

Embracing Love's Adventure Together

PROGRESS

DEC 2026: VOL. 33, NO. 12

THIS ISSUE:

CHRISTMAS SEASON
Dates, Times, and Places

COOKIE WALK
Sun, Dec 6 starting at 7:30am

CHRISTMAS CAROLING
Tues, Dec 15 at 6pm

CHRISTMAS FOR ALL AGES
Sun, Dec 20 at 10am
First Presbyterian

CRAIG CARES
Holiday Program

PEACE ON EARTH?



I've noticed myself feeling unsettled again lately. Things beyond my control keep changing.

As a congregation, we have been in a period of disruption since April. Still without a building, we are now preparing for Christmas services in a new space and without a music director. We have what we need. We can do this. But the disruption of our regular routines can be exhausting.

The whole rebuilding task is demanding. It has so many parts to it and requires much time and energy from our leaders and staff. We keep taking the next step, but it's unsettling to me when I can't know for sure what the long-term impact of our choices will be.

Some of the changes we encounter are good, even wonderful. My wife and I just became grandparents for the first time. The birth of our granddaughter Freyja is a great joy, yet this also brings a shift in priorities and routines. We are now traveling to South Milwaukee as often as possible to visit her and

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH

MISSION: Reach, Nourish, and Empower people with the Good News of Jesus Christ!

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Office Hours: Monday-Thursday 8:30am-4pm; Friday 8:30am-Noon



Pastor Michael

mmueller@flcj.org
262.930.2072



to support our son and daughter-in-law.

By the time you read this, Christmas and the New Year will be close at hand. The expectations of the holidays and the extra responsibilities that come with these days can also become overwhelming for us.

Where is peace to be found? How can we bring a calm presence to our homes, our life together, and our workplaces? How can we bring an open spirit to questions that draw conflicting opinions and allow for no easy answers?

The path to becoming a less anxious person can start by caring for our bodies. It's difficult to remain grounded amid uncertainty or conflict when our body's needs have been ignored. Healthy food, regular movement every day, occasional vigorous exercise, and a good night's sleep are important foundations. These are things we have an important degree of control over. If we don't do what we can to care for our bodies, we won't have a strong foundation to remain calm when the world around us gets crazy.

In addition to basic self-care, an important key to peace in changing times is to remember what doesn't change. The love of God remains constant for us and for the whole world that God has made. Our mission to become that love for others doesn't change. "Remain in me, as I remain in you," said Jesus (John 15:4). He calls us to remain in his love, receiving it for ourselves and sharing it with others, without distinction, whatever is happening around us and whatever the world may be doing.

The familiar prayer of serenity, used frequently by Twelve Step groups, is a good way to keep centered: Lord, grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. It's a simple prayer that we would recognize what is ours to do and entrust the rest to God. I notice that anxiety always spikes in me whenever I start obsessing about something I can't control, while losing sight of the ways that I do have power to act and make a difference.

So, caring for our bodies, remaining connected to the love that doesn't change, and doing what is ours to do – these three commitments can help to empower in us a calm, peaceful presence for the unanswered questions, the unresolved conflicts, and the ordinary challenges of daily life.

Care for one another during these busy December days – and remain close to the one whose birth caused the angels to sing, "Peace on earth -- to all whom God favors!"



CHRISTMAS CAROLING

Tues, Dec 15 at 6pm



Join us for Christmas caroling at First Apartments! We will meet at First Lutheran's carport entrance at 5:45pm, then walk across the parking lot to the First Apartments.

Bring your favorite instrument (guitar, violin, flute, VOICE, kazoo!, tambourine) and your good cheer! This is family-friendly, so bring friends of all ages, and your littles! All are welcome to celebrate the joy of Christmas! Email Renee Engen with any questions: rengen@flcj.org.



COOKIE WALK

Dec 6
Starting at 7:30am



The Discipleship Team is bringing you the 6th Annual Cookie Walk on Dec 6. Here is a great way to get a lovely variety of holiday cookies to share with family and friends. From 7:30am until after the second service, you can fill your box with as many cookies as you want. It will be weighed and you pay accordingly.

We need lots and lots of donated cookies so when you bake, please plan an extra few dozen for your church. The proceeds go to the youth to help pay for their mission trips.



SMART AND GENEROUS GIVING

To those who follow the way of Jesus, financial giving expresses both trust in God and love for our neighbors. By giving generously, we become part of the movement of God's love in the world. Here's a way of giving that could strengthen the sharing of First Lutheran Church, while also reducing your taxes!

Many people save for retirement using a traditional IRA. When funds are deposited in an IRA, the deposits are generally tax deductible, but later when the funds are withdrawn, the taxes must be paid. You can avoid paying taxes on a withdrawal, by giving a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your IRA. If you are 70½ or older, the amount you donate to charity is excluded from your taxable income and might help satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.

This could be a tax-advantaged way for you to give a special end-of-year donation or to fulfill your regular giving commitment to First Lutheran in 2026. To distribute a gift from your IRA, send a note to your account administrator requesting they make a direct charitable distribution from your account to First Lutheran Church. You can also receive a tax benefit from donating stocks or appreciated assets. Donating long-term appreciated stock directly to a First Lutheran Church lets you avoid capital gains taxes on the investment growth while claiming a fair market value (FMV) income tax deduction.

Your financial generosity continues to empower our efforts to grow community and build new relationships with our neighbors. Please prayerfully consider making an end-of-year gift to help us finish the calendar year strong. Your offering must be postmarked by December 31 to receive a tax benefit in the current tax year. You can also give electronically by going online to our webpage www.flcj.org/give.

If you have any questions about year-end giving, please contact our business administrator, Arwen Twitchett, at busadmin@flcj.org or 608.752.7434. Thank you!





LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

Whether we are reacting to an actual dementia diagnosis, or simply sensing that we are not who we used to be, most of us initially want to retreat from life as we struggle to accept our "new normal". We often avoid activities or responsibilities we once handled with ease, those we did automatically, to avoid feeling embarrassed by our decline.

According to Wikipedia, "examples of automaticity are common activities such as walking, speaking, reading, bicycle-riding, assembly-line work, and driving a car. The mind is able to focus on other activities or thoughts while undertaking an automatized activity (for example, holding a conversation or planning a speech while driving a car)."

Our best chance to remain independent, for the longest possible time, is to keep doing what we want to keep doing. If we want to keep driving, we should try to drive somewhere at least once per day. My favorite daily rounds include stops at the Pig, Target, and car wash. Rather than filling my gas tank when it hovers near empty, I top it off frequently as a means of retaining muscle memory regarding the correct sequencing of the gas pump.

Our loved ones benefit if we gracefully accept our "new normal" and develop strategies that allow them as much time as possible for their own lives as our shared dementia journey unfolds.

POINSETTIA DELIVERY

Dec 24-31



Poinsettias may be taken home after the 7:30pm Christmas Eve service. If you would like to pick up your poinsettia after Christmas, they will be available at the FLC office or Good Shepherd.

Please note that FLC poinsettias will be placed on the ledge in the Good Shepherd sanctuary. If picking one up at Good Shepherd, please take only from the designated ledge.

Thank you!



CRAIG CARES
Holiday Program

With her heartfelt dedication to helping others, Jan Pinnow introduced us to the Craig Cares Holiday Program. In honor of her memory, FLC hopes to match—or even surpass—the care we provided to the over 40 students last year. Student program lists aren't available yet, but the program will be similar to past years. Watch the weekly bulletins for updates.

Craig Cares programs accepting donations year-round include the Hygiene Closet, Clothing Closet, and general Craig Cares Donations.

Immediate needs: toilet paper, paper towels, laundry soap, dish soap, hygiene items, monetary donations, and backpacks.

Drop-off location:
Craig High School

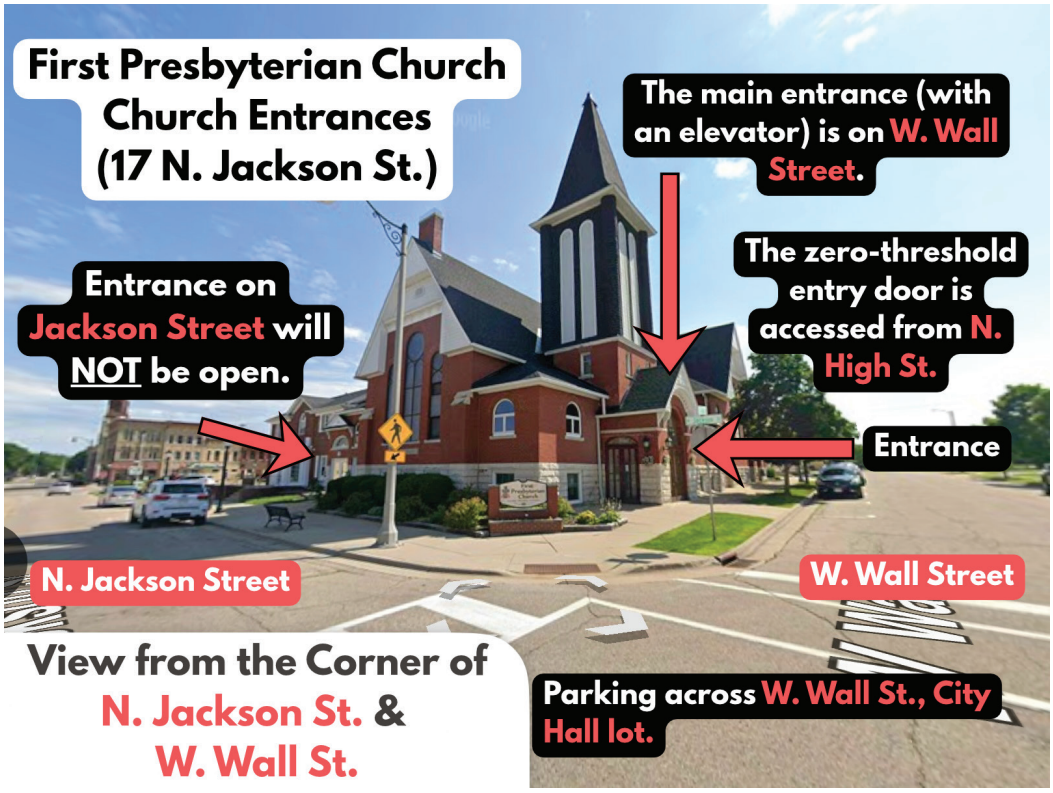
Monetary donations (mail):
Craig Cares
Attn: Heather Last
Craig High School
401 S Randall Ave
Janesville, WI 53545

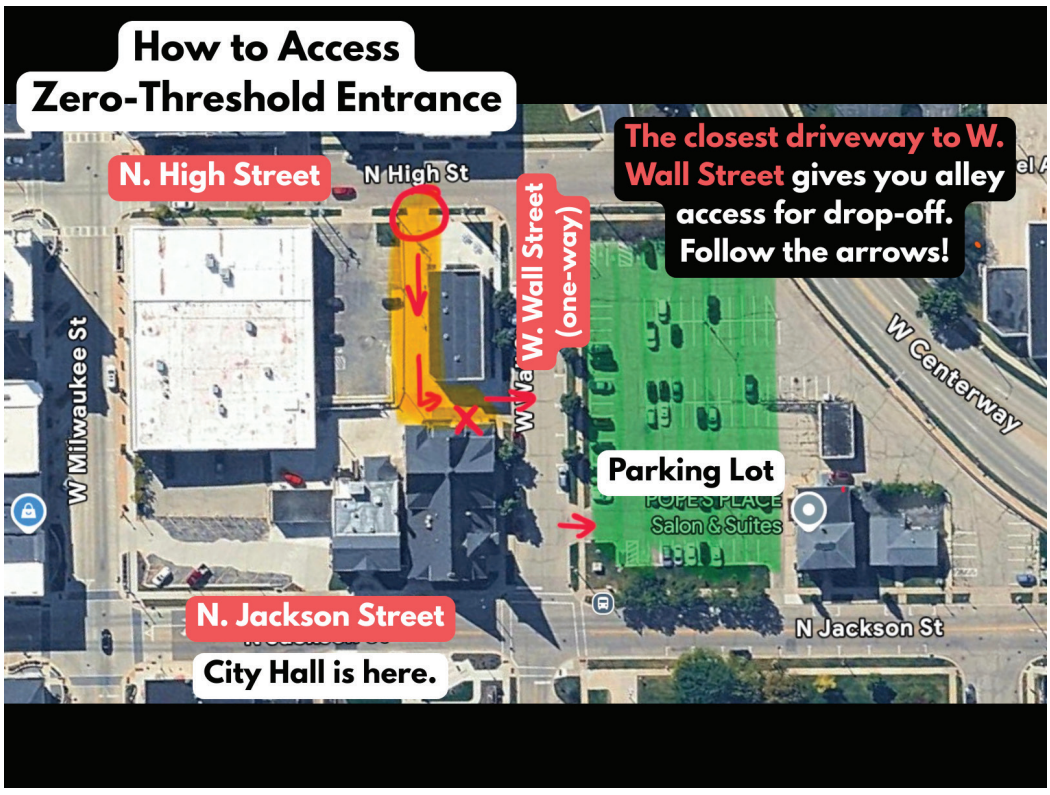
Please indicate your affiliation with First Lutheran when donating. Questions? Contact Jer Carpenter at 920.209.1378.



CHRISTMAS EVE AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

Christmas Eve worship will look a little different this year! We will gather at First Presbyterian Church, 17 N Jackson St, Janesville, WI, for our Christmas Eve services.





The main entrance is located on W. Wall St. There is an accessible entrance door and an elevator and stairs to second floor, and greeters to assist. The stairs and elevator open to a level narthex suitable for walkers and wheelchairs. There is a sidewalk ramp at the corner of N. Jackson and W. Wall.

The zero-threshold entrance must be accessed from N. High St., not W. Wall St. See map. Greeters will open the door. This leads directly into the side and front of the sanctuary. The first row of pews is on level floor. The sanctuary slopes up to the back from there, similar to the main seating at JPAC and Orchestra section at the Overture Center.

If you have questions about the best way for you to enter First Presbyterian, call Jeanie at 608.752.7434 x10.

DECEMBER WORSHIP

The traditional season of Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas. It is a time of focused anticipation as we look for God's coming among us. Advent culminates in the celebration of God's birth as the Christ child.

Notice in the schedule below that our celebrations during this time are at two sites – Good Shepherd Lutheran and First Presbyterian Church.

ADVENT SUNDAYS

Dec 6 & 13: 8am and 10am worship at Good Shepherd, 700 N Wright Road

Dec 20: **Christmas for All Ages: Mary Said Yes!** An intergenerational telling of the Christmas story 10am at First Presbyterian Church, 17 N Jackson Street

CHRISTMAS EVE THURSDAY, DEC 24

2pm, 4pm and 7:30pm Christmas Eve Worship with song and candlelight at First Presbyterian Church, 17 N Jackson Street

FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS, DEC 27

10am: **A Service of Lessons and Carols** at Good Shepherd, 700 N Wright Road

CHRIS

Celebrate Christmas for All Ages: Mary Said YES Dec 20 at 10am - One Service

Join us on Sunday, December 20 at 10am at First Presbyterian, 17 N Jackson St, Janesville, for a special **one-service** Sunday as we celebrate Christmas for All Ages: Mary Said YES! This joyful service invites everyone—young and old—to come together and rejoice in the hope and light that Jesus brings to our world, both then and now.

Our Sunday School children will bring the timeless Christmas story to life through song and drama, accompanied by beloved Christmas hymns, special solos. Communion will also be served.

Parents, grandparents, and friends—be sure to bring your cameras to capture these cherished moments!



Christmas for All Ages 2025

Experience the wonder of Christmas as members of all ages from First Lutheran share their gifts in a heartwarming worship celebration.

And don't forget to invite a friend (or two) to join you for this unforgettable morning of joy, music, and the true spirit of Christmas at First Lutheran Church.

TMAS TIME



Christmas 2026

The angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26-38) shows up at Mary's house unexpectedly. His gracious words of greeting soon give way to overwhelming promise: Mary will conceive and give birth to the hope of Israel. What at first strikes her as impossible, the angel assures, will not be impossible for God.

This announcement is the prelude to Christmas. Jesus' birth will be the fulfillment of the angel's promise. His life will bring hope to many, a hope that shows up unexpectedly and in unlikely places.

In her poem "Annunciation," Denise Levertov describes this scene, then asks "aren't there annunciations of one sort or another in most lives?" Too often, she suggests, we turn away in fear or uncertainty or lack of hope, and the door to the opportunity closes.

I wonder what God is inviting in us today. What are you hearing or sensing? Mary was taken quite by surprise, and yet she responded with openness. Mary said "Yes!" to the adventure with a ready willingness.

Perhaps her story can become the prelude for us to enter this Christmas with curiosity about God's mysterious call, beckoning us to embrace the impossible and become bearers of light in our world today.

BUILDING CLOSURES

Holiday schedule for First Lutheran's offices at the parsonage:

- Dec 24 & 25 closed
- Dec 31 closed at Noon
- Jan 1 closed

Christmas Eve Worship held at 2pm, 4pm & 7:30pm at First Presbyterian Church, 17 N. Jackson St.

We hope time spent with family and friends over the holidays is a blessing to you, and we look forward to serving with you in 2027.

MEMORIALS
Oct 2026



MEMORIALS RECEIVED

Nada Rupnow Memorial
General: Kenneth & Nancy Manthei

GIFTS RECEIVED

ECHO: Frances & Vincent Kessenich, Barbara & Dennis Franke, Duane Meister, Catherine Garvin, Magda Nelson, David Romstad

Capital Campaign: Bob Engstrom

COUNCIL MINUTES
Highlights of Nov Minutes

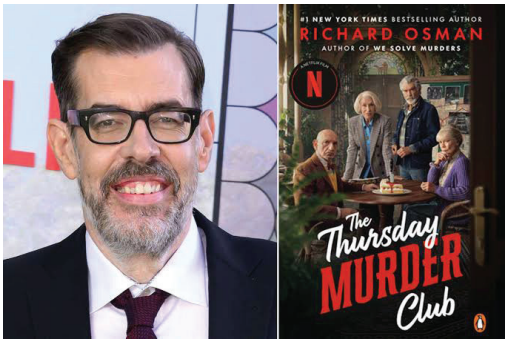
These are the highlights from the Nov 2026 Church Council Minutes. If you would like to read the full minutes please visit: **www.flcj.org/council**

- Congregational meeting on Sunday, Nov 22 after the 10am service to authorize expenditures for disaster recovery
- Church Council scheduled to interview potential Capital Campaign consultants on Dec 7 and 10.

Next meeting: Dec 15, 2026, 6:30pm
Respectfully Submitted, Tom Dorscheid, Secretary

PAGE TURNERS
Upcoming Books

The Page Turners meet on the first Tuesday of each month at 5pm at Karen Grimsrud's home. Come every month or simply when you can—everyone is welcome! ***Contact:*** Sally Schuenke, 608.754.0407



Dec 1: *The Thursday Murder Club* by Richard Osman

COOKIE DECORATING
Dec 5 at 10am at Good Shepherd

Join us on December 5 at 10am at Good Shepherd as we frost and decorate cookies together! Enjoy some fellowship, creativity, and fun as we put the finishing touches on our cookies in preparation for the upcoming Cookie Walk. Everyone is welcome, and extra helping hands are always appreciated!





BE PART OF THE ALTAR GUILD TEAM

The Altar Guild will meet on Jan 6 at 5:30pm at the Parsonage to plan the spring schedule. Everyone is welcome! If you're interested in helping, please join us—we'll provide training and answer any questions you may have. We look forward to seeing many new faces!



MONTHLY READINGS
December



Take a few moments each day to connect with God through His Word. You'll be amazed at how your relationship with Him deepens and grows.

Dec 6 (Advent 2):
Isaiah 40:1-11
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8

Dec 13 (Advent 3):
Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11
Psalm 126
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28

Dec 20 (Advent 4):
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16
Luke 1:46b-55
Romans 16:25-27
Luke 1:26-38

Dec 27 (Christmas 1):
Isaiah 61:10—62:3
Psalm 148
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:22-40

DEC CALENDAR

If you have an article idea for the Progress, please submit it to christals@flcj.org by the first of the month so the layout can be planned. The actual articles are due the 10th of the month.

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
		1 **8a** BG's (P) **9a** Knitters (FSH) **11a** Staff Mtg (P) **5p** Page Turners (KH) **5p** Men of Iron (GS)	2 **8:30a** Mission Sew (FSH) **10a** Bible Study (GS) **4:30p** FLCW (FSH) **5p** Disaster Recovery Team (Zoom) **6p** Worship Team (GS) **7p** Youth Group (P)	3 **3p** Communication Team (Zoom) **6:30p** Young Adults (GS)	4	5 **10a** Cookie Decorating (GS)
6 **7:30a** Cookie Walk (GS) **8a** Worship (GS) **9a** Coffee Hour (P) **9:45a** SS (GS) **10a** Worship (GS) **11a** Coffee Hour (GS) **4p** Scout Mtg (GS)	7 **5:30p** Youth & Family Team (P) **8p** Centering Prayer (Zoom)	8 **8a** BG's (P) **9a** Mary Ruth Cir (MH) **11a** Staff Mtg (P) **4p** Relationship Team (P) **6:30p** Youth & Fam Team (GS) **7p** Discipleship Team (GS)	9 **10a** Bible Study (GS) **1p** Joanna Cir (MH) **6p** Worship Team (GS) **7p** Youth Group (P)	10 **PROGRESS ARTICLES DUE** **10a** Worship (Rock Haven) **11:15a** Worship (Oak Park Place) **6:30p** Young Adults (GS)	11	12
13 **8a** Worship (GS) **9a** Coffee Hour (P) **9:45a** SS (GS) **10a** Worship (GS) **11a** Potluck (GS)	14 **5:30p** Building & Grounds (P) **8p** Centering Prayer (Zoom)	15 **8a** BG's (P) **9a** Knitters (FSH) **11a** Staff Mtg (P) **6:30p** Church Council (P)	16 **8:30a** Mission Sew (FSH) **10a** Bible Study (GS) **5p** Disaster Recovery Team (Zoom) **6p** Worship Team (GS) **7p** Youth Group (P)	17 **3:30p** Second Harvest (PL) **5:30p** Worship Collective (P) **6:30p** Young Adults (GS)	18	19 **9a** Christmas for All Ages Rehearsal (GS)
20 **10a** Christmas for All Ages (FP) **11a** Coffee Hour (FP) **4p** Scout Mtg (GS)	21 **8p** Centering Prayer (Zoom)	22 **8a** BG's (FLC) **11a** Staff Mtg (P)	23 **10a** Bible Study (GS) **6p** Worship Team (GS) **7p** Youth Group (P)	24 **OFFICE CLOSED** **2p** Worship (FP) **4p** Worship (FP) **7:30p** Worship (FP)	25 **OFFICE CLOSED**	26
27 **10a** Worship: Lessons & Carols (GS) **11a** Coffee Hour (GS)	28 **8p** Centering Prayer (Zoom)	29 **8a** BG's (FLC)	30 **5p** Disaster Recovery Team (Zoom) **6p** Worship Team (GS)	31 **OFFICE CLOSED AT NOON** **7p** Young Adults New Year's Eve Party (P)		

Abbreviation Key:
A = Aubrey's Home
C = Cargill Methodist Church
CHS = Craig High School
D = FLC Door 8
FP - First Presbyterian
FSH - First Senior Housing
GS = Good Shepherd
KH = Karen Grimsrud's Home
M = Madison
MH = Member's Homes
0 = Outside Parsonage
P = Parsonage
PL = Parking Lot
SA = Sanctuary

CHURCH FINANCIALS

The monthly financial report shows the Memorial giving and expenses in the first column, with the actual and budgeted revenue and spending in the last three columns, for July-September 2026. This chart follows the treasurer's report for September in the council minutes. Disaster donations and expenses are reflected in the memorial income and expense column. The full balance sheet and profit and loss reports can be viewed online (www.flcj.org/financials). If you have any questions on the financial reports, please contact Arwen Twitchett at 608.752.7434 x14 or email busadmin@flcj.org.

Year to Date Financials

September 2026

	Memorials	YTD Actual	YTD Budget	$ Over/(Under) Budget
Revenue				
Contributions		$173,637.22	$200,630.75	($26,993.53)
Rentals		$566.50	$0.00	$566.50
Weddings/Funerals		$200.00	$200.00	$0.00
Other Receipts		$14,048.43	$13,334.99	$713.44
4-H Fair		$25,874.16	$28,500.00	($2,625.84)
Memorials and Gifts	$51,336.41			
Total Revenue	$51,336.41	$214,326.31	$242,665.74	($28,339.43)
Mission Spending				
Benevolence	$0.00	$3,000.00	$3,000.00	$0.00
Personnel	$7,187.12	$155,974.41	$153,955.06	$2,019.35
Administration	$29.97	$9,165.95	$11,105.56	($1,939.61)
Buildings and Grounds	$108,365.05	$16,072.71	$39,300.12	($23,227.41)
Communication	$172.67	$94.68	$1,620.00	($1,525.32)
Church Programs	$802.28	$7,922.50	$15,095.00	($7,172.50)
Community Connections	$236.13	$0.00	$75.00	($75.00)
Memorial Miscellaneous	$1,352.00			
Total Mission Spending	$118,145.22	$192,230.25	$224,150.74	($31,920.49)
Total Net Income (loss)	($66,808.81)	$22,096.06	$18,515.00	$3,581.06

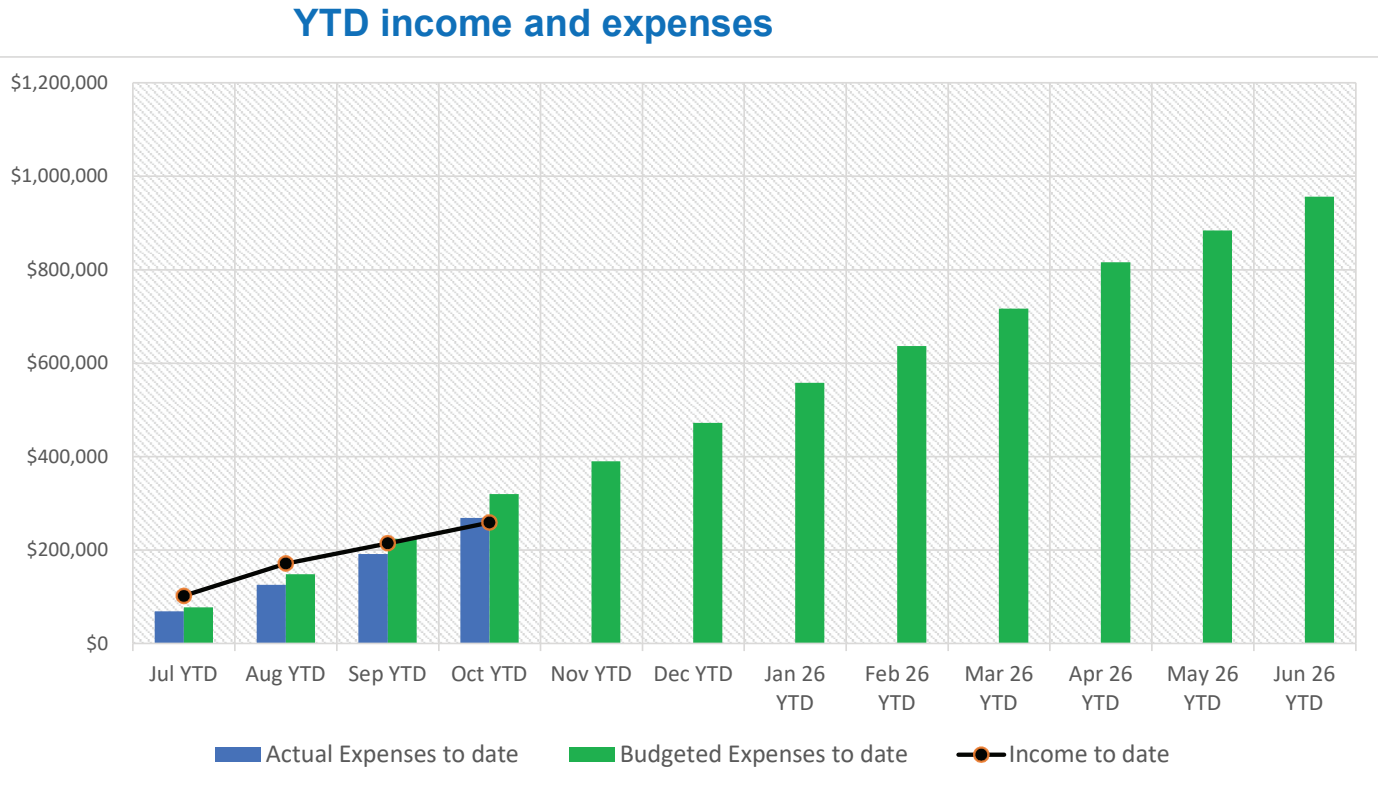
CHURCH FINANCIALS

The financials for the new fiscal year to date, July-October 2026, are shown below. The weekly need is calculated by averaging the total budgeted expenses for 12 months (from July 2026 through June of 2027). The weekly average YTD is the total income received, divided by the number of weeks in this fiscal year, to date. The graph shows the budgeted expenses in green, the actual expenses in blue and the monthly income received as a black dot and line. Total year to date income is lower than budget, however regular budgeted expenses are also lower than anticipated, this is due to less spent on building expenses, the food booth, VBS and First Fest. A majority of our expenses are continuing as normal for instance programming expenses and staff salaries. Building expenses will continue to be lower, however, now that temporary heat has been restored, we will see an increase in utility costs. For July through October our net year to date income is now negative at $22,104. This fiscal year will be less predictable than normal as income and expenses may fluctuate during this dynamic situation. The finance team and council are carefully considering all financial decisions.

October 31, 2026

Weekly need	$18,573	**Budgeted Income:**	$64,424	**Budgeted Expense:** $95,657
Weekly average YTD	$15,228	**Actual Income:**	$44,551	**Actual Expense:** $76,539

		Received to date	Difference	% Difference
YTD income needed	$319,808	$258,877	($60,931)	81%
12 month income needed	$956,320	$258,877	($697,443)	27%





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SHARE A POINSETTIA



The Decorating Committee invites you to help beautify the church for Christmas by donating a poinsettia. If you'd like to take part, please complete the form and return it with $20 to the church office (612 N Randall Ave, Janesville, WI 53545) by Mon, Dec 8.

(PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY) # of Plants_____

In memory/honor of _____
(circle one)

_____

GIVEN BY _____

_____

Pick-up your flowers after the 7:30pm service on Tues, Dec 24.

Volunteers are needed to deliver poinsettias to the homebound. Cards (with and without addresses) will be available on Dec 24 to go with each delivery. Cards will stay in the Gathering Space all week for those able to help. Please wait until after the 7:30pm service before taking any flowers. Thank you for helping us share the joy of Christmas!

FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH
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Janesville, WI 53545

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Worship Schedule: 8am: Sanctuary; 9:30am: Sanctuary & Live-Stream on Facebook & YouTube
9:15am: Sunday School