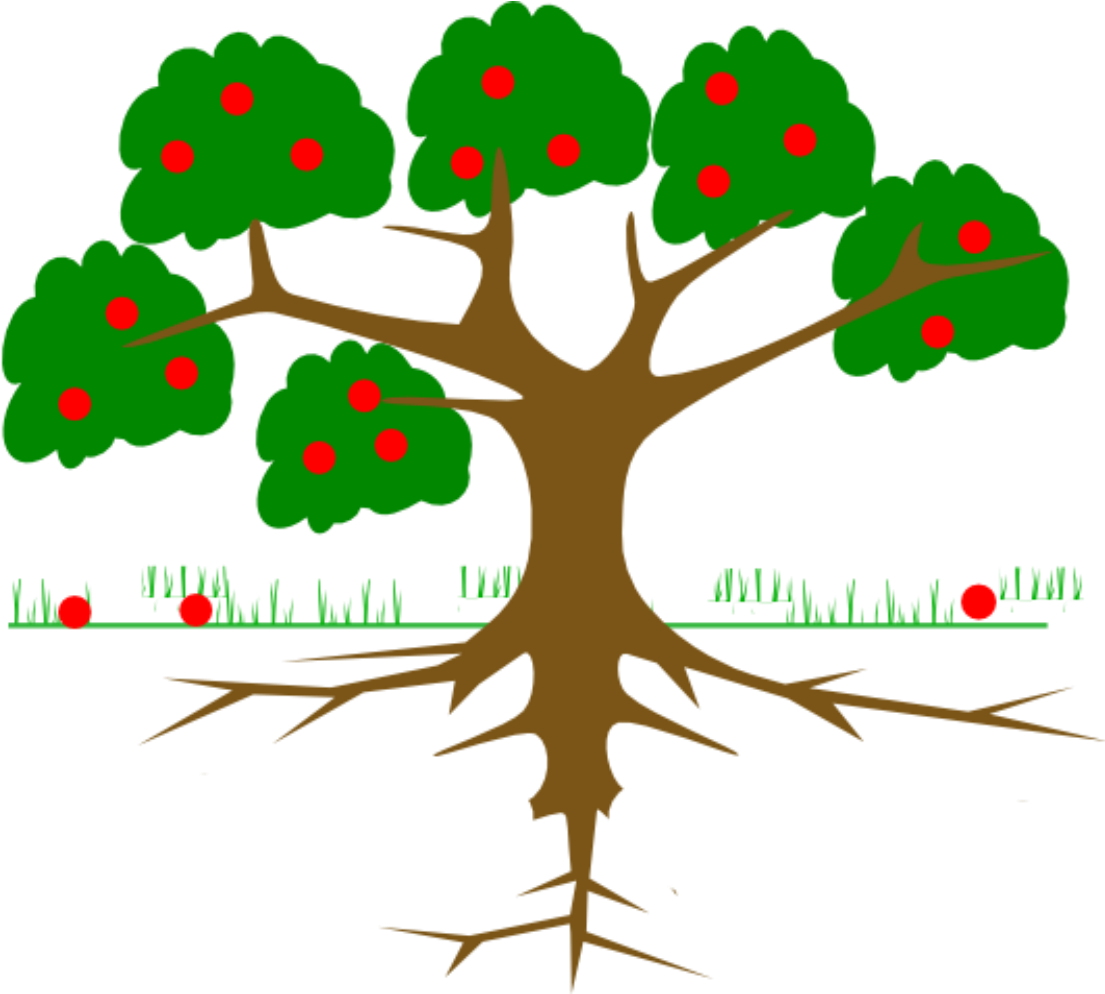


St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church Leadership Handbook



1 Peter 5:12-17

Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you ² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it, not for sordid gain but eagerly. ³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away.

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Purpose and Scope

This Leadership Handbook is intended to be a guide to those in our Congregation who have decided to assume a leadership role in some capacity. This role could be formal and spelled out in our Constitution or Bylaws or very informal and for a very short time. Since our Constitution and Bylaws are St. Matthew's governing documents, those will always have authority over leader's action. This handbook was created as a vehicle to pass along best practices and suggestions to those who've decided to serve. While we think there are some good suggestions in here, that's all they are, suggestions. The committee who created this wants to encourage leaders to lead as they see fit depending on the circumstances. We feel there's value in limiting bureaucracy and red tape, so as not to stifle creativity and action. At the same time, being prepared for meetings, handling them efficiently, and properly assigning and following up on action items creates energy and momentum that the group can leverage. Let's face it, people like to be part of groups when they feel respected, time is being well spent, and meaningful stuff gets done.

Leader's Covenant

Being mindful of the privilege and responsibility as a leader within this Christian community, the leader, with the help of God, will strive to serve well the Lord, the Church, and God's people as God gives each person the grace to do so.

Understanding the importance of the office and the Christian example in the community, the leader is encouraged to the best of their ability to:

1. Attend worship services regularly and be present at the Lord's Table to share in God's love and forgiveness.
2. Pray regularly for God's presence and guidance in this Christian community.
3. Support the Rostered Leaders in their conduct of their ministry both with prayer and through the sharing of talents/spiritual gifts.
4. Make a responsible financial commitment to the work of the Church.
5. Share reports of the committee's work with the Congregation Council liaison.
6. Be a witness to the importance of my Christian faith through my conduct and example at work, home, and the church.
7. Involvement in the ongoing process of becoming an educated Christian layperson and respond in love to those in need.

Responsibilities of a Committee Chairperson

- A. Before a committee meeting:
 - a. *Choose the venue (in person/Zoom) and schedule the space.*
 - b. *Make sure each member is reminded of the time and place of the meeting via phone call, postcard, email, or text.*
 - c. *Plan and share the agenda outline.*
 - d. *Consult, when appropriate/needed, with the Rostered Leader and council representative in arriving at an agenda.*

- e. *Make sure to either unlock the door, or station someone at the door, to allow for entry into the church by other committee members. Lock up afterwards.*

B. During a meeting:

a. Tasks

- i. *Review minutes or activities of the last meeting.*
- ii. *Ask the council representative (if present) to review applicable items pertinent to the committee from the most recent Congregation Council meeting.*
- iii. *Lead the discussion on each agenda item.*
- iv. *Summarize committee actions, especially those actions which lead to a recommendation to Congregation Council for action.*
- v. *Schedule the next meeting.*

b. Interpersonal Relationships:

- i. *Make sure the members know each other personally.*
- ii. *Start and or end each meeting with prayer and consider some form of devotions at the beginning of each meeting (consider a sign-up/rotation).*
- iii. *Try to involve each member in the discussion.*
- iv. *Try to reach committee solidarity on actions taken, but make sure that minority positions are recognized.*

C. Meeting Follow Up:

- a. *See that the minutes of the meeting are written as soon as possible with assigned action items and shared with the committee.*
- b. *Report committee actions and recommendations to Congregation Council through the assigned liaison.*

D. General:

- a. *Appoint or elect a secretary, if desired, for the committee.*
- b. *Identify “action” items from “information only” items when reporting to Congregation Council and share it ahead of time within an email.*
- c. *Review the duties of the committee with the committee periodically during the year.*
 - i. *Establish goals and priorities for the year.*
 - ii. *Review the year’s accomplishments at the last meeting of the year and make recommendations which will give the new committee some guidelines for its consideration.*
- d. *Help the committee see its responsibilities in relation to the whole church.*
- e. *Interact and communicate/share with other committee chairpersons when possible and when need arises.*
- f. *Plan for committee membership continuity from year to year, which may include recruiting new members.*
- g. *Follow Finance Committee disbursement guidelines.*

- h. *Prepare an annual report for the congregation and submit it to the Office Administrator.*
- i. *Prepare a ministry plan and budget recommendation for the coming year.*

Communicating and Working with the Church Office

As we do God's work while navigating our personal and professional lives, please be cognizant and respectful of our office administrator's time and responsibilities to put the office administrator in the best possible position to succeed and promote clear communication.

- Deadline for both weekly bulletin and shout-out email is Wednesdays, not later than noon.
- Reports to Congregation Council deadline is Monday afternoon before the meeting.
- Meetings and other activities that need a room reserved and need to be added to the church calendar are to be relayed to the office administrator as soon as they are known to reserve their specific rooms.
- All activities going on at or through the church are to be shared with the office administrator. If it is being posted on Facebook or our website, it is also to be shared with the office administrator for publication in bulletins and shout-outs.
- Any specific items that need action from the office administrator are to be emailed to the administrator directly with that information.
- Special projects, such as large print jobs, mailings, etc., are to be given to the office administrator two weeks in advance to plan to fit it in between the normal weekly duties.
- For anyone using the church credit card, a receipt is to be printed or emailed and supplied to the office administrator, who codes the monthly statements with cost centers for the Treasurer and Bookkeeper.

Leadership Positions Outlined in Constitution and Bylaws

- **President**
 - Prepare agenda and facilitate monthly CC meetings
 - Prepare agenda and facilitate Annual Congregational Meeting
 - Prepare agenda and facilitate any special Congregational Meetings
 - Contribute to and assist in preparing Annual Report to Congregation
 - Serve as liaison to Congregation Committees as needed and report committee activity to CC
 - Meet with Rostered Leaders (monthly) to communicate agenda topics/needs
 - Represent St. Matthew at Synod events/with Synod associates as needed
- *Spiritual/Environmental*

- Foster and support a healthy culture for all members of the congregation and rostered leaders
- Be a visible and approachable leader who is open to communication from the congregation
- Develop and execute ethical and Christian method of conflict management for areas of conflict within the congregation as needed
- Support and encourage rostered leaders
- Lead by example of their Christian faith and with a servant's heart
- Foster and support the other members of the CC to ensure teamwork, fellowship and healthy communication

- **Vice President**
 - Provide input on Council Meeting Agendas
 - Attend and actively participate in Council Meetings (currently scheduled as monthly meetings)
 - Serve as a liaison to one or more Committees; participate in those Committee Meetings and provide verbal summary reports about the Committee's activities to ensure visibility and transparency to the Council
 - Lead Council Meetings when the President is unable to attend and/or preside
 - Represent Council / the congregation at various Synod events, as the need arises

- **Treasurer**
 - Record deposits in Quickbooks weekly
 - Pay invoices and expense reimbursements weekly from Quickbooks.
 - Submit payroll twice a month and enter in Quickbooks.
 - Reconcile all bank accounts monthly and distribute bank statements to appropriate parties.
 - Manage investments with assistance from the Finance Committee.
 - Assist with preparation of budget annually, including calculating Rostered Leaders Portico Benefits and salary increases.
 - Update Paychex and Portico with changes to payroll and benefits every January.
 - Contact person for inquiries of estate gifts – provide direction on how to give.
 - Attend Congregation Council monthly meeting.
 - Attend Finance Committee monthly meeting.
 - Provide oversight of the following:
 - Prepare documents for Form 990-T Tax Return filing.
 - Prepare documents for RITA Form 27 and Medina City Tax filings.
 - Administration of Grace House Loan compliance and documentation.

- **Secretary**
 - Attend monthly Congregation Council meetings.
 - Prepare minutes (completing of minutes can be done once the recorded meeting is available for review to capture additional information you may have missed).
 - Send minutes to Congregation Council members for their review.
 - Prior to the next meeting, send a copy of the minutes to the office administrator to be included in the packet of documents for the upcoming meeting.
 - Document vote results from the Congregational Meeting and send documentation to the Congregation Council members.
 - Take minutes at the Annual Congregation meeting.
 - Take minutes at any Special meetings that may arise.
 - After the monthly meeting and the previous month's minutes are approved, send a copy to Evangelism/Communication to be published on the church's website.

- **At Large Council Member(s)**
 - Attend regular and special council meetings.
 - Vote on matters brought before council.
 - Serve as a liaison to specified teams or committees within the church organization structure for a term determined by council leadership.
 - May not serve as chair of any committee.

- **Finance Secretary**
 - Record contributions – those contributions come electronically through Vanco, by mail or collection plates.
 - Prepare statements in June and January.
 - Attend finance committee meetings.
 - Oversee and communicate with the counters. Provide written policy to counters.
 - Email or share with the pastor if you notice a negative change in giving or if a name comes along that is not in the "system." Is this a visitor, potential new member? Communication is important for many reasons.
 - Record contributions in the database.
 - Send names and addresses (excluding gift amount) of Memorial contributions to office administrator for acknowledgement letters.

- **Finance Chair**
 - Communicate the financial status of the church to leadership.
 - Collaborate with other Committee Chairs to create a financial plan (budget) for the church.
 - Gather budget requests.

- Schedule Finance Committee Meetings (FCM).
- Set Agenda for FCM.
- Lead FCM.

- **Stewardship Chair**
 - Focus on stewardship year-round with the following emphases:
 - Stewardship is a way of life, not just “fund-raising.”
 - It's a way of life in how “we manage our whole redeemed lives and our possessions.
 - What I do after I say “I believe.”
 - We belong to God.
 - All we have is a gift from God.
 - Giving of our time, talents, and treasure is an act of worship, an expression of faith, and a spiritual discipline.
 - We give/serve out of gratitude, not obligation.
 - We have a need to give/serve. It's a loving response to God's love for us.
 - Conduct an annual stewardship drive
 - Encourage support of activities/organizations that practice good stewardship of the world, i.e. recycling, conservation, time-management, health and wellness, etc.

- **Property Chair**
 - Prepare agenda and facilitate property committee meetings.
 - Coordinate with maintenance supervisor, janitor, or contractors to take care of property issues.
 - Update liaison so they can share with the Congregation Council property matters/activities.
 - Work with committee members to plan the budget for the upcoming year to be submitted to the finance committee.
 - Coordinate with the committee and budget for large expenses.
 - Periodically review expenses vs budget.

- **Personnel Chair**
 - Serve as mediator to resolve personnel/policy conflicts.
 - Make annual budget recommendations for staff compensation.
 - Work with appropriate committees to complete an annual confidential ministry review of non-rostered staff members.
 - Work with appropriate committees to conduct interviews and make recommendations to the Congregation Council to fill vacancies in non-rostered staff positions.

- Work with appropriate committees to initiate recommendations for termination of non-rostered staff positions only.
- Work with appropriate committees and staff to develop and regularly update job descriptions for personnel.
- Represent staff concerns/negotiations regarding job descriptions to the Congregation Council.
- Develop written policy for personnel regarding matters of leave, vacations, reviews, etc.
- Assume other personnel responsibilities as designated by the Congregation Council.
- Maintain appropriate personnel records and update Personnel Manual as needed.
- Prepare reports of committee activity to the Congregation Council and annual report to the congregation.
- Oversee responsibilities of the committee, schedule meetings, and prepare agendas.
- Serve as a member of the Mutual Ministry committees for Rostered Leaders.

Responsibilities of a Council Member as a Liaison to a Church Committee

- A. The Congregation Council Member is encouraged to pray regularly for this church, the Congregation Council, and for the committee and its members.
- B. The Member's term as **liaison** to the committee shall run from January to December.
- C. The **liaison** may attend and participate at the meetings of the committee.
- D. The **liaison** should be available as a resource to the committee chair.
- E. The **liaison** should share with the committee the actions of the Congregation Council, with a focus on the items relevant to the committee.
- F. The **liaison** should encourage the committee chair to submit a monthly report to Congregation Council.

Additional St. Matthew Committees

The following committees, or ministry teams as they are referred to within the Bylaws (*C13.07.01 and C13.07.02*), are how St. Matthew chooses to organize the many and various ministries that are performed within the life of the congregation. Like the tree on the cover of this handbook, everything we do and who we are as St. Matthew sprouts forth from and receives its life and nourishment from the roots, the Holy Trinity. The church, or community of believers that gather (St. Matthew), becomes the trunk of the tree. From this trunk grow the limbs, or branches, out of which sprout the many leaves. The branches are not permission-giving committees in and of themselves, but rather ministry focus areas from

which leaves (committees) grow. Like a tree, there is a sense of organic-ness to how the ministries grow, when they grow, and for how long they live. Like leaves, some of the ministries will grow only for a season and may go away once the focus for ministry has been accomplished. Other ministries might resemble more of a pine or juniper needle, lasting many, many seasons. The branches provide structure, but by removing them as an additional committee and added level of bureaucracy, it allows for more permission and freedom to grow ministries. If a group of two or three of us have a passion to start a new ministry that's not in the budget, and we have the funds to cover it and a place to do it, then we have the freedom to grow it! And if an older ministry that has been done for what seems like forever no longer has the momentum to keep it going, then we have the freedom to allow it to drop off, or prune it to allow for new growth to occur. Just as the tree is one, the important part in how we organize and put structure to our ministries aren't the branches, or even the different ministries, but that we grow together as one in all that we do as we are fed and nourished by the source of all life.

- **Congregational Life**

Various ministries that might grow from this focus in ministry might include, but is not limited to, worship life, prayer ministry, and educational opportunities in growing as a disciple. These ministry activities are focused on the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the membership.

- Bible studies
- Sunday School
- Care Connection
- Parish Nurse
- Prayer Group
- Lay Assistants (readers, ushers, communion)
- Altar Guild
- Sunshine Meals
- College Care Packages
- Kitchen Helpers
- Sunday morning coffee
- Livestream

- **Comprehensive Youth**

Various ministries that might grow from this focus in ministry might include, but is not limited to, educational, social, service, and worship-oriented activities. These ministry activities are focused on ways in which to teach the youth how to be disciples and live out their faith within the community.

- Sunday School
- VBS
- Luther Littles, Luther Middles, Luther League

- First Communion
 - 2nd grade Bibles
 - Catechism
 - Youth events
 - Senior Recognition
 - Christmas Program
 - Super Bowl of Caring
 - Bake Sale
 - Easter Breakfast
 - Worship assistants
- **Small Group**
 Various ministries that might grow from this focus in ministry might include, but is not limited to, fellowship, education, and service activities. These ministry activities are focused on providing ways for the community of faith to connect in fun and meaningful ways within the community.
 - Men's breakfast
 - Silent Book Club
 - Pastor's Bike Rides
 - Chili Cookoffs
 - Baseball game outings
- **Social Concerns**
 Various ministries that might grow from this focus in ministry might include, but is not limited to, addressing social justice issues, serving in social ministry activities, and participating in local, national, and international needs. These ministry activities attempt to help the community of faith to be active within the larger community in a hands-on way.
 - Operation Homes
 - LGL Samaritan Fund
 - God's Work, Our Hands
 - Gift Cards
 - Flour Barrel Fund
 - Blankets for Children's Hospital
 - Loads of Love Laundry Ministry
 - Food Drives/Donation Boxes
- **Evangelism/Communication**
 Various ministries that might grow from this focus in ministry might include, but is not limited to, coordination and promotion of church activities within and outside of the faith community, out-reach to the neighborhood, and witness oriented activities. These

ministry activities are focused on naming God's activity in the world and within the community of faith.

- Signage
- Shout Out Message
- Website
- Social Media
- Food Drive
- Newspaper advertisements
- Cross Penny

1 Peter 4:11

Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Church Website and Social Media

Guidelines and Responsibilities

General Purpose

At St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, we know that the website, online social platforms, including social networking services (such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube), livestreaming, podcasts and blogs are constantly transforming the way we interact. We also recognize the importance of the Internet in shaping the public view of our church.

The Evangelism and Communication Team is committed to supporting the congregation's right to interact responsibly and knowledgeably through social media. As the Internet is a primary method of communication, there is an increased opportunity to reach a wider audience through the church website and social media. These channels enable viewers to be more aware of church content, to share that content with friends and family, and to maintain closer contact with the church and its leaders. Web technology makes it easier for individuals to locate the church and find specific information of interest.

Guidelines for Sharing on Social Media

The Evangelism and Communication Team and the Congregation Council reserve the right to direct its members to avoid certain subjects and remove inappropriate comments and posts. St. Matthew social media sites are monitored on a regular basis.

What Gets Shared:

- All contributions should represent the congregation's ministry, and any postings must be appropriate to the mission and core values of St. Mathhew Evangelical Lutheran Church and the ELCA.

- Any statements made online should use common sense and be supported with factual evidence, written knowledgeably, accurately and professionally.
- Any contributions shared with those who manage online and social media platforms that are deemed appropriate and are consistent with our social media guidelines.
- It is the responsibility of the leader, committee chair, member, etc. to share information intended for social media.

With Respect and Privacy Rights:

- Honor the privacy rights of our rostered leaders and staff. There are times when information is good for the congregation but not the public. (i.e. Pastor's, Deacon's, and Office Administrator's vacations: Notifications put them and their homes at risk.)
- Protect our Youth.
 - There are times when it is not appropriate to share youth events on social media. Communicating certain information to more than just the families whom it affects is a liability.
 - When livestreaming youth (Children's Sermons or youth events), we must be overly cautious about protecting their safety, and from exposing unintentional derogatory shots.
 - Families are asked to complete a "Photo Release" form as an added measure of safety and consent for the youth of our congregation. We are prohibited from posting pictures without parental approval.

Website Responsibilities

The website is managed by the Evangelism and Communication (EC) Team of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church. Ultimate responsibility for the website lies under the auspices of the church's Congregation Council (CC) and the webmaster.

- I. The **Congregation Council** has general oversight of the life and activities of this congregation. and in this case, how the website represents the church to the world. It is responsible for enforcing and updating these General Policy and Content Guidelines. The CC Secretary is the sole source and authority for sharing official council and governing documents with the webmaster to be posted on the "Members" section of the website.
- II. The **Evangelism and Communication Team** is responsible for the contents of the pages published on <http://www.stmatthewmedina.org> and abides by the highest standards of quality. The EC Team is committed to ensuring privacy, including copyright issues. The team operates under the assumption that all works are protected by either copyright or trademark law unless conclusive

information indicates otherwise. In the case of unauthorized uploads, downloads, or links, the offending material will be removed immediately.

The EC Team is committed to ensuring the accessibility of its website and internet to people with disabilities. New and updated web content produced by our organization meets accessibility guidelines put forth by WCAG (*Web Content Accessibility Guidelines*). The Evangelism and Communication Team will review the website's accessibility on a quarterly basis.

- III. The **Webmaster**, with the help of EC, is responsible for:
- Overseeing the web site's major design and function
 - Ensuring a consistent look and feel throughout the website
 - Ensuring logical and consistent navigation throughout the website
 - Monitoring the health, usage, stability, and security of the website
 - Receiving and posting timely material (text and photos) from staff, leadership and church members
 - Updating the site on a frequent basis

Communication Channels

St. Matthew Lutheran Church has created these Church Website and Social Media Guidelines and Responsibilities under the guidance and regulations of the "ELCA Social Media platforms and content: best practices for congregations" and the "Media Relations: Best practices for congregations". All of these best practices guidelines can be found on the ELCA website at www.ELCA.org

Wow! Everywhere you look, we are doing God's work within our congregation and in our community. Hopefully you can see and feel the energy of the many ministries happening at St. Matthew! We are blessed and have much to celebrate as a congregation. Over the last year, we've been bringing more intention to empowering the congregation to activate new ideas and involve more people in committees and decision making, to ensure we are embracing and engaging diverse perspectives. We've gone from few people involved in decision making to many people, and we believe this is positively impacting the culture of our congregation.

This message comes to you from Congregation Council – as part of our commitment to a continuous and very intentional focus on nurturing a healthy, transparent culture, with communication practices that help us constructively surface new ideas, listen to concerns and discuss questions about our congregation, our future, and our ministries.

This message is intended to share some communication practices that we believe are foundational – and that can help especially when anticipating situations that involve emotions and navigating different and potentially conflicting perspectives. We believe it's possible – and really important – to share our true feelings and individual perspectives, and to be able to work through disagreements with a loving, caring spirit. With the positive

momentum and energy evident across our congregational life, we believe this is a great time to pause and double down on reinforcing the importance of highly effective communication practices.

Sometimes, it might not be clear where to go or who to talk to about ideas, concerns, and questions. Let's avoid parking lot conversations and work to eliminate the rumor mill. We have multiple communication avenues, and we encourage all members to embrace open and transparent communication – this is one of the important ways we will strengthen our culture, together.

If you find yourself wrestling with something related to St. Matthew, we encourage you to prayerfully consider how to express your ideas, concerns, and questions and ideas. We are blessed to have multiple options to engage in dialogue, as outlined below.

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Rostered Leaders | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Pastor Steve Mahaffey</i> <i>Deacon Lindsay Stertzbach</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Please make an appointment for a meeting or phone call</u> – they have busy schedules that require them to be out and about, so they aren't always at the church office! 😊</p> | | |
| Congregational Council | Pastor Steve's Mutual Ministry Team | Deacon Lindsay's Mutual Ministry Team | Pew Pad |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Pastor Steve Deacon Lindsay</p> <p style="text-align: center;">President: <i>Jennifer Knaggs</i> Vice President: <i>Kristine Neate</i> Treasurer: <i>Teri Uttech</i> Secretary: <i>Delores Ivan</i> At Large Members: <i>Amanda Kotick, Bruce Reed, Jim Woodard</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Brad Gierhart</i> <i>Tom Kotick</i> <i>Joe Obermeier</i> <i>Julie Shrader</i> <i>June Trenty</i> <i>Barb Woodard</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mike Holthouse</i> <i>Amanda Kotick</i> <i>Tom Kotick</i> <i>Bob Maas</i> <i>Kristine Neate</i> <i>Barb Woodard</i></p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Did you notice? The pew pads have been updated to include an option to request a conversation.</i></p> |

Here are a few tips to consider when preparing for a conversation or meeting topic that might be emotional or challenging:

Put your thoughts in writing. This helps you to increase your personal clarity about what you want to discuss and helps minimize emotions. It also helps in the moment – you have something to refer to and stay focused on the message and not the emotion.

- Assume positive intent from others. This means always starting from a point of view that the other person means well.
- Care enough to confront. Speak directly with another person to understand their perspectives or discuss concerns.
- Practice active listening – ask questions and seek to understand other perspectives on a topic. Be more consumed with what your conversation partner has to say than your own point of view.
- Invite everyone to share their thoughts without interruption.
- Invite reflection – end a discussion or meeting with a powerful question, like “Have you / Has anyone left anything left unsaid? Let’s hear from everyone...”

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. James 1: 19-20

ELCA Mission and Values

St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church, Medina is a member of the larger church body known as the Northeastern Ohio Synod, one of the 65 synods belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

ELCA

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.3 million members in more than 8,900 worshipping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region.

We are church

We are what God has made us – people whom God has created by grace to live in union with Jesus Christ and has prepared to live faithful, fruitful lives by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10). In Jesus Christ, God has reconciled us to God and to each other. As we gather around word and sacraments, this life in Christ is what defines, shapes and guides us as a community of faith, the church.

By God’s grace we can and do live confidently and generously in this community of faith and in service of others, amid the mysteries and paradoxes of this life in Christ – including our human limitations and failings, and the ambiguities, uncertainties and suffering that we experience.

We are Lutheran

We are a church that walks by faith, trusting God's promise in the gospel and knowing that we exist by and for the proclamation of this gospel word. We proclaim Jesus Christ

crucified and raised from the dead for the life of the world. As the apostle Paul wrote (Romans 1:16-17), and we echo in our Constitution (2.02), we are not ashamed of this gospel ministry because it is God's power for saving all people who trust the God who makes these promises. "We are to fear and love God, so, that we do not despise preaching or God's word, but instead keep that word holy and gladly hear it and learn it" (Small Catechism). God's word, specifically God's promise in Jesus Christ, creates this liberated, confident and generous faith. God gives the Holy Spirit who uses gospel proclamation – in preaching and sacraments, in forgiveness and in healing conversations – to create and sustain this faith. As a Lutheran church, we give central place to this gospel message in our ministry.

We understand to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical – committed to the oneness to which God calls the world in the saving gift of Jesus Christ, recognizing the brokenness of the church in history and the call of God to heal this disunity.

We are church together

Just as God has joined us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in baptism, we are also joined to others, not only in the ELCA and The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), but in all communities of Christian faith around the world. In Christ none of us lives in isolation from others. Jesus is our peace and has broken down the walls that divide us – walls of judgment, hatred, condemnation and violence – and has made us into one, new human community (Ephesians 2:14-15). This spiritual communion depends only on God's mercy that comes to us in the word and sacraments. That alone is enough for unity, and so we yearn for this communion with all Christians at the Lord's table.

Because God gives us our unity in Christ, we are able to see and respect the diversity within Christ's body. We receive it as a gift and embrace it, rather than treating it as a threat or a problem to be solved (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). We respect and honor the diversity of histories, traditions, cultures, languages and experiences among us in the ELCA and in the larger Christian community of faith. We seek full participation of all in the life and work of this church and will strenuously avoid the culture of any one group becoming the norm for all in the ELCA. And we strive to address the ways that racism, sexism, classism and other forms of injustice limit participation and harm people, communities and the whole body of Christ. In all these relationships the ELCA serves reconciliation and healing with other Christians, while repentantly acknowledging its failings and wrongs, trusting in God's forgiving mercy.

We are church for the sake of the world

Christ has freed us from sin and death, even from ourselves, so that we can live as ministers of reconciliation in loving and generous service of our neighbors (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). In Jesus Christ, all of life – every act of service, in every daily calling, in every corner of life – flows freely from a living, daring confidence in God's grace.

Freed by the transformative life of Christ, we support ELCA members as they give themselves freely in transforming service with the neighbor. Through a wide range of daily vocations and ministries, we nurture faith, build alliances and gather resources for a healed, reconciled and just world. As church together, we faithfully strive to participate in God's reconciling work, which prioritizes disenfranchised, vulnerable and displaced people in our communities and the world. We discover and explore our vocations in relation to God through education and moral deliberation. We bear witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ through dialogue and collaboration with ecumenical partners and with other faiths. In all these ministries, God's generosity flows through us into the life of the world.

Vision

A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation.

Purpose

Activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.

Values

Our values are grounded in faith, in our biblical and Lutheran confessional sources and our love of God and neighbor. They speak to the way this church lives and practices our faith, and they will guide how we journey forward in Christ as church together.

Forgiveness and reconciliation – We are reconciled to God by God's forgiving mercy. Forgiveness and reconciliation flow from what God has made us to be in Jesus Christ and what God is doing with us in the world. As a people of God, we embody forgiveness in speech, action and relationships, and our ministry in reconciliation is foundational.

Dignity, compassion and justice – Each person is created in God's image. We respect this God-given right to dignity and, inspired by the life of Jesus, show love and compassion for all people. Through proclamation of the gospel, through worship and as servants of God working for healing and justice in the world, we uphold and seek to protect the dignity and human rights of all people.

Inclusion and diversity – As Christ's church, we value the richness of God's creation and offer a radical welcome to all people, appreciating our common humanity and our differences. We are a church that does not view diversity as a barrier to unity. We recognize and will challenge dynamics of power and privilege that create barriers to participation and equity in this church and society – for women, people of color, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, people who are marginalized or living in poverty, and the LGBTQ community.

Courage and openness to change – Because we trust in God's promise and understand faith to be a living, daring confidence in God's grace, we are emboldened to embrace

learning and change in our spiritual and institutional journey as church. This means we are open to new ways and willing to take risks to discover God's plan for this church.

Faithful stewardship of God's creation and gifts – As church together, faithful stewardship is about holding to God's purpose and ensuring the responsibilities and resources that God has entrusted to us are used with great care and with accountability to God, to each other and those served by this church.

What should I know about the ELCA faith tradition?

We are a church that is deeply rooted and always being made new. Our roots are in Scripture and a collection of writings called the Book of Concord, as well as in the rich histories of our congregations. We're a church that strives to be faithful to the gospel and work toward more justice and wholeness in the world.

We are equipped to live and serve in the world with all its complexities, tensions and ambiguities. All are welcome here.

What do Lutherans believe?

We believe that all people are imperfect and are saved (made right with God) by God's grace and God's grace alone, through Christ. There is no special prayer you need to pray, no special state of mind you need to achieve and no good deed you need to perform. We believe that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God became one of us and took upon himself the sin and suffering of all the world. God did this to demonstrate God's love for us. We believe that we receive the gift of grace by faith alone on account of Christ. We live in the tension of still being sinful but trusting that we are forgiven and that God is at work in us. The gift of grace expresses God's unconditional love, and in response to that love we are set free to live gratefully and lovingly.

An important date in the Lutheran tradition is Oct. 31, 1517, when a German monk named Martin Luther started a movement known as the Reformation. He insisted the Bible showed that salvation could not be earned or bought, which was contrary to church teachings at the time. Luther believed salvation was a gift and a sign of God's never-ending love. The most influential documents for our church were written by him and other Lutheran reformers. These are compiled in the Book of Concord. Key writings there include the Augsburg Confession and [Martin Luther's Small Catechism](#). We don't believe that you are born or are baptized Lutheran, but if you participate in the Lutheran tradition, you identify as a Lutheran Christian.

What does the Lutheran tradition have in common with other Christians?

We believe it's important to have relationships and understanding with other Christian faiths, and with other religious traditions and worldviews too. With other Christians we read the Bible, gather in congregations for worship services and affirm core Christian beliefs.

The ELCA has established "[full communion](#)" agreements with six Protestant denominations: the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the

United Church of Christ, the Moravian Church in America (Northern and Southern Provinces), The Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church. These agreements mean that we share enough essential understanding to participate in common mission. We exchange clergy and encourage opportunities to work together toward justice and peace. We acknowledge that differences remain, but we can talk about these, learn from each other, challenge each other and just agree to disagree.

In our multireligious world, the ELCA is committed to working with people of other religions and worldviews toward mutual understanding and for the common good.

What's important to know about the history of the ELCA?

The Lutheran movement was born as a reform effort in the heart of the medieval Christian church in Europe. The framework for our beliefs began in the 16th century, in what became known as the Protestant Reformation. American Lutherans trace their roots back through the mid-17th century, when early Lutherans arrived from Europe, settling in the Virgin Islands and present-day New York.

The ELCA was formed in 1987 when three Lutheran churches merged to form one denomination. The American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America came together to form the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Lutheran women were first ordained as pastors in the United States in 1970, in churches that eventually formed the ELCA. The first woman of color was ordained in 1979. In 2009, after a long period of studying the Scriptures and discerning our theological understanding of [human sexuality](#), the barrier for ordination of LGBTQIA+ individuals was removed even as the church affirmed a variety of convictions. People of all sexual orientations and gender identities can serve as pastors and deacons in the ELCA. The gifts of all people called to ministry are received with joy.

Explore more notable [ordination anniversaries](#) in the ELCA.

Looking for a specific piece of Lutheran history? Try searching the [ELCA Archives](#).

The ELCA has repudiated Martin Luther's anti-Judaic writings and is committed to Jewish relations and combating anti-Semitism.