

Council President's Report

December is a busy month, and this was certainly true at Hope Lutheran. The month was filled with many events and activities, supported by a great deal of behind-the-scenes work that made it all possible.

I am deeply thankful for all who put in extra time and effort preparing the church for the holidays; planning and providing music throughout the month; preparing for, participating in, and supporting the Minnesota Mission Trip baking day; and planning, preparing, and supporting the Hope Lutheran Youth Ministries Christmas Program, among many other contributions. I am also grateful for your continued support of and presence at Hope Lutheran. Our members support in and for Hope Lutheran does not go unnoticed.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all who, despite many commitments at church and at home, participated in the initial meetings with Reverend Peter Soli. That being said, I understand - it was an absolutely busy time to be starting the process – so, do not be discouraged if time did not work for you to attend, you can pick right up by reviewing the letter that was sent out. Feel free to reach out with questions, concerns, or comments – and certainly we will take prayers as we start the work. Reflecting my interactions with Reverend Soli—both prior to and during December—I am encouraged by the breadth of experience he brings from his years serving congregations. He understands the day-to-day life and work of the church, having spent his vocation immersed in its ministry. This background and knowledge are new for Hope Lutheran, and it is clear that he is thoughtfully focused on our congregation and our future.

During one of our meetings, Peter invited everyone to share how they were doing. With my work life especially busy this December and being a mom of four teens/tweens— “providing the Christmas magic”—the season felt overwhelming. Another member shared that we had entered the season of Advent and that, for her, it was a time to slow down and reflect. Advent is meant to be a time to slow our pace and focus on the meaning of Christ's coming and reign—a season of hope, peace, and watchfulness. Her reflection gave me pause as December and Advent have not felt this way for me in recent years or if I were to be honest with myself, perhaps this season has never felt this way to me. As I sat down to write this newsletter, this became an “aha” moment for me: a reminder of how much we need meaningful interactions across a broad cross-section of our congregation, where insight, perspective, and community can be shared.

Many members and groups met throughout December to prepare for the end-of-year. One of those groups was the Trustees, who met prior to Christmas to review the proposed 2026 budget for Hope Lutheran. This budget will be reviewed at the January meeting, after which the Council will finalize and vote on it. A bit different from previous years, there will also be an informal meeting and discussion regarding the proposed budget for those who are interested on the Sunday prior to the Annual Meeting. This approach was recommended as a best practice, and I look forward to the questions and dialogue that can take place ahead of the Annual Meeting so members feel informed and engaged.

You may recall that I previously shared that another congregational survey would be sent out before the Annual Meeting. I had not forgotten about this; rather, during planning conversations with Reverend Soli, he shared that he may recommend conducting a survey as part of his work with the congregation. In light of that, I felt it would be best to focus on Reverend Soli's survey when the time comes. In the meantime, if you would like to share what you believe is going well, what could be improved, or any suggestions you may have, please feel free to reach out to me by phone or email.

This past year—and the holiday season—has been a difficult time for many. As we move into the new year, I want to continue to pray for understanding, patience, and empathy of others. We never truly know what is happening in another's life or home, and if nothing else, we can always choose kindness.

As we begin the new year, I wish each of you peace, hope, and God's blessings in the months ahead.

Amie Ascherman

Hope Lutheran Council President