

ALERT!

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
615 Grant Street ✕ Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219

2023
REFORMATION
VOLUME 77, ISSUE 5

ON REFORMATION AND REBIRTH

Five hundred and six years on from the beginning of the Reformation, the Church of Jesus Christ, at least in the West, finds itself once again searching for its identity and purpose in a changing world. The churches of the Reformation were born out of the Church's decline through the Middle Ages, and, though it came with fractious division, the Reformation did also come with renewal, growth, and the spread of the Gospel to the masses around the world. At least in terms of numbers, it could be said that the rebirth in the West spurred by the 16th century Reformation peaked around the middle of the 20th century.

As I've reflected about my own place as a pastor at this point in history, I've realized that any Christian around my age or younger has known nothing but ministry in a shrinking Church—and, here in Western Pennsylvania, in the midst of a shrinking population as well. Of course, I'm only talking about the Church as a whole. There are certainly bright spots where we see growth in churches and communities, but, on average, we have witnessed much decline. Many, many congregations in our synod, in the ELCA, and in most other denominations have closed, and certainly many more will follow in the near future.

October 22 at First Lutheran Church was a Sunday where it felt clear we are bucking that trend. Our church pews were fuller than usual, and our choir loft was packed with adults, youth, and children praising God with their music. The procession wrapped the whole way around the church. The feeling and sight of the Body of Christ gathered in strength gives us such a lift—such hope—that the Gospel itself is alive and well, that “God is here,” as we sang, and that “the gates of hell shall not prevail” against Christ's Church. (Matthew 16:18)

Against all the odds and against all the forces that would seek to prevail against us—amid all the risks, difficulties, dangers, expenses, and challenges of doing downtown ministry—it does seem that God has a purpose for this congregation at this time. We continue to be one of the bright spots where the Gospel is alive and spreading, where all people find welcome, and where the Church thrives in the very face of challenges.

At its heart, the Gospel is precisely about life prevailing against death. Yet, Christ also shows us that there is no true life without dying. True life emerges through and from the grave; it does not merely struggle against death. There cannot be true life that has not died first to the old self, to sin, and to evil itself. The pattern of decline, death, and rebirth is not a flaw of the Church. It is a feature. We just happen to find ourselves in a time in history where the

Continued on p. 5...



The Rev. Brian A. Evans

PH: 412-471-8125

FAX: 412-471-9521

flcpittsburgh.org

Connect with us on social media!



TAKE NOTE!

Outstanding choral events are scheduled to take place at First Lutheran Church in the next weeks! On Sunday **November 5 at 4:00 PM**, the Pan-Orthodox Choir of Pittsburgh, under the direction of Fr. Thomas Soroka, will offer a concert featuring canticles and psalms in the Russian, Greek, Antiochian, and other Orthodox traditions. Sung *a capella*, the rich choral history of the church will be presented. The concert's theme is "God is Wonderful in His Saints;" it promises to be a glorious musical celebration on the Sunday of All Saints. We are delighted to welcome the Choir back to First Church; invite friends, and come to this very special concert.



Sr. Cynthia A. Pock, OLF, AAGO

Light-Up Night Festivities! The Thiel College Choir will be in concert here at First Church on Saturday **November 18 at 6:00 PM**. Selections from the Choir's holiday program will be presented. Following the concert, all may exit to see holiday lights throughout the city. It is always wonderful to feature the choir from our Lutheran college community.

The German Christmas Service is scheduled for Sunday **December 17, 4:00 PM**. Lessons and carols in German with special musical guests are included in the service.

First Lutheran Church is blessed to welcome a wide variety of choral experiences. Parking is now available in the US Steel Tower garage for a reduced rate. Mark your calendars and come for these wonderful musical presentations!

Cynthia Pock
 Sr. Cynthia Pock
 Cantor

FINANCIAL CONGREGATION MEETING

The purpose of this December meeting is to take action on the Congregation Council's Proposal for Ministry, 2024. This proposal (budget) has been developed with the involvement of parish committees, staff, and the Council itself. All Voting Members are urged to be present. Voting Members are defined as those members of the congregation who have communed and made a contribution of record in the past year. Guests are also welcome to attend.

**9:45 AM on Sunday, December 10
 in Holy Cross Hall**



The musical ensembles of First Lutheran Church, top-bottom: Bel Canto, Cantate, the Parish Choir, & the Gloria Dei Ringers

CHRISTIAN ED. CORNER

Children and Youth

FAMILY CIRCUS / KIDVENTURE

Saturday, October 28, 10:00 AM- 12:00 PM Put on your costumes and join the Family Circus (age 0-grade 2) & Kid Venture (previously known as the Tween Group, grades 3-6) for a morning of fellowship and fun! In addition to trick-or-treating and games, Mad Science of Pittsburgh is coming at 11:00 AM to perform a show followed by a hands-on activity. Families with younger children can play in the nursery if the little ones would rather play than watch the show. RSVP to Emily Weimer at eharmon130@gmail.com.

YOUTH SERVICE OPPORTUNITY!

Amen to Action: Saturday, October 28: Amen to Action calls together different faith traditions to come together to serve in unity. In 2022, First Lutheran youth and their families were proud to participate as Amen to Action provided over one million meals to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. We are excited to participate in the Amen to Action 2023 food packing event at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on **Saturday, October 28 from 8:15 AM - 12:00 PM**. Youth and family members are welcome! Please sign up at this link. <https://tinyurl.com/Amen2Action>

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING 2024 INFORMATION MEETING:

On **Sunday, November 5, at 12:15 PM**, Youth in grades 8-12 are invited to come to an informational meeting regarding the July 16-20, 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, LA.

Continued on p. 5...



Joanne Pflugh (right) prepares to demonstrate handbells and choir chimes at the Music Ministry stall of the Rally Day Ministry Area Fair.



Pastor Evans offers a backpack blessing at this year's Rally Day carnival.



Emily Weimer, Natalie Connors, and Amanda Skov work the Christian Education Committee stall during the Rally Day Ministry Area Fair.



Enjoying one of the many games at the Rally Day Carnival.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

GLOBAL LINKS
Sharing Surplus. Saving Lives.

GLOBAL LINKS VOLUNTEERING DAY

Join us **Saturday, November 11 from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM** to volunteer at Global Links. Global Links prepares and ships surplus medical supplies to resource-poor areas in the Western Hemisphere. Learn more at globallinks.org. Volunteers sort and pack materials for shipping. No special skills required. Open to those who are 18 years and older or are 16-17 with a signed waiver by parent or guardian. Global Links is located near the Greentree exit on I-376. You can get the registration link by contacting the church office. Contact Sherry Wilson at swilson854@gmail.com for more information about volunteering.

PLEASANT VALLEY MEN'S SHELTER MEAL:

Tuesday, November 7

To love our neighbors, First Lutheran Church prepares and serves a meal at Pleasant Valley Men's Shelter on the first Tuesday of every other month. Our next dinner will be Tuesday, November 7. We are in need of volunteers to make food at home or buy prepared food at a store and to help serve the meal at 7:00 PM. If you are interested, or would like more information, please contact Jeff McCurry at mccurryj@gmail.com.

MEAL MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

Each Wednesday morning **8:00 AM - 1:00 PM**, a small team of volunteers prepares 60-100 meals in our church kitchen for two local organizations serving our neighbors in need. Meals are planned and groceries are gathered by our coordinators; volunteers need no cooking experience. Contact Christine to volunteer at cgh@flcpittsburgh.org.

LAUDATE DOMINUM SERIES



**GOD IS
wonderful
IN HIS SAINTS**

**THE PAN ORTHODOX
CHOIR OF PITTSBURGH**
under the direction of
FR. THOMAS SOROKA

presented by
FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
615 Grant Street, Downtown Pittsburgh

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5 ✠ 4:00 PM

for more information, visit:
flcpittsburgh.org



You are invited to ...

**CELEBRATION
OF Caring**



**NORTHSIDE COMMON
MINISTRIES**

Thursday, November 2, 2023
5:30 p.m.
Pittsburgh's Grand Hall at the Priory

40 years of Caring for our
North Side Neighbors in Need

NORTHSIDE COMMON MINISTRIES CELEBRATION OF CARING

Thursday, November 2, at 5:30 PM
The Grand Hall at the Priory

First Lutheran Church has secured a table for 10 at the Celebration of Caring for Northside Common Ministries, which many of our members actively support. We invite you to join us at a discounted cost of \$40 per person. Sign up in the Parish House or e-mail Christine at cgh@flcpittsburgh.org.

Continued from p. 3...

Adults

Book Discussion: Braiding Sweetgrass: You're invited to join our final discussion on Robin Wall Kimmerer's book, *Braiding Sweetgrass* considering the author's integration of work and spirituality as a Native American botany scholar and our own integration of Christian spirituality in our lives.

**Tuesday, November 28 at 7:00 PM
(Church & Zoom): sections 4 and 5**

For more details, email Pastor McCurry at jpm@flcpittsburgh.org.

Adult Sunday Church School

In November, our adult series will focus on various expressions of Lutheran Campus Ministry in our area. Join us to hear more from:

November 5 – Pastor Brian Riddle and campus ministry at Thiel College, a school started by First's former Pastor, William Passavant, and still affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

November 12 – Pastor Brian Bennett and campus ministry outreach to the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, Chatham University, and Carlow University.

November 19 – Our own Pastor Jennifer McCurry, with dual roles in our parish's student outreach and as an interfaith Coordinator of Spiritual Life at Point Park University.

CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

The church office is now accepting Christmas poinsettia orders. Please submit your order by **Friday, December 8, 2023**. The order form for poinsettias and special music ministry gifts can be found on the final page of this newsletter. Thank you!



LAUDATE DOMINUM SERIES

LIGHT UP NIGHT

with the

Thiel

COLLEGE CHOIR

presented by

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
615 Grant Street, Downtown Pittsburgh

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18
6:00 PM

for more information, visit:
flcpittsburgh.org

Continued from cover...

Church as a whole awaits resurrection. Rather than railing against this process, let us continue to praise God with all our hearts that we live in Jesus and that nothing in all creation can take that away—no matter what the Church and the world around us look like at the moment. Only God can raise the dead. This is his work; not ours. Yet, God uses us and calls to us to be the living Body of Christ in the world. We are called to be his presence, to show up for one another in our worship, in our service, and in the work of justice and peace. In this work, let us “be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)

With you in Christ,

The Rev. Brian A. Evans
Senior Pastor



FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

Submitted by the Finance Committee

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH Statement of General Fund Activities

Accounts	8 mos Actual	8 mos Budget	8 mos Variance	Annual Budget
Revenues				
Offerings & other gifts	\$408,261	\$413,508	\$ (5,247)	\$620,175
Distributions & interest	151,525	150,220	1,305	189,080
Total Revenues	559,786	563,728	(3,942)	809,255
Expenses				
Personnel	\$355,903	\$371,341	\$ (15,438)	\$560,600
Benevolence	40,267	41,767	(1,500)	62,400
Christian Education and Youth Ministry	16,502	13,067	3,435	18,400
Evangelism and Social Ministry	10,346	8,467	1,879	12,700
Parish Operations	27,862	32,775	(4,913)	49,100
Property Maintenance	62,504	60,835	1,669	87,518
Worship	26,436	12,600	13,836	18,400
Total Expenses	539,820	540,852	(1,032)	809,118
Net Surplus (Deficit)	\$ 19,966	\$ 22,876	\$ (2,910)	\$ 137

As shown in the above chart, through the first 8 months of 2023, you continued to faithfully and generously support FLC's ministries. Offerings and other gifts of \$408,261 consists largely of envelope giving totaling \$394,088. Offerings and other gifts were \$5,247 behind the year-to-date budgeted figure of \$413,508, closing the gap by over \$17,000 from the actual vs budget gap through June 2023. As reported in the previous Alert, giving units were down during the first six months of 2023, from 178 to 152 units during 2022. While an updated analysis of giving units will be completed later in the year, we do know that much of the improvement in the past two months reflects a few larger gifts.

Total expenses of \$539,820 remain slightly below the budgeted figure, by \$1,032 through the first 8 months of 2023. You may notice that Personnel expenses are \$15,438 below budget. That is largely due to lower than anticipated overtime hours for our maintenance and housekeeping staff and reduced expenses from Council's decision to not continue with an intern beginning in August. As shown above, we reported a General Fund Surplus of \$19,966, during the first 8 months 2023.

Please direct any questions, comments, or concerns you may have to the Chair of Finance, Jim Nealon.



Orders must be placed by
Friday, December 8

Christmas Poinsettias

ORDER FORM

_____ poinsettias @ \$9.00 each, \$_____ enclosed

Please make checks payable to First Lutheran Church. Orders may be placed in the offering plate or mailed to the church office, ATTN: Christine Hoffman.

Your Name _____

Phone/E-Mail _____

Poinsettias may be given with or without recognition or a dedication in our annual Poinsettia and Special Music Gifts booklet. Please indicate below if you would like your donation to be recognized, and exactly how you would like the dedication to appear.

- In MEMORY of... _____
- In HONOR of... _____
- In CELEBRATION of... _____

Please indicate the name(s) or event above.

- I would like to remain anonymous.
- Just list my name as a donor, please *(no dedication)*.

MUSIC MINISTRY GIFTS

Please accept my music ministry gift in the amount of \$ _____.

Please make checks payable to First Lutheran Church. Gifts may be placed in the offering plate or mailed to the church office, ATTN: Christine Hoffman.

Your Name _____

Phone / E-Mail _____

Music Ministry Gifts may be given with or without recognition or a dedication in our annual booklet. Please indicate below if you would like your donation to be recognized, and exactly how you would like the dedication to appear.

- In MEMORY of... _____
- In HONOR of... _____
- In CELEBRATION of... _____

Please indicate the name(s) or event above.

- I would like to remain anonymous.
- Just list my name as a donor, please *(no dedication)*.

