonderful music and fellowship.
Secondly, it is important to share with you some important updates from the church council:
At the March meeting, the council voted to forego participation in the St. Peter July 4th parade and instead, adopt a larger three-year rotation of activities. These activities will consist of the Christmas Live Nativity, a fall festival with a church open house, and the July 4th parade. We felt this would be the best way to engage with the community in a broader sense without overly tasking any particular committee within the congregation. While there is much more to follow on this, please start thinking about participating in the Live Nativity this December. This is a wonderful event for the entire family to get involved. My family has participated as angels, Wise Men, and even Mary!
The council also voted to call for a special congregational meeting on April 6. This is to vote on *continued discussion* of the use of the land to the east of the church. Over the last two years, the Strategic Planning Committee has done a lot of work gathering information about the potential use of the land. As you know, this has all been purely informational and data gathering. The council invites the congregation to vote whether this discussion should continue or whether we ought to put the idea on the shelf for the time being. It's important to stress that this is *NOT* a vote to sell or not. This will be a vote to gauge the congregation's desire to continue the discussions and gathering of information. I feel this is an important vote so I hope to see you there!
Sincerely,
Mark Roemhildt

**There will be a special congregation meeting on April 6th following worship. We will seek the congregation's permission to proceed researching options on what to do with the vacant East lot.**

**Temple Talk - February 9 - Mary Spear**

Show of hands: How many of you know First Lutheran has a strategic plan?

This strategic plan was adopted by the congregational council in March of 2023 and it outlines our congregation's priorities and goals. One of the priorities in this plan is Engaging and Collaborating with the Community. I am the facilitator for the team that is working on this priority. In addition to myself, others on this team include Randy Frey-Hawkins, Kristy Larson, Shanon Nowell, Mike Stewart, and Keith Stelter.

There have been many newsletter articles, a forum and monthly council updates on our work but we feel we need to be better communicators with our members. We will be giving a series of temple talks beginning today and for the following 3 Sundays and a First Forum scheduled for March 2nd will be an opportunity for questions and further discussion.

Now, back to the strategic plan. When the plan was being developed, the working group assigned several goals for each priority. One of the goals for our priority is to use the **assets** of FLC to meet the **needs** of the community. One asset our congregation has is vacant land that is near schools and the city center.

We had been hearing that there was a real need for housing in St. Peter. We explored this need for housing in more depth by having discussions with stakeholders including the city administrator and community development director. We also looked at data from two different housing studies for St. Peter, one conducted in 2012 and the other just completed this fall. The most recent study establishes that there is a great need for all kinds of housing including affordable housing for people renting and looking

to purchase a home, first time home buyers, people 55+ looking to downsize, and those who are looking for higher priced housing.

So yes, there is a need for housing in St. Peter but also this need is so critical because housing contributes so much to a person's health and well-being. Stable housing provides a sense of security and support that are hallmarks of a higher quality of life. Given this information and these insights, our team sees housing as a way this congregation can love and serve our neighbor.

I want to reassure you that the work of this team is to gather information. We are not making any decisions about the use of the land. That is for the congregation to decide.

**Temple Talk 2 Febyary 16 MikeStewart**

My name is Mike Stewart and I am a member of the Strategic Planning Committee. Last week, Mary Spear gave you an introduction to the strategic plan here at FLC, including the possibility of using some of the church property for housing. Mary also told you that our committee is an information gathering committee, and so today I want to fill you in on some of the many things we have done to gather information.

One of the first meetings was with City Administrator, Todd Prafke, to discuss the need for housing and look at 2012 housing survey results. We also received information about zoning from Ben Baker, the Community Development Director for Saint Peter. Paul Tanis shared information about real estate law and Bruce Gray discussed the 2022 land appraisal.

We met with members of the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership to get ideas about the types of housing projects that might be possible. In December 2023 we held a First Forum after church to get feedback from members of the congregation. By the way, we will be holding another First Forum in two weeks on March 2nd.

We examined the results of the 2024 Saint Peter Housing Survey. Finally, we were advised to see if any developers would even be interested in our property before moving forward. As a result, we contacted 10 developers and had 4 respond that they would be interested should we decide to sell the land. With that interest shown, an appraisal of the property was done by Appraisal Services of Mankato.

**Temple Talk - February 23 - Shanon Nowell**

Over the past two weeks, you have heard from Mary Spear and Mike Stewart about our congregation's strategic priority of Engaging and Collaborating with the Community. Mary introduced the idea that one of our greatest assets—our land—could be used to meet a significant need in St. Peter: housing. Mike then walked us through the careful process our team has undertaken, ensuring we are doing our due diligence by meeting with key community stakeholders, gathering data, and learning from experts in the field.

Today, I want to take a moment to reflect on why this matters. As people of faith, we are called to love and serve our neighbors. Throughout our conversations with community leaders, one thing has become abundantly clear: access to stable, affordable, and appropriate housing changes lives. It strengthens families, supports economic growth, and contributes to the overall wellbeing of a community. The question before us is how First Lutheran might be called to respond.

I want to emphasize, as Mary and Mike have before me, that no decisions have been made. Our role as a team is to explore possibilities, gather information, and share what we learn with you so that, as a congregation, we can discern the best path forward together.

Temple Talk March 2 Bonnie Pettis
Good morning. My name is Bonnie Pettis and today I would like to provide some insights into the First Lutheran Church Finance Committee.
**I'd like to review the 3 Strategic Plan Financial Goals with you that our team focuses on.**
1) Implement a plan to achieve and maintain financial stability. a. Simply put a plan for financial sustainability & stability is a tool that is used to help First Lutheran church meet our overall goals and thrive in our community **and** allows it to continue thriving over the long-term.
2) Ensure that FLC has a financially balanced budget and reserve funds.
● The finance committee has a firm commitment to providing a financially balanced budget to the congregation for their review.
● We are also focused on having a Capital Improvement Fund that can help protect our budget from known and unknown risks. Recent examples for items that we have needed to use reserve funds for include the repair of our church organ along with boiler and roof repairs.
3) Develop and put into place a process to match the budget to identified needs and wants of the church.
● To meet the overall goals we have for First Lutheran church our plan for financial stability needs to incorporate what we want to do as a congregation.
● One of the most important things I believe our Finance Committee does is our correspondence with various FLC committees to assure that we understand their needs and the goals they have set. Truly working together as a team to make our congregation thrive.
During our Forum time today discussions will be focused on options for the extra land we have at FLC. The finance committee has reviewed and monitored the progress of the land committee and has recommended that we move forward with the sale of the land. The sale of the land provides income that we need to supplement the annual budget. Without additional funds from the land sale we will need to find other ways to supplement our income or cut expenses to maintain a financially balanced budget.

## Update form Lifelong Learning

**Pre-k - 1**

Unfortunately, since the last time we made a write up for the newsletter I haven't taught my class, and as such can't speak to their activities. I would like to say a big thank you to Alli Kuhlman and Rachel Szybnski for subbing for me while I was gone
-Grace Timm

**2-4 Grades**

We are busy with our Lenten and Easter lessons! Our 2-4 graders have learned about the Transfiguration, Joseph Feeding his Family, and the Disciples. This group has lots of energy, so we often have class in the nursery to work with the larger space for activities. We continue to see consistent attendance at this age level, with students being actively engaged in their lessons, crafts, and games. We look forward to our special Easter project in the weeks to come!

**5-6 Grades**

Our older group continues to show up for class and ask hard questions. You can tell that many of them are thinking deeper about their faith and will be prepared for the years of confirmation class ahead. We have continued to work with this group on books of the Bible, learning the Disciples, and reviewing the sermon from church. We were able to go outside last week when the weather was beautiful, which was a nice end to our class time! We look forward to our Easter project, as well!

# First Forum Summary

The following summary reflects the feedback gathered from the First Forum held on March 2, 2025.

Approximately 60 congregation members attended and shared their thoughts on the potential development of our land, alternative opportunities for its use, additional information needed to make an informed decision, and preferred communication methods. This document organizes the key themes and concerns raised during the discussion.

## Question 1: Looking Ahead 10 Years – Potential Benefits & Challenges of Developing Our Land

| Potential Benefits: | Potential Challenges: |
|---|---|
| Aligns with our broader mission | Loss of control over land use and development |
| Convenient location near the school and church | Concerns about environmental impact and loss of green space |
| Provides much-needed housing, including options for those who can't afford market rates | Possibility of community or neighborhood opposition |
| Eliminates maintenance costs (e.g., mowing) | Risk of losing members over the decision |
| Generates revenue:<br>• Helps reduce debt/mortgage<br>• Provides long-term budget support<br>• Contributes to the city's tax base | Once sold, the land is permanently gone; may regret decision to sell someday |
| | Sale price may not be significant |

**Potential legal and financial considerations:**

- Possible tax implications
- Possible liability issues
- Impact on tax-exempt status
- Aesthetic concerns
- Keeping the church a landmark, not blending in with new development
- Ensuring the design aligns with church values
- Need for alternative ways to meet community needs without selling land
- Relocation concerns (sheds, gardens)

## Question 2: Alternative Uses for the Land to Benefit the Church & Community

| Green Space & Recreation: | Community-Oriented Projects: |
|---|---|
| Park or athletic fields | Columbarium |
| Community garden | Islamic center |
| Prairie restoration | Partnership with Gustavus, the city, or a conservation group to preserve as green space |
| Tree farm | Collaboration with Living Earth Center at Good Counsel for garden development |
| Labyrinth | |

**Other Considerations:**

- Leave as is
- Efforts to recruit new families

## Question 3: Additional Information Needed to Make an Informed Decision

| **Financial & Legal Considerations:** | **Community Impact & Logistics:** |
|---|---|
| Would the church owe taxes on the sale? | Would rezoning be required? |
| Cost-benefit analysis of selling vs. keeping the land | Conditions that could be placed on the sale |
| Estimated net revenue from the sale | Developer options and level of church involvement in the project |
| Potential impact on endowment structure | |
| What cuts would the finance committee consider if we don't sell? | **Congregational Engagement:** |
| If it was planted as a restored prairie what would be the initial and ongoing costs? | Input from members in nursing homes, assisted living, and younger families |
| Is the land abstract or torrens? | |

## Question 4: Preferred Communication Methods & Update Frequency

| **Methods:** | Announcements (e.g., temple talks, First Out Loud updates) |
|---|---|
| Emails | Written versions of temple talks for broader access |
| Hard copies | Wednesday evening updates for families |
| Direct mailings | |
| Church website | **Frequency:** |
| Town halls | Quarterly or even monthly updates |
| Small group discussions | Over-communicate through multiple channels |

**Other Considerations:**

- What percentage of the total FLC "green space" does this land make up?
- Show us exactly where the property lines are that you are talking about.
- What exactly would happen to our mortgage if we sell the land?
- How much could we reasonably expect to see in yearly disbursements if we put the rest of the money in an endowment? It depends on negotiations with Thrivent.
- Do we have any control over what would possibly be built there? Choosing a responsible developer offers some control.
- What will happen to the trees that were planted?

The answers to the most frequently asked questions about FLC's vacant land will be in next month's newsletter.

Thank you for your engagement as we continue this important discussion!

From the desk of Deacon Brenda

**It's time to go outside.**

I have just returned from a conference on Spirituality in children and youth and the connection to nature. My question for each of us was one that was asked during my conference. Do you recall a time when you were a child and had a moment where you had a mystical experience - or felt especially close to God? Perhaps it was looking at a sky filled with stars and realizing the immense expanse of the world. Children are often curious and open to wonder and are naturally spiritual beings. I will never forget how our three year old daughter answered the question I jokingly asked one day "How did you ever get to be our daughter, Annaeka?" and she looked at me with all seriousness and stated, "I picked you and Dad out when I was in heaven." Her answer took my breath away and reminded me that children can have a very open window to sacred places. Their sense of wonder and imagination can help them (and the adults around them) experience holy moments. But…

We live in a world filled with screens where our children are often over-scheduled or confined inside and expected to act grown up - even though they are not grown up. Youth under the age of 25 spend 50-65% less time experiencing the natural world than previous generations, so they lack opportunities to find spider webs or icicles or frogs. When children have access to unstructured, outside time they reap cognitive, physiological, behavioral and spiritual benefits. We need regular and sustained connection to the natural world to be healthy. That is where we experience healing and wholeness. We know Jesus would have spent time outside as a child, running and playing, creating games and growing - like kids do. So…

It's time for us to spend time outside. Start with five hours outside a month - that can make a difference. A few plans to get outside at FLC in the coming months:

Wednesday, April 23 - Final mentor night (outdoor activities)

Wednesday, April 30 - Final FLC Education night. Outside play time (weather permitting)

Upcoming outdoor time: All family bike ride in May

All family outdoor walk, games and S'mores - June

Vacation Bible School: Sunday, July 27-Wednesday, May 30 evenings

God's Peace Brenda

**THE GREEN COMMITTEE SAYS THANK YOU to everyone who contributed energy-efficient light bulbs during Epiphany Season. We delivered a bounty of 179 light bulbs to St. Peter Area Food Shelf for their clients.**

KEEP DONATING PLASTICS TO THE NEXTREK BENCH PROJECT.

COLLECTION BIN IN THE ENTRANCE

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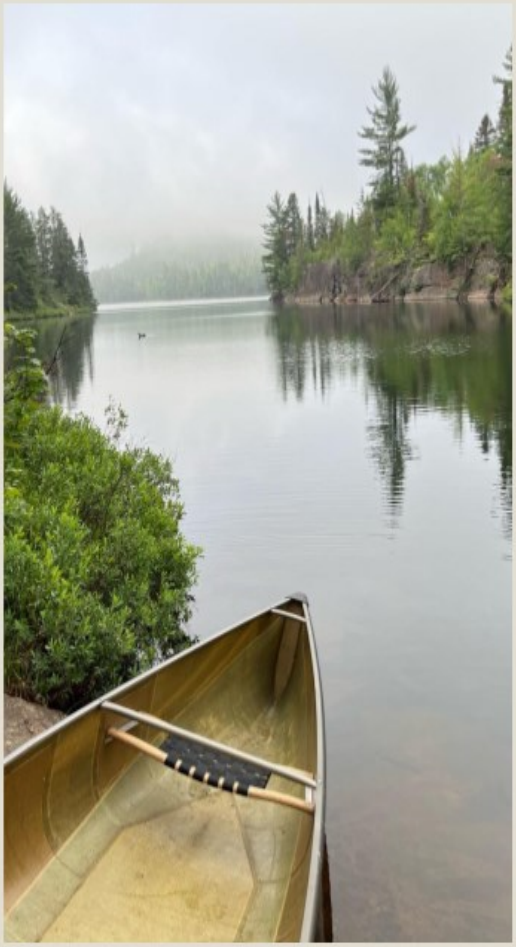
# 2025 BWCA Trip

## FLC Youth (grades 8-9)

We are planning another trip to the Boundary Waters this summer!

We will settle on our dates and entry point very soon!

Once again, I will be asking the congregation this spring for some equipment and support.

If you have any questions, please contact Mark Szybnski at 507.380.9180 or at markszybnski@gmail.com