

Dear Members and Friends of First Lutheran,

Before I get to my news, I spoke with Sarah Sedlacek after worship Sunday. With our county's covid positivity rate at 5.02% last Thursday, we are about as close as we can get to the standard the covid committee set for making masking for worship encouraged but optional. I've asked for further guidance on what this might mean for worship and Holy Communion. Watch for an announcement later this week.

A few weeks ago, I received a call from Jim Roeber encouraging the council to investigate ways to enhance the quality of our live worship stream by adding additional equipment. He offered several great suggestions which I passed on to the council and to the foundation to plant the seed for further discussion. Following worship a couple of weeks ago, another one of our members approached a council member saying, "with COVID going away, we are not going to keep streaming worship, are we?" These different perspectives illustrate what we don't fully grasp about this particular ministry.

Pastor Sami has begun sharing with us regularly how many persons are worshipping with us, not just in the pews, but from wherever they are and at different times following our live stream. Our on-line attendance is significantly higher each week than our in-person attendance. It includes not only our shut-ins, but people we may or may not ever know, people who are nourished by our worship and strengthened for their own lives of service.

Those who study the ways in which people seek church homes report that people no longer do this by simply walking in the door and seeing how they are greeted, though this is still very important. Before they even decide to make that trip, they check out congregations' worship via their worship streams. Then they ask, "do we like what we see enough to check them out in person?" Congregations who have no on-line presence don't even make the first cut.

In our mission statement we proclaim ourselves to be "a vibrant and nurturing faith community inviting others to experience the grace of God." Our challenge is to ask how we extend the welcome people are searching for in the ways and places they are searching. Our question is how important to our mission is it that we invest in the technology that allows our outreach to be as effective as it can be, even without "proof through people in the pews" of who we are reaching or what we are getting in return. We will be exploring this question together in coming months. Please, start thinking it through for yourself now.

Changing subjects, I reported at the Annual Meeting and in my letter following that meeting that our actual operating fund balance as of the January 30 meeting date was \$9,361.97, and that our dedicated accounts were fully funded. The operating account balance I announced was incorrect. The correct balance was \$16,861.97. When I asked Cyndee for the numbers the day before the meeting, she pulled the information from our U.S. Bank operating account but forgot to include \$7,500 in a separate UMB account. She apologizes for this oversight. Since then, Cyndee has transferred the \$7,500 into our U.S. Bank operating account and closed the UMB account. With two pending repair bills that will total over \$5,000 and the cost of winter

snow removals, that money has provided a necessary cushion. I will provide an updated operating account balance after Cyndee closes the books on March.

This leads me to one other thing I want to address. A few members have lingering questions about the money we received in 2020 through a Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) loan. Was that money all spent? Is there still PPP money stashed away that can be used for special projects? The short answer is, "No it was not all spent and no there is no balance stashed away." The \$7,500 in the UMB account mentioned above was the remainder of our PPP loan.

We received the PPP loan through UMB in the amount of \$29,400 in May 2020. The loan amount requested and granted was based on actual payroll expenses including salary and benefits, utilities, and mortgage interest we routinely incurred in a 60-day period. In applying for loan forgiveness, we had to demonstrate that we did indeed have payroll, utilities, and mortgage interest expenses at least equal to the loan amount and that we did not lay off any staff to reduce expenses. WE DID NOT have to prove we had no other income available to meet these expenses.

UMB opened an account where that loan was deposited. Here's how we used it. Cyndee transferred \$2,104.44 to the building fund, an amount equal to two-months' mortgage interest. This left \$27,295.56 in the UMB PPP loan account. Cyndee transferred money from this account to our operating account as needed to cover payroll and utility expenses and to supplement congregational giving. Fortunately, 2020 member contributions were enough that Cyndee did not need to transfer the full amount to our operating account in 2020. A balance remained that Cyndee was able to draw on as needed in meeting 2021 operating expenses. The \$7,500 Cyndee transferred to our U.S. Bank account this month was the last of that money.

Here is how we reported that income. The entire loan plus \$258.88 in accrued interest was officially forgiven March 17, 2021. Bruce reported the amount transferred to the building fund as income there. Cyndee amended our 2020 Income and Expense statement to include the remaining \$27,295.56 as operating fund income. These actions were reported in the 2021 Annual Report to the congregation. This income has not appeared in subsequent Income and Expense Reports because it was 2020 income. Operating fund income beyond what is needed to cover current operating expenses remains available to meet operating expenses until used up, taking us back to the repair bills and snow removal costs I noted above.

If you have further questions, please ask me. I'll get you answers.

As always, I end by asking you to continue to pray for our openness to the mission God calls First Lutheran into in our community and beyond. May we empty ourselves that God might fill us.

Jim Pierce,
President