

# BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH, SCHOOL & PRESCHOOL

July 2023 – June 2024

Annual Report

Vision: **Changing Lives through Christ**

Mission: **Sharing Christ's Love and Caring for All People**

Dear Members and Friends of Bethlehem,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is hard to believe that we have come to the end of the 110<sup>th</sup> year of God's rich grace at Bethlehem. Over that long history, God's love has been shared, many people have received God's care through you, and lives have been changed. I would like to highlight some of the ways in which that happened during our 23/24 fiscal year. (Much of this information was shared at the annual meeting held last June, and e-mailed to members. You may request that information from the church office.)

## Sharing Christ's Love

**Church Attendance** is about sharing God's Word. The Good News that Jesus died to forgive our sins and give us eternal life was shared in many ways. Our Sunday morning worship after going through the pandemic and a drop of more than 50% from 302 to 142/Sunday has steadily grown each year about 11% to an average of 222/Sunday. Christ's Love was shared at 26 funerals, at Advent and Lenten Services. With God's blessings we will continue to grow our attendance. This past year we added 8 adults by confirmation, 10 adults by transfer, 13 by youth confirmation and had 9 baptisms. We thank God that our Deacon Ken Kerouac has retired and is beginning to serve us more. During the past year our congregation issued two calls for a new pastor at Bethlehem which were declined. The Pastoral search committee will begin again in the Fall. Please keep Bethlehem and our new pastor in your prayers. God has already chosen our new pastor.

**Bible Classes** share God's Word throughout the week. More than 50 people/week participate in Bible Study; from Sunday morning to 6:15 am on Friday, from seniors to youth, at church, at home, in small groups even on ZOOM the life-giving Word is shared. We were able to host a Vacation Bible School in June for 40+ kids. This coming fall, Bethlehem will offer more opportunities to grow in the word through our whole church wide Bible Study, "A Clash of Kingdoms." Also, this fall we will again begin Sunday School for preschoolers through 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Our School, Preschool and New GSRP** (Great Start Readiness Program) have been a perfect way to let the little ones come to Jesus. (130 children for 23/24 and we expect 150 enrolled for 24/25). Every school day our children get to hear about how much Jesus loves them from "Jesus Time" to religion, to weekly chapel, to catechism class. Starting new this year, the GSRP program has offered us the chance to share Christ's love to 8 students that we never would have had the opportunity to do so. In addition, 5 of those are returning next year for kindergarten. (Next year we expect 16 students.) For the first time in five years, we have not had to bring on new school staff. We can praise God for our school.

## Caring for All People

**Service Projects** are a way we share the message of Christ's love but we care for a multitude of people. Our food pantry serves about 20 families per month. Partnering with The Food Bank of Eastern Michigan over 30 adult volunteers and our middle schoolers loaded the trunks of more than 200 cars, amigos, bikes and push carts with 17,856 pounds of food. Each month our noisy offering supports local Saginaw ministries like; CrossRoads Counseling, It's All About the Cross Ministry, Life Clinic, Rescue Ministries of Mid-Michigan, The Michigan District LCMS, the Gideons, Alaska Mission Trip, Habitat for Humanity, and Emmaus House.

**Ingathering** is another way in which we care for people. In the fall we collected \$7,000 to purchase 20,000 Meals for Kids and over 150 volunteers assembled them and enjoyed lunch and fellowship. (We are scheduled to do this again on October 13.) The orphan Grain Train barrel in the narthex needs to be emptied almost weekly. Over 75 gifts for our Angel Tree went to the Legacy Adoption Agency. We held ingatherings for supplies for the Alaskan Mission Trip, for Bethlehem's VBS, diapers and wipes for Life Clinic, toilette paper for the Heart of Saginaw. Knitting And Crocheting Group created close to 50 hats and mittens for those in need!

**Volunteers** are an important part of Sharing Christ's Love and Caring for All People. The service projects would not have happened without the involvement of many volunteers. This does not include groups like the Altar Guild, Choir Members, Praise Worship Band, Cemetery Caretakers, Board Members, Elders & ushers, grass cutters, coffee makers, lay readers, Worship Tech Booth, and others. Our Braille Workers currently meet twice a week but in the future hope to meet a third time. A dedicated group of volunteers makes contact and visits with many of Bethlehem's homebound members. There are many other volunteers who simply fly under the radar. Thank You and may God bless you as you have blessed others.

## Supporting the Mission

**Financial Support** while not the main focus, our mission at Bethlehem could not be accomplished without your financial contributions. Here is a brief snapshot of the numbers for FY 23/24:

<b>Church Income</b>	\$615,861	Under Budget	\$9,264
<b>Church Expenses</b>	\$649,477	Under Budget	\$99,249
<b>School Income</b>	\$767,299	Over Budget	\$6,299
<b>School Expenses</b>	\$707,969	Under Budget	\$10,131
<b>Combined Net Income (loss)</b>		Over Budget	<b>\$25,715</b>

We budgeted a \$90,235 deficit but actually ended the year with a net income of \$25,715. It should be noted that one major reason why we finished the FY in the black is because we had budgeted for a second pastor for 9 months of the year. As good financial stewards, Bethlehem does have a reserve fund set aside for future needs. In addition to these in-house monies Bethlehem contributed to the work of the church at large. Your generosity supported the Michigan District with \$3,800, Valley Lutheran High School \$23,564, Noisy Offerings with \$3,683, in addition to numerous other ministries. At our Annual Meeting we voted to begin budgeting 1% of our offerings (\$6,000) to the Michigan District in FY 24/25. What a tremendous blessing as our Trust Fund set up a new School Tuition Fund for our Bethlehem Lutheran School. We exceeded our goal and gathered \$44,296.49! You may still make contributions to that or any of our other Trust Funds.

Thank you so much for your support of Bethlehem with your prayers, stewardship, and volunteerism. You are the hands and feet of Jesus at Bethlehem. By God's grace, we will continue to "**Change Lives through Christ**" in all that we do as the body of Christ at Bethlehem. **THANK YOU!**