

# the CHALLENGE



Winter  
2022

First New Quarterly Edition!

Feb - May - Aug - Nov

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### NATIVE PLANT SPOTLIGHT

**Big Bluestem** (*Andropogon gerardii*), above, is one of the iconic prairie grasses that once covered a large portion of Minnesota. It's easy to ID from the finger-like array of spikes at the tips of the tall stems.

## The Community Kitchen at St. Luke

By Brennan Blue

By the time this first edition of our newly formatted *Challenge* newsletter is published, our Community Kitchen project will be nearly complete. While pandemic realities will delay a big, splashy celebration of the project's completion, we are still crossing over an important threshold here: one in which we as a community boldly open ourselves more fully into partnership with the wider community.

There will be many opportunities to mark and celebrate this new chapter in St. Luke's life as a vibrant site for community building. And I hope many of them will include food! In the meantime, though, I'd like to share forward a substantial portion of the grant that St. Luke wrote to the Presbytery last summer, laying out how this infrastructure investment represents a unique opportunity for a new era of mission and ministry at St. Luke. While you've no doubt heard or read pieces of this vision along the way, I'm hopeful that the opportunity to reflect on the project here in a longer reading format will be both helpful and inspiring.

*...The below responses come from a grant proposal submitted by St. Luke in June of 2021 and approved by the Presbytery of the Twin Cities area in September of 2021...*

**Describe the initiative you are proposing. What will happen and who will be served? How will it revitalize your congregation, make disciples, and transform lives?**

St. Luke Presbyterian Church is blossoming into a central hub for local mission, ministry, arts and advocacy in the West Metro area. This exciting development is elevating a longstanding barrier for community: our kitchen is undersized and not up to code in the City of Minnetonka, which

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## The Community Kitchen - continued

means we are unable to offer hospitality or host events involving meals. This Congregational Development Grant will support our faith community's embrace of this development in our life and calling by helping us to establish the new St. Luke Community Kitchen.

St. Luke has a long and storied history of sharing its faith through action, arts, learning and advocacy. We also have a long history of "going it alone" while missing out on the chance to collaborate with others within and beyond our faith community. Thankfully, our commitment to living the gospel of God's love and justice in the world is drawing us more and more into coalitional movements for justice, equity and peace. In the past few years, our community has emerged as a central gathering place for faith-based community organizing for a number of West Metro community organizations and efforts. At the same time, St. Luke has adapted our own mission and ministries to be more collaborative and coalitional in nature. As a result, we now have outside organizations meeting in our spaces, partnering in our ministry efforts, and bringing new people through our doors and into the possibility of relationship. St. Luke's Earth Stewards Team, for example, has partnered with Minnetonka Climate Initiative, West Metro Climate Action, Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, and Sierra Club for climate justice lectures and events. The Minnetonka Coalition for Equitable Education held their end of year review and celebration on our grounds earlier this month, working in partnership with our Senior Pastor to shape the event. For a community that has historically followed our calling out into the world beyond our doors, it's been a revelation to find those beyond our doors now coming to us for support in their own lives and callings.

So far, we've found creative (yet limiting) ways to work around offering hospitality or hosting longer events. But to truly embrace our calling as a central hub for mission, ministry, arts and advocacy in the West Metro, St. Luke needs to address and upgrade our hospitality infrastructure. While we are making accessibility adjustments through the building, it is essential that we address our under-sized and officially unusable kitchen. Our current inability to provide the basic hospitality of community meals and sustenance limits not only our gathering options, but the deep bonding and fellowship that comes with breaking bread together. To invest in the essential community and hospitality infrastructure needed to claim our vision of coalitional ministry, St. Luke will renovate and expand our current defunct kitchen space into the new St. Luke Community Kitchen. This project represents an important next step in further positioning St. Luke as the home for faith-based community organizing, advocacy and fundraising efforts here in the West Metro.



**How is this initiative original and creative for your congregation? What new idea or practice does it introduce?**

Growing relationally into a communal hub for the West Metro area has brought new people, energy and partnerships into the life of our community. We believe this model provides our community a faithful bridge into the post-cultural Christendom era of Presbyterian ministry in which church visitation and growth can no longer be assumed. We further believe that we are uniquely called and capable to become a place of gathering and growth for those seeking to follow what we know as the gospel, and what others may know by the names of justice, solidarity, love and peace. The gift of working in coalition with others here in our place of worship is new to us in many ways, but it is a gift that uniquely suits our drive to foster beloved community while pursuing God’s justice in the world.



**What contemporary ministry challenge(s) is this initiative addressing?**

A contemporary challenge addressed by this initiative is the broadscale decline in church membership and attendance across the U.S. and in Minnesota. With the age of mainstream cultural Christendom behind us, fewer individuals and families will seek out the Church for the sake of joining an institution. We recognize that we cannot take church attendance for granted. At the same time, we believe that people are hungry—now more than ever—for justice, spiritual meaning-making, arts, advocacy, and community. By expanding our vision of what it means to be the church to include intentional, diverse and often fluid partnerships, St. Luke will position itself to attract individuals who resonate with St. Luke’s life and mission, regardless of whether they are actively seeking a church.

**How will you share this with other churches in the Presbytery so they can learn and benefit?**

We are hopeful that our vision of being “the hub” for west metro for justice, peace, arts and advocacy will provide an inspiring example of what it looks like to embrace a unique congregational calling while



leveraging both our physical infrastructure assets and our relational opportunities. We hope to witness to creative new ways of “getting people to church” where they may discover anew that the church is not the building, but the people joining together to follow in the life-giving, spiritual work of God. We hope to share stories of how and why key partnerships and coalitions came into being, and how this investment in our own physical infrastructure was ultimately an investment in the relational capacity and presence of St. Luke Presbyterian Church. ■



# Carbon Neutrality

## St. Luke is Working Towards Carbon Neutrality, and So Can You!

By Judy Gregg and Mary Malotky

Imagine yourself seated in our sanctuary, looking around at the worship space that you know and love. Though we rarely think about it, this view is focused and sharpened for us by an array of carefully chosen lights – lights which now emit less carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, compared to just a few months ago. Late last fall, St. Luke replaced all of the lights throughout the church with energy efficient LED bulbs, with support from local grants and rebates. The money saved on St Luke's monthly electric bill alone will cover the cost of all those bulbs in a handful of years. You, too, can **try this at home**. Or advocate for it in your schools, businesses, and living facilities.

The next time you are out on the Columbarium plaza, peak through the vines at the big silver HVAC unit that keeps us cool in the summer and warm in the winter. This unit – along with the other HVAC units throughout our building – are being fitted with new controls and thermostats to increase their energy efficiency while allowing for remote, digital controlling. This will allow folks like Brennan to turn on the heat in the sanctuary on bitterly cold mornings, even before he's shoveled the snow out of his own driveway. This, again, will save us money while also reducing our carbon footprint. You, too, can **try this at home**. Or advocate for it in your schools, businesses, and living facilities.



Both of these projects were inspired, in part, by an energy audit, highlighting the simple yet significant ways that we can improve our sustainability as a community. You, too, can **try an energy audit of your own home**. Or advocate for it in your schools, businesses, and living facilities.

## Pursuing Carbon Neutrality

While we are of course excited to be saving money through smart improvements like these, our ultimate goal is to pursue carbon neutrality as a community and share our learnings along the way. This is not merely the goal of St. Luke's Earth Stewards team. It is now an official goal of the church, as **the Session has endorsed and updated the following Earth Stewards resolution for our community:**

**Be it resolved that St Luke Presbyterian Church will become carbon neutral by 2040. We will continue to be a bold witness to the congregants and the wider community as we educate and model just and equitable carbon neutral living**



The Session wholeheartedly agreed and passed the resolution. Earth Stewards were asked to form a task force to look at ways we can get to carbon neutrality by 2040. The LED light bulbs and improvements to the HVAC units are two of many things we will be pursuing to improve our carbon footprint.

Did you know that we have 96 solar panels on our roof, which pay for 2/3 of our electric bill? And that the rest of electricity comes through XCel's Windsorce plan for renewable energy? Or that the blinds in the Garden Court and in our sanctuary reduce our energy usage? Or that low flush toilets and the 1000 gallon rain barrel that catches rain water off the roof and waters our vegetable gardens both help reduce our water usage? If you didn't know, now you do. You, too, can **try this at home, folks!**

And then, of course, there's our massive grounds restoration project, which will remove invasive species, promote biodiversity, repair our soil, and benefit our watershed. And the newly growing rain gardens.

Beyond our building and grounds, Earth Stewards has also formed a task force to look at our investments. Are we supporting companies that invest in fossil fuels? Are we considering climate justice in our investment choices? Where should we be divesting? Or Investing in life giving endeavors? **You, too, can try this at home, folks!**



The list is long of what we want to be doing to become a carbon neutral congregation. We hope you will consider becoming a carbon neutral household and are open to your questions and involvement going forward. Have interest, ideas, or questions? **Contact Judy Gregg or Mary Malotky to learn more and join in the joyful work of sustainability. ■**

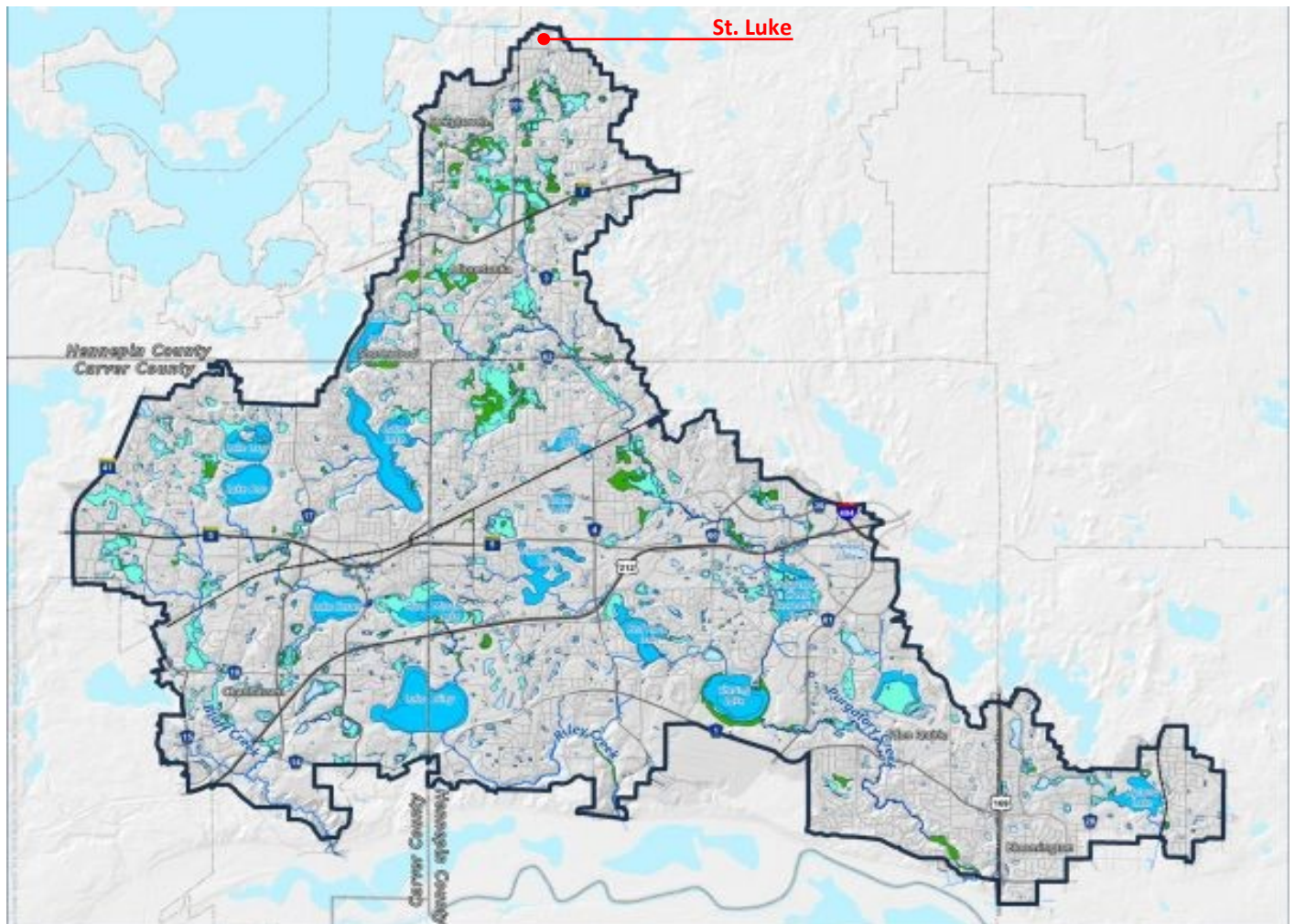


# A Watershed Moment for Our Woods

## **A Watershed Moment: An event marking a unique or important historical change of course or one on which important developments depend.**

By Anne Deuring

We have one year under our belts toward our goal of creating a healthy and diverse habitat on the grounds of St. Luke ([more info on our website](#)). Most of that work has been the removal of non-native, invasive plants to make way for the growth of beneficial native plants. Our work is truly a “watershed moment” because of our “unique and important” location in the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District (RPBCWD) “on which important developments depend.” St. Luke occupies the very northernmost tip of the 50-square-mile watershed which flows south eventually into the Minnesota River. This means it all begins with St. Luke. What we do matters to the entire rest of the watershed. Worst case example first: If a car in our parking lot leaks oil, that contamination will adversely affect every stream, wetland, and lake in its downhill path before it adversely affects the Minnesota River. Alternatively, every helpful action we take on our grounds will help every stream, wetland and lake along that same downhill path.



Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District (RPBCWD)

These are helpful water quality and quantity actions currently in play or soon to happen at St. Luke:

- Collecting rainwater onsite in raingardens and cisterns: Reduces stormwater runoff.
- Removing impervious surfaces to increase infiltration: When the buckthorn was removed we discovered an old building foundation with a concrete floor in the woods. It's gone! Don Kerr and Brennan Blue sledge-hammered it to bits.
- Roots in the ground; the deeper the better: Roots help infiltration of rain, help keep water from running off the surface, keep soil from compacting, create conduits to replenish aquifers. We will be planting over 300 trees, shrubs and wildflowers this coming June on the St. Luke grounds. These will all be native species that will provide immeasurable ecological services. Save the date, Saturday, June 4, for our Big Planting Event.
- Reduce turf grass: Replace with native, low-resource vegetation. The typical Kentucky bluegrass lawn requires mowing, water and fertilizer to look good. Because of its shallow roots, and often thatch and compaction, turf grass creates much more surface water runoff than deeper rooted plants. We are planning to eliminate the turf grass alongside the new walkway to the Columbarium and replace with native perennials this spring.
- Reduce or eliminate salt usage: 1 teaspoon of salt pollutes 5 gallons of water - permanently. At St. Luke we specify in our plowing contract no salt be applied unless requested. We use grit instead of salt on the walkways. All you need to do to stay safe is walk like a penguin. Also recommended is using a walking stick and wearing ice cleats on your boots.
- No chemicals (fertilizer or pesticides): Chemicals can runoff with surface drainage. Chemicals can also harm living organisms of the soil, destroying its infiltration properties.
- Reduce water usage: No grass watering. We water our food gardens - that's it!



All these actions are improving water quality and quantity downstream from us. And there is always more we can do.

### **And because of our auspicious situation in the RPBCWD, St. Luke was awarded a Water Stewardship Grant of \$11,800.**

This grant will be used for seeds, plugs, shrubs, and trees that will be planted to replace the invasives species that we have been removing. We will also be planting cedar, sage, and sweet grass around the Sweat Lodge to restore some of the privacy enclosure the buckthorn used to provide. The grant is also earmarked for a battery-powered chipper/shredder which will help us practice closed-loop recycling. No more expending fossil fuels to haul brush and leaves off the site.

The Watershed District added 30% more to our grant amount for professional invasive plant management/maintenance for three years. That means they really want this project to work and are stewarding their grant money wisely.

Where are you in the watershed? Maybe you are in another watershed. Check your watershed by entering your address [here](#). ■



# Youth and Families

## Dedicated to providing joyous community for our youngest.

By Nora P. Elliott

We got creative for Advent 2021!

The Gift Making Workshop returned with a new feature this year: take home bags! Four of our families were dealing with positive exposure situations, so were in isolation. Sandy Z. helped ensure each family had the supplies wrapped up for their kid's crafts and they were available for curbside pickup that afternoon. Huge thanks to Chris Sullivan and all the other adult volunteers who made this magical day happen again!



Our utmost gratitude to the LGBTQ+ panel that came and spoke to the Our Whole Lives youth groups. We've paused OWL during the Omicron surge and look forward to getting back together in Feb/March

Our Sunday School team connects with our youngest by offering a virtual story time on Thursdays, while grown-ups are making dinner.







A huge thank you to the families, youth, and children that recorded their parts took the time to help us tell the holy story. Check it out on our [YouTube page HERE](#).

### Coming Up This Quarter

With only virtual options available, Nora led several youth into the fantasy adventure world of Dungeons & Dragons this January. Together they'll continue exploring a mysterious carnival, a magical new world, and press their luck as decide what they want to do next.



### Our Whole Lives returns!

When we're able to be back together again, our youth of all ages will continue on and make use of the makeup days in their otherwise full schedule. Details on the youth and family [Discord server](#).

Grown-ups with young kids! Do you have questions about human sexual health and education? Could you use a bit of extra parental support in navigating the realities of parenting in 2022? Come to the Parent Support Group that meets the first Sunday of each month, after worship. Hybrid engagement available. Contact [nora@stluke.mn](mailto:nora@stluke.mn) for more information

*On the horizon, next quarter:* A new gardening program for elementary-aged kids and their families, Youth Sunday, plus End of Year Awards & Kickball. ■

# Ambiguous Loss

## Ambiguous Loss

By Jill Engeswick, Coordinator of BeFriends

Creator God, You are with us when we know and when we don't know. You give us energy and wisdom to find answers and you provide patience and love when there are no answers. May we understand that "Learning to live with ambiguity is learning to live with how life really is, full of complexities and strange surprises." (James Hollis) Help us to better understand Ambiguous Loss and believe that it is possible to live well, despite the "not knowing." Amen

Ambiguous Loss is a term that has been around since the 1970s when Dr. Pauline Boss from the U of M used it to describe unresolved grief for soldiers who fought in Vietnam and never came home. St. Luke BeFriends became familiar with this term two years ago when Ginny Larson shared an article that she felt could give us some insight into understanding the pain of Ambiguous Loss. It's not an overly complex concept, but it is important to be able to recognize it and know strategies in order to lower our anxiety - especially during these Covid times.

Ambiguous Losses are those that are unclear, confusing, and for which future stories/outcomes are unknown. There are two basic kinds, which can overlap.

### **Physical absence, but psychological presence**

- Don't know if alive or dead, don't know if returning
- Kidnapping, deportation, long-term hospitalization

### **Psychological Absence, but physical presence**

- Addiction, Alzheimer's, Autism, coma, mental illness,
- Dementia, Chronic physical illness
- Survivors of trauma (PTSD), homelessness,
- Poverty, genocide, war, domestic violence

Ambiguity occurs when there are unanswered questions, uncertainties and disruptions to family and work life. Consider all the ways the pandemic has created anxiety related to ambiguity. Here's what Dr. Pauline Boss says about the pandemic: "What is distressing us is not just the virus, but the ambiguity surrounding it: What **it** will do and what **we** should do about it. Science provides some answers, but we are experiencing uncertainty, and that's very stressful for a society that is accustomed to solving problems and having definitive answers."

### **Implications for daily lives:**

What are some of the ways Ambiguous Loss can affect our daily lives and ways of thinking? Here are some responses from St. Lukers who attended the Adult Ed mod:

- Individual - Depression, anxiety, stress, violence, suicide,
- Paralyzing, exhausting, substance abuse,
- Hard to move forward, inexplicable sorrow
- Relational - Family/couple conflict, anger at professionals,
- Separation/divorce



- Changes in family rituals or traditions
- Family roles and tasks change
- Family rules change

**Strategies that help us build resiliency in the face of ambiguity:**

- Label what you are experiencing
- Name your losses and grieve your losses
- Use rituals for grieving and healing
- Reinforce or build support connections
- Set limits (say No to some things so you can say Yes to others)
- Be flexible, adapt routines, normalize situation
- Increase tolerance for ambiguity
- Emphasize what **can** be changed or addressed

**Dr. Pauline Boss’s 6 Guidelines for Learning to Live With Loss**

These six concepts represent a circular model, not linear.

1. **Finding Meaning** - Name the problem. Practice forgiveness. Rely on religion and spirituality. Do small, good works. See suffering as a part of life.

2. **Tempering Mastery** - Recognize the world is not always just and fair. Avoid blaming yourself for not being able to fix all problems. We don’t have control over many things.

3. **Reconstructing Identity** - Redefine who family is, who plays what roles. Be flexible about gender and generation. Develop shared values and create new family traditions and rituals.

4. **Normalizing Ambivalence** - Guilt and negative feelings are normal. Use the arts to increase your understanding of ambivalence. Ask questions about context and situation. Bring ambivalent feelings out in the open. See community as family.

5. **Revising Attachment** - We lower anxiety when we shift to **Both/And thinking** (not absolutes like “we’re all going to die” or “there’s nothing to worry about.” ) This pandemic is both dangerous and manageable. This is both a terrible time and a time for us to come together for the common good. We have to be home alone and we can stay connected to each other through technology. We do what we can control - Even though it is a terrible and dangerous time, we can deal with it by being more flexible and resilient. Develop memorial ceremonies and farewell rituals. Build relational supports -peer groups or family/community meetings.

Continued on next page



# Ambiguous Loss - continued

**6. Discovering Hope** - Increase your tolerance for ambiguity. Redefine justice. Find forgiveness. Find spirituality. Imagine options. Develop more patience. Recreate family rituals. Laugh at absurdity.

Reasonable Hope -

- Is relational
- Is a practice
- Maintains that the future is open, uncertain and influenceable.
- Accommodates doubt, contradiction and despair.
- Doesn't insist on closure...

**Video (10 min) of Pauline Boss summarizing Ambiguous Loss and discussing Myth of Closure:**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HEQZmjMpN4&ab\\_channel=TheBrainwavesVideoAnthology](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7HEQZmjMpN4&ab_channel=TheBrainwavesVideoAnthology)

### Examples of Resiliency:

- Accept what you can not change and Change what you can
- Take small steps/manageable pieces
- Realize - Bad things happen to good people
- Use BOTH/AND thinking
- Heal yourself by helping others
- Do not let bitterness consume or define you
- Hopeful visions of the future
- Draw on spiritual resources

May you find yourself managing the challenges of Ambiguous Loss using the strategies in this article and your deep faith in God. St. Luke is a community for support during tough times, and for when we face ever-changing unanswered questions and complexities. May you be gracious with yourself and others, and practice BOTH/AND thinking. May God be with you in 2022. ■

### Things that can be equally true:

You are resilient	<b>and</b>	need a break
You gave your all	<b>and</b>	need to back out
You are independent	<b>and</b>	still need others
You were sure	<b>and</b>	things changed
You are kind	<b>and</b>	have boundaries
Others have it worse	<b>and</b>	your pain is valid
You did your best	<b>and</b>	now you know more

From @findyourshinetherapy

### Alzheimer Awareness from Climb Theatre-

"Grandpa and Lucy" is a 20 minute animated video about loving relationships changing, but remaining strong as Alzheimer's disease affects someone in the family. Feel free to share this video with your friends and family (especially children). Please contact [jillengeswick@gmail.com](mailto:jillengeswick@gmail.com) if you have any trouble accessing this video. Thanks!

<https://climb-theatre.mykajabi.com/products/intergenerational-connections/categories/4161829/posts/2150395370>



# News and Events

## Adult Education: Sundays at 9:15 am in the East Room or on Zoom

We value continuing education for students of all ages. Your adult education coordinating team will continue to provide hybrid adult education and community building modules twice a month.

- February 13: Coffee Hour
- February 27: State of the Church; Join Pastor Brennan and Treasurer Don Davies to review the annual report and 2022 budget
- March 13: Talk with Another Gender; an open forum with topics picked by our men's and women's groups, Hermanos & Women Connecting
- March 27: TBD
- April 10: Coffee Hour
- April 24: Fire & Fall prevention; a first aid presentation by Sara Ahlquist

If you have a passion for supporting the communal learning of our community or an opportunity to welcome a guest speaker at a future mod, please contact [nora@stluke.mn](mailto:nora@stluke.mn) to get involved

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**Saturday, February 19, 2022. 10:00-11:30 am - Discussion:** "The Time is Right for Bold Climate Action" with Rep. Patty Acomb. The Hopkins Fire Department, 101 17<sup>th</sup> Ave. S., Third floor classroom, Hopkins. Sponsored by the League of Women Voters.

**Sunday, February 27 - The Annual Meeting of St. Luke Presbyterian Church** will occur on Sunday, February 27 in the Sanctuary immediately following our 10:30 am worship service. (Note: this may shift to March, if we have not yet returned to in-person worship).

**Sunday, March 6, 4:00-5:00 pm - Climate Justice...**what is it and what does it mean out in the suburbs?

**Saturday, March 12, 2022 at 11:00 am - Jean Ice Celebration of Life at St. Luke.**

**Wednesday, April 20, 7:00 pm - Dr Mark Seeley with an Earth Day Message**

**Saturday, June 4, 2022 from 10:00 - 2:00 - Big Planting Event:** We will be planting over 300 native trees and shrubs as Phase One of the Woods Restoration. We will be joined by neighbors and partner organizations.

## Partner News

**DIW** St. Luke was recently recognized by DIW for our outstanding generosity. We are still collecting basic items for DIW in our entrance. To stay in touch with all the wonderful things happening at DIW, sign up for e-news from the Division of Indian Work by scrolling down to the bottom of this website - <https://www.diw-mn.org/>

**ICA Current Needs** Tissues, Baby Wipes, Napkins, Chips & Crackers, Adult Diapers, Cat Litter, Paper Towels, Olive Oil, Tea, Toilet Paper, Coffee, Shampoo, Conditioner, Deodorant, Wet & Dry Cat Food, Dish Soap, Laundry Soap, Bar Soap, Toothpaste, Baby Food, Diapers (Size 5), Pull Ups, Quinoa, Cereal (Hot & Cold)

# St. Luke Staff and Communications

**Rev. Brennan Blue** (he/him), **Senior Pastor**

952-473-7378, [brennan@stluke.mn](mailto:brennan@stluke.mn)

612-518-7737 cell

**Rev. Nora P. Elliott** (she/they), **Associate Pastor**

952-473-7378, [nora@stluke.mn](mailto:nora@stluke.mn)

801-556-1881 cell

**David Hovick Lohman** (he/him), **Minister of Music**

[david@stluke.mn](mailto:david@stluke.mn)

**Will Rand** (he/him), **Minister of Worship Arts**

[will@stluke.mn](mailto:will@stluke.mn)

**Anna Flekke, Childcare Worker** (she/her)

**Anne Deuring** (she/her), **Secretary**

952-473-7378, [office@stluke.mn](mailto:office@stluke.mn) or [anne@stluke.mn](mailto:anne@stluke.mn)

**Darla Monson, Finance Secretary**

952-473-7378, [darla@stluke.mn](mailto:darla@stluke.mn) or [finance@stluke.mn](mailto:finance@stluke.mn)

**Randy Lofgren, Custodian/Sexton**

952-473-7378

**Joe Anderson & Brenda Davis, Sunday Morning Custodians**

**Jill Engeswick** (she/her), **BeFriendsers/Dementia Friends Coord.**

952-426-2831, [jillengeswick@gmail.com](mailto:jillengeswick@gmail.com)

**Every member and friend is a minister of God's love and justice.**

St. Luke Presbyterian Church  
3121 Groveland School Road  
Minnetonka, MN 55391

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Email Anne at [office@stluke.mn](mailto:office@stluke.mn)

WEB ADDRESS

[www.stluke.mn](http://www.stluke.mn)

Note: Notices such as Session Slices and Birthdays may now be found in our weekly congregational email.

St. Luke is a joyful, inclusive and compassionate community on a spiritual journey seeking to do justice, make peace, act mercifully, and walk humbly with God.