



Mission Statement
Sharing God's Love Wherever
We May Be

This is the QR
code for giving
at Bethesda
Lutheran
Church.



**A Member Congregation of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America**

BETHESDA NEWS is a monthly publication of
Bethesda Lutheran Church, Jewell, IA

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Upcoming Dates

Mar. 29 Palm and Passion
Sunday
Mar. 31 @ 5pm
Community Choir
Rehearsal (Bethesda)
Apr. 1 Seder Meal for
Confirmation Program
Apr. 2 Maundy Thursday
Worship at 7:00 pm
Apr. 3 Community Good
Friday service (@
Bethesda)
Apr. 5 Easter Sunday
8-8:45 Breakfast
9 am Festival Worship

BETHESDA NEWS is a publication of Bethesda Lutheran Church, Jewell, IA



GOD'S CALL THROUGH LAY MINISTRY TRAINING

Beloved siblings in Christ of Bethesda,

Last month, I wrote an article about Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry and his call to ministry. A call that came out of being asked first to be a Lay Minister in the congregation he was worshipping, Shekinah Chapel. It was and is a powerfully captivating story about responding to God's Call in one's own life.

One of the truths of our faith is that God calls all of us, every baptized person, to lives of discipleship, service, and witness. This is what Lutherans mean when we profess a theology of the "priesthood of all believers." Sometimes that call leads us into familiar forms of ministry: teaching Sunday School, serving on a committee, singing in the choir, being on Church Council or volunteering with the high school youth group. Now, in the

21st Century, the Holy Spirit is stirring up new callings among lay folks who feel drawn to leadership in worship, preaching, and pastoral care because let's face it, most congregations no longer need to put folding chairs in the aisles of the sanctuary anymore.

Across our Northeastern Iowa Synod, many congregations are experiencing pastoral vacancies. As Pastor Steve Backett shared at the annual Riverside Conference Assembly, an average of 30 congregations have been without a pastor each year. Those congregations rely on supply pastors who are not always available. Yet, the Holy Spirit is not absent. Again and again, faithful lay members have stepped forward to lead worship, preach, visit the homebound, and support the life of their congregations. The **Lay Ministry Training Program** exists to equip these leaders with the theological grounding, practical skills, and spiritual confidence they need to serve well.

This two-year program combines online coursework through a Lutheran lay school with monthly mentoring and an annual in-person retreat. Participants grow in their understanding of Scripture, Lutheran theology, worship leadership, preaching, and pastoral care. Those who complete the program become **Certified Lay Assisting Ministers (CLAMs)**, and some may be approved to serve as **Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs)** in which their congregation's altar is authorized, in the absence of a pastor, to preside at Holy Communion and baptisms.

When I served in the South Dakota Synod, our Weekly Text Study was attended on average by 8 ministers, 3 of them were SAMs and they were doing wonderful work in their congregations. They loved coming to Text Study because it allowed them to learn from the wealth of Ordained Pastors present and to continue to feel supported by the larger Church.

But beyond the structure and training, the heart of this program is discernment. It invites participants to listen to how God is calling them to serve the church they love. It nurtures gifts that may have been quietly growing for years. It strengthens congregations by raising up leaders from within their own pews. Leaders who know the community, love the people, and feel a genuine call to serve. Lay Assisting Ministers are welcomed and encouraged to co-lead worship with the pastor or the deacon serving the congregation!

Article is continued on the next page.

GOD'S CALL THROUGH LAY MINISTRY TRAINING

(Continued from front page)

This type of ministry is one that Lutherans are able to do where other denominations cannot. Let me tell you a story from my past. When I was in college, I came back home for a summer. I went to visit my priest, Monsignor Walter Brunkan. I asked him if there was some way that I could lead worship with him, saying prayers, occasionally preaching a sermon (after we worked on it together), assisting in a fuller capacity. I was, at that time, truly discerning a Call to the priesthood even while actively dating Lisa. In fact, I went to a retreat one weekend at a Catholic seminary. But he said that in the Catholic Church, it is not possible unless the man is actively in seminary. How would my life have been different if I could have "tried out" pastoral ministry?

As Bishop Kevin Jones reminds us, "*I encourage you to pray and reflect on how God is calling you to participate in this movement.*" May we listen with open hearts and trust that God continues to raise up leaders for the sake of the gospel.

If you sense the Holy Spirit nudging you toward something more. Maybe toward learning, toward leadership, toward a new way of serving, then this is the moment to explore that call. If you know someone whose gifts shine in worship, teaching, or caring for others, encourage them to pray about this opportunity. Just like I said last month, send them my way because I want to talk with them or with you. The Northeastern Iowa Synod has developed a new Certified Lay Ministry Program and I have included that in the newsletter this month for you to read (again). I'm praying for you! The Church is praying for you! Most importantly, God is calling you!

*In humble service of the Triune God,
Pastor Jonathan Dolan*

Bethesda Lutheran Church - Council Meeting Minutes - 09 February 2026, 7:00 pm

Present: Wade Miller, Jeff Scott, Jen Nibe, Rich Heeren, Marcia Wheeler, Pastor Jonathan Dolan, Hans Koehn, Sherri Hove, Heather Thelen (Education), Mike Hill (Trustees), Sue Lund (Evangelism/Stewardship)

Guest: Donna Busch

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by President Wade Miller.

Devotions were led by Pastor Jonathan Dolan.

Approval of the Agenda

Rich Heeren moved to approve the agenda as written; Mike Hill seconded, and the agenda was approved unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes of the January Meeting-

Approval of January meeting minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

Financial/Treasurer's Report

Sherri Hove gave the Treasurer's Report. As of January 31, the general fund balance was \$13,408.60.

Jeff Scott moved to approve the Treasurer's Report; Mike Hill seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Pastor's Report

Pastor Dolan distributed a copy of his January's Pastor Report. During January, he met with the Board of Deacons, Board of Worship, Board of Youth, Council, and the Nominating Committee. He visited a couple of families, bringing Holy Communion and provided pastoral care to the Ron Wheeler family.

Confirmation attendance continues to be strong on Wednesdays with less attending on Sundays. Confirmation class watched the movie "King of Kings" to cap off their reading through the Gospel of Luke.

Youth group continues to be strong. Because Pastor will be gone during Lent Services, Jeff Scott volunteered to join Roxie to make sure there are two adults present.

Adult Education has been using the "Wired Word" and has had good attendance with about 8 people each Sunday since the beginning of the year. Upcoming events include the Seder meal with confirmation students, Riverside Conference Annual Meeting, and Lutheran Day on the Hill. For Lenten services, Pastor will be here for the first and last service and for the remaining services, will be participating in the "round robin" exchange of pastors as we have done in the past. Pastor Dolan will be gone on 5/17.

Old Business

Church Insurance

Jeff spoke with Lightwell Insurance about possibly getting a coverage quote.

New Business

-Report from Riverside Bible Camp Annual Meeting
Donna attended the RLBC annual meeting on 2/1/26. In 2025, campers came in from 17 states and staff from US and other countries. Camper numbers were steady with VBS numbers down. Riverside received a grant from Homeland Security to add security features. Riverside has purchased an additional 150 to allow for grassland to provide hay for the horses. They will be starting a campaign for a new multi-purpose building. New Board Members were elected.

-Report from Candidacy Retreat

Donna attended the Candidacy retreat on 2/6-2/7 at the Shalom Spirituality Center in Dubuque. At the meeting, an update was given and the new Region 5 representative was introduced. Donna will now be serving as Secretary for the Candidacy Committee.

Small group exercises at the retreat included looking at various church Ministry Site Profiles and Annual Reports. Donna was able to provide accompaniment for the two worship services held.

-Action: Appoint Marcia Wheeler to continue on the Board of Worship

Rich Heeren moved to approve Marcia to continue on the Board, Sherry Hove seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

-Action: Appoint Nicole Ferguson to continue on the Board of Evangelism/Stewardship

Mike Hill moved to approve Nicole to continue on the Board, Rich Heeren seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

-Action: Appoint Hans Koehnk to continue on the Board of Youth (with written request)

Tabled until next meeting as written request is needed from Hans.

Board Vacancies (after appointments)

- Youth (1)
- Education (1)
- Evangelism/Stewardship (1)
- Worship (2)

Council discussed the need for additional people to fill Board seats. Boards will meet and discuss potential names to suggest for vacancies.

Board Reports

Education – None

Deacons – Seder Meal with Confirmation Students will be 4/1 @ 6:00 with parents and mentors if available. Celebration dinner for 8th graders will be on 4/29, with students being confirmed on 5/3. Interviews will be 4/22 and last regular confirmation class will be 4/15.

Evangelism/Stewardship - None

Worship – Lent services start 2/18 @ 6:30 with Ash Wednesday. 3/29 will be Palm Sunday service. Maundy Thursday service will be 4/2 @ 7:00. Easter Service of 4/5 with breakfast before service. Seder Meal is on 4/1. They will try changing to 2 offering plates.

Trustees – Replaced batteries in the smoke detectors. Parsonage has had doors opened and fans on to air it out. Lisa will paint subfloor with Kilz. Will possibly look into duct cleaning. Received a survey to complete from Church Mutual.

Youth- Hans reported not enough availability for Easter Breakfast and wondered if Confirmation would be interested/able to do it. Rich said that would work and he would discuss details with Lisa and the Deacons.

Sherry Hove requested that Donna send the Annual Report to the Congregation for people who could not attend. Also requested that the Bulletin be emailed.

Rich Heeren discussed the possibility of a QR code being added to the PowerPoint for online worshipers and the Bethesda Weekly and Monthly Calendar. Discussion was also had about alternate methods of giving such as Venmo. Donna will look into it.

The next council meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 10th at 7:00 pm.

Sherry Hove moved to adjourn the meeting; Mike Hill seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned with the Lord’s Prayer at 9:17 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jen Nibe



BOARD OF WORSHIP:

Marcia, Ortrude and Pastor held a meeting on March 9, 10:30 am.

We discussed Palm Sunday Service using Matthew’s story of the crucifixion. It will take 6-7 volunteers to read the character’s parts and narration of the story. Pastor will be Jesus and we will sign up the other readers on the Sunday before. We also talked about how Amy will have the congregation march in differently than last year which was apparently done wrong.

There was discussion about Easter Sunday. Rich Heeren will be organizing the breakfast with the confirmation students for 8 am.

Dials will talk to Julie about doing special music for prelude, offering and communion.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Board of Ed Minutes for March Meeting 3/22/26
Pastor Jonathan, Amy Barquist, Heather Thelen

Palm Sunday – 3/29/26

Amy will touch base with Donna to see if we need to pick up Palms or if they send them. We will hand out Palms in the narthex before church.

Easter Sunday – 4/5/26

All kids will sing at the 9:00 a.m. service. Please have children meet in the Primary room at 8:30 a.m.

(continued on next page)



Heather will put together something for Donna to put in the bulletin next week and for Lily to add to the Facebook page.

Volunteer Recognition Sunday is 4/26/26

Amy will visit with Nicole about the auction (if we will have SS). Also, visit with Jen, Traci, Linda & Marcia about SS. Amy will pick up cake and beverages. We will serve fellowship as a Thank You to all the volunteers that have helped our youth over the past year. Heather will put together something to share with Donna and Lily to send out to encourage everyone to join us.

VBS

Bethesda is hosting 6/8-6/10/26. We will try to get registration forms out to families 4/22/26-4/26/26 and start recruiting help. Amy will reach out to Pastor Jon from Ellsworth & Kayla from Randall.

Next Meeting – 4/16, 4/19 or 4/20

The kids choir will sing “Alive, Alive“ either after opening hymn or after the children’s sermon.

Other things reviewed were:

The Seder Meal on April 1 at 6:00 pm. There are 60-75 people signed up to come and Worship Committee is helping.

April 26 is Kid’s Music Sunday. There will be no sermon, or communion and the kids will do readings and music. This is also the last day for Sunday School and there will be a volunteer recognition.

We also discussed the need for council to appoint 2 more members for the Worship Committee.

Respectfully submitted, Ortrude Dial

BOARD OF DEACONS:

Please mark your calendars for the following: Sunday, March 29, after church, confirmation students will be setting Fellowship Hall for the Seder Meal.

Wed., Apr 1, 6:00 pm: Seder meal

Sunday, April 5: 7th and 8th grade Confirmation

Students are serving the Easter Breakfast from 8:00 to 8:45 am. Student and parent helpers are to arrive by 7:40 to prepare. If you have questions, please contact Pat Melchert at 515-451-0389.

Wed, April 29, 5:30 pm 8th grade students meet with Deacons

Wed, April 29, 6:00 pm: Confirmation Celebration Dinner and Rehearsal – 8th grade students, mentors, guardians/parents are invited.

Sunday, May 3, 9:00 am: Confirmation/Affirmation of Baptism for 8th grade Confirmation students. Gather in Fellowship Hall at 8:45 to get on robes. Reception will follow the worship service in Fellowship Hall.

Sunday, April 5: 7th and 8th grade Confirmation Students are serving the Easter Breakfast from 8:00 to 8:45 am. Student and parent helpers are to arrive by 7:40 to prepare. If you have questions, please contact Pat Melchert at 515-451-0389.

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BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

Bethesda Lutheran Church

Board of Trustees
February 26, 2026

Present: Pastor Dolan, Nancy Tjaden, Mike Hill and Lisa Peterson

Maintenance:

1. Parsonage: floor painting and general cleaning to be done when weather permits windows to be open.
2. Plumbing: Jerome has order a new hot water heater for the Quiet Room which provides hot water to the restrooms in the narthex. 2b. Jerome will give the board an estimate for back sump pump.
3. Fire extinguishers were checked last week.
4. Boiler inspection is planned for March 10: report will follow.
5. Mike continues to check parsonage for any issues.
6. Musicians would like more light in the choir loft: shades were removed.

Business:

1. Voting will occur in the Narthex in June and November.
2. Fellowship Hall is rented out for graduation.

Adjourn with Prayer

Next meeting to be announced when estimates and project information are available.



Interim Pastor: Rev. Jonathan Dolan

Deacon roster:

Pat Melchert: 515-451-0389; Richard Heeren: 515-231-2886; Eudene Lund: 515-290-4674; Josh Hilfiker: 515-460-3637

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Donna Busch, Admin. Assist.; Lisa Peterson, Custodian; Julie Lutjen, Accompanist; Confirmation Students, Sound and Technical Team

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Congregation Officers:

Wade Miller, President; Jeff Scott, Vice-Pres.; Sherri Hove, Treasurer; Jen Nibe, Secretary

Attendance

Attendance	
02/25	56
03/01	75
03/03	27-Timberland
03/04	49 - Lent
03/08	61
03/11	48- Lent
03/15	Canceled-weather
03/18	25
03/22	67
03/25	NA
03/29	NA

Please remember to update the church office of any changes to your address, email address, land line, or cell phone numbers. Also, any of the same for children at college or who have left home but are still members. Thank you.



Fund Balances to-date: March 23, 2026

Fund Name	2026 Budget (only applies to General Fund)	Needed per week to meet budget-GF	Needed @ 12 weeks to meet budget-GF	Actual received @ 12 weeks	Disbursements to-date	To-date Transfers from Contingency Fund	Fund Balances
General Fund	\$218,464.96	\$4, 201.25	\$50,414.99	\$38,526.57	\$40,824.05		\$13,873.46
Sunday School	NA	NA	NA	\$158.2	\$212.14		\$7,224.40
Youth & Family	NA	NA	NA	\$309.00	\$ 3.98		\$21,114.23
Designated Missions	NA	NA	NA	\$1,308.50	\$657.41		\$8,625.74
Undesignated Missions	NA	NA	NA	\$210.00	\$71.79		\$3,121.61
Discretionary Fund	NA	NA	NA	-0-	-0-		\$685.11
Capital Improvements	NA	NA	NA	\$1,700.00	-0-		\$8,811.02
Gifts and Memorials	NA	NA	NA	\$2,696.27	\$1,565.65		\$11,913.08
Contingency Fund	NA	NA	NA	-0-	-0-		\$53,848.28
Endowment Fund*	NA	NA	NA	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00		*

*Funds managed offsite

Note: This is for everyone's information and is: General Fund ONLY

General Fund	Income	Transferred from Contingency Fund	Disbursements	Fund Balance at end of month
January Only	\$12,903.37	-0-	\$15,665.71	\$13,408.60
February Only	\$12,601.79	NA	\$15,638.19	\$10,372.20
March Only	NA	NA	NA	NA
April Only				
May Only				
June Only				
July Only				
August Only				
September Only				
October Only				
November Only				
December Only-2025	\$21,916.92	-0-	\$21,370.92	\$16,170.94



FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS

Remembering Jesus' life, death and resurrection helps us live with gratitude every day.

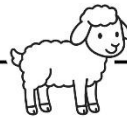
Use the picture and number code to fill in the blanks for Hebrews 12:2-3, NIV


























- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. Jesus | 5. cross |
| 2. weary | 6. endured |
| 3. endured | 7. scorning |
| 4. opposition | 8. shame |



- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. Jesus | 5. perfecter |
| 2. lose | 6. him |
| 3. pioneer | 7. faith |
| 4. sinners | 8. hand |

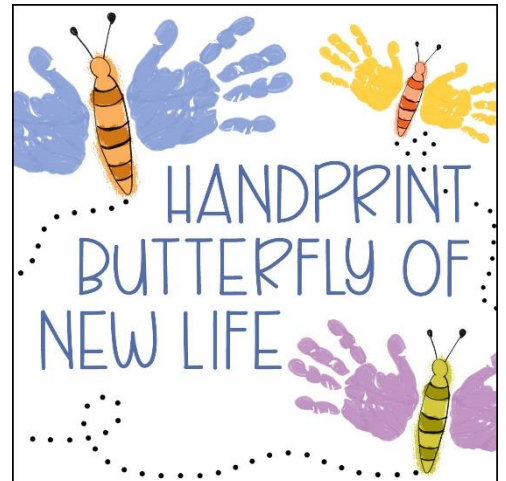


- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. eyes | 5. right |
| 2. us | 6. grow |
| 3. joy | 7. God |
| 4. heart | 8. throne |

"... fixing our  1 on  1, the  3 and  5 of  7. For the  3 set before  6 he  3 the  5,  7 its  8, and sat down at the  5  8 of the  8 of  7. Consider  6 who  6 such  4 from  4, so that you will not  6  2 and  2  4."

Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV

ANSWER: "... fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ... down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured the cross, scorning its shame, and lost his life for us, that he might bring us to himself through his own blood, by purifying his people to himself as a peculiar people, zealous of good deeds." Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV



HANDPRINT BUTTERFLY OF NEW LIFE

The butterfly reminds us of new life and the Resurrection. After three days, Jesus rose from the dead and brings us the hope of new beginnings. This simple craft helps children celebrate that joyful truth.

What you need:

- Light-colored construction paper
- Card stock
- Glue
- Paint
- Paintbrush
- Paper towel or baby wipe



What you do:

- Cut out a butterfly body from the construction paper.
- Glue the butterfly body onto the card stock.
- Use a paintbrush to coat the palm of one hand with paint.
- Press your painted hand beside the butterfly body to create a wing.
- Repeat with your other hand to make the second wing.
- Clean your hands with a paper towel or baby wipe.
- Optional: Add Luke 24:5-6 (NIV) around the butterfly or on its body:

"Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

Community Matters!

YES, I CAN!

I cannot end poverty, but I can feed one hungry person. I cannot stop war, but I can offer peace to my neighbor. I cannot prevent death, but I can hold the hand of someone who is dying.

These may seem like small acts, yet they are far harder - and far more meaningful - than any grand plan for social change. Christ reminds us of their worth: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40, NIV).

Tuesday Together Time



The South Hamilton Community is invited to "Tuesday Together Time" each Tuesday at noon held in Bethesda Lutheran Church Fellowship Hall. Bring a potluck dish to share with others.

All tableware is provided. Don't have food prepared, please come! There is always plenty and, if you desire, a container is provided for you to put a little donation in to go toward Global Good Gifts.

Donations are growing again; total at this time is \$875.00.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON TUESDAY? DO YOU NEED A LITTLE FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY?

JOIN US - THERE'S A PLACE READY AND WAITING FOR YOU! Prize winners in March: Janet, Carol, Eudene, Sylvia, Jessica, Pat, Monica, Lisa, Pr. Nancy, Sharon, Darrel, Pr. Jonathan, John, Jackie, Larry

The Lunch Wagon - Jewell Residents

- **Do you need assistance with meals?**
 - **Do you live in Jewell?**
 - **Are you homebound?**
 - **Are you recovering at home?**
- If you answered yes to any of these questions, you can contact:**



- **Susan Lund at 515-290-3000 or Sarah Freeman at 515-291-1528**
- **Lunches will be delivered Monday through Friday between 11:30 to 12:15.**
- **The cost of the lunch is \$5.00 per meal.**
- **Lunches will be prepared in Jewell by:**
- **JEWELL MARKET: Mon/Tues/Wed/Thurs and**
- **THE MALIBU: Fri.**
- **Lunches will NOT be delivered on holidays.**



Proud Partner of Food Bank of Iowa

The Lord's Cupboard Food Pantry is open each Monday of the month from 5:00 to 6:30 pm. Additionally, the Lord's Cupboard is open the *first Monday* of each month from 1:00 to 2:00 pm. If you know someone in need of food assistance, please let them know of the availability of The Lord's Cupboard. If you have questions, please talk with Karla Alanis Palomo (515) 310-0151 or the church office.

The Lord's Cupboard's location: Jewell, PO Box 330, 439 Main Street, Jewell 50130-0330.

Phone: 515-827-5148

Are you interested in volunteering your time with the Lord's Cupboard? More volunteers are needed and we would be very glad to accept your help. Please contact Karla @ 515-310-0151; or Sue @ 515-290-3000; or leave a message at the church office for a return call @ 515-827-5148.

Volunteers are always needed and the help is greatly appreciated.

The next Mobile Food Truck will be here in April.

*Our Mission: **Lutheran Services in Iowa** responds to the love of Jesus Christ through compassionate service. LSI is an affiliated social ministry partner of the Iowa congregations of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and a member of LSA (Lutheran Services in America). We proudly serve people of all ages, abilities, religions, sexes, gender identities, national origins, ethnicities, races, and sexual orientations. Learn more at LSIowa.org and [Facebook.com/LSI.iowa](https://www.facebook.com/LSI.iowa).*

Your gift changes the lives of thousands of people across Iowa.
Lutheran Services in Iowa, P.O. Box 848, 106 16th St. SW
 Waverly, IA 50677

As we step into spring, we're reminded of the hope and renewal that this season brings. Just as spring brings new life, we continue to see God at work through the ministry and mission you help make possible.

Because of your prayers, encouragement, and faithful support, lives are being touched in meaningful ways. Every conversation, every act of service, and every opportunity to share hope is a reminder that this work is not done alone it is a community effort rooted in faith.

Thank you for standing with us and for being such an important part of this mission.

If you have any questions, please reply to this email or reach out to Andrea Maschka, LSI's Chief Development Officer at Andrea.Maschka@LSIowa.org

We are so grateful for your partnership in sharing our mission!

GROWING HOPE: LSI'S SPRING PLANT SALE

Spring is an exciting season at LSI, and this year brings an especially meaningful milestone for our Global Greens program. After many years of renting space, we are grateful to share that LSI has purchased our local greenhouse in Des Moines, IA. This step allows us to expand our work and continue creating opportunities for the refugees and immigrants we serve.

Our Global Greens program brings together individuals and families from many different countries who are building new lives in our communities. In the greenhouse, participants grow flowers, vegetables, and hanging baskets while learning valuable job skills, practicing English, and forming friendships. It is a place where people from around the world work side by side, gaining confidence and experience as they move forward in their new home.

The **Spring Plant Sale** is an important part of making this program possible. The plants sold during the sale are grown and cared for by the refugees and immigrants in our program. Every purchase helps support training, supplies, and the ongoing work of LSI as we walk alongside newcomers adjusting to life in Iowa.

For our participants, the greenhouse represents more than a place to grow plants, it is a place to grow opportunity, community, and hope.

We invite you and your congregation to support this ministry by visiting the greenhouse during the plant sale, sharing the event with friends and neighbors, and keeping the families we serve in your prayers. When you purchase plants from LSI, you are not only preparing your garden for spring you are helping cultivate new beginnings for our newest neighbors.

Thank you for your continued partnership in this important work.



Dear Beloved Church Family,

I write this letter with a tender but trusting heart.

As many of you know, I have been pursuing my calling to ordained ministry through my studies at seminary. Recently, I faced a difficult setback: I did not pass my preaching course. My professors shared that they believed my sermons were not yet at the level required, and without the scholarships I had been awarded, I am unable to afford continuing seminary with paying my tuition at Wartburg Theological Seminary. Because of this, I have made the hard decision to step away from seminary for now and return to college to further grow in my writing and public speaking skills.

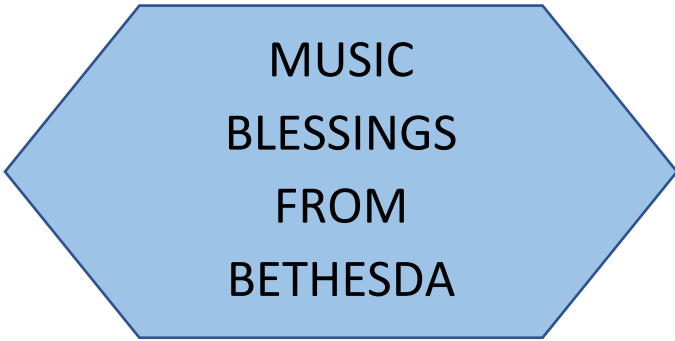
This has not been easy to accept. Hearing that I was not fit to be a priest was painful. It shook me. It humbled me. But it did not extinguish what God has placed within me. I know with all my heart that God is not done with me yet. The fire He placed inside me still burns brightly. A closed door does not mean a closed calling. Sometimes it simply means there is more refining to do, more shaping, more strengthening before the next step. I trust that this season is not a rejection of my vocation, but a preparation for it.

I want to thank each and every one of you. Your prayers, encouragement, kind words, and belief in my calling have carried me through more than you know. You have affirmed me when I doubted myself. You have listened to my early sermons. You have loved me through both confidence and insecurity. I am deeply grateful for this church family and for the ways you have supported my journey.

This is not the end of my calling. It is a chapter in it. My hope is to return to seminary in the future, complete my Master's degree, and pursue ordination when the time is right. I believe God's timing is wiser than my own, and I am choosing to trust Him in this valley as much as I would on the mountaintop.

Please continue to pray for me as I grow, learn, and prepare for what comes next. And know that I remain committed to serving Christ and His Church in whatever ways I can during this season.

*With gratitude, humility, and hope,
Sergio Gomez*



Dear Parents,

We are planning our third “Music Blessings from Bethesda”. The first two years were a huge success and everyone enjoyed participating and listening to all of the talents of Bethesda and beyond.

Our third “Music Blessings from Bethesda” event will be during worship on Sunday, April 26, 2026.

You are receiving this letter for you to indicate whether or not your child will be available that Sunday morning to participate. As before, the Tone Chimers, Hearts of Praise Choir, and many other talented children, young adults, and anyone of any age will be included. To make the planning easier, it is necessary to know how many of the Tone Chimers and the Hearts of Praise children can attend.

Please complete the form on the bottom portion of this letter, cut it off, and **return it to Janis by Wednesday, April 8th**. Thank you for providing this needed information.

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To Janis:

My child (children) _____

(write name or names)

_____ Yes: my child will participate on April 26, 2026.

_____ No: my child will not be available on April 26, 2026.