



Spirit of Life Annual Report 2024

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For we do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

Romans 14:7-9

Pastor's Report

The Apostle Paul writes these words from Romans 14 to the people of ancient Rome who are part of new Christian communities. These are people who, though very different from each other, are drawn together by the Good News. Paul writes to help them understand how they belong to God and to each other.

For Spirit of Life, 2024 was a year to explore what it means to belong to the Lord and to each other. As we reflect on this year of ministry, think about the ways in which God met you and swept you up into a great community of belonging. Think about the places at Spirit of Life where you found belonging. Think about the people with whom you felt you could be yourself. Think about the ways you offered belonging to someone else. And celebrate the growth and belonging that this community has experienced in these last few years. Because belonging takes courage. It takes intention.

2024 Membership Report

Members, 12/31/2023	192
Received 2024	
By Transfer	1
By Baptism	4
By Affirmation of Faith	9
Total Received	14
Removed 2024	
By Death	1
By Transfer	2
For other reason	0
Total Removed	3
Members, 12/31/2024	203

Martin Luther would describe sin as being turned in on ourselves, or *incurvatus se*. Which if you think about is often a coping mechanism for those who have been hurt. We turn inward to protect ourselves from further damage. So to turn outward requires reassurance. To turn outward requires safety and confidence. When we find belonging in our relationship with God and within a Christian community, we are instinctively turned outward. Luther would say we are free from sin to love and serve our neighbors. This is at the heart of Spirit of Life's mission. Ministries of childcare, quilts, food, prayer and health continue in this place with the aim of

loving and serving the most vulnerable people in our community. I believe they also give people a sense of belonging. Belonging allows us to take chances, as we did so many times this year. With confidence we embarked on worship series that explored questions about God and our lives and explored the lives of little known biblical characters. We sang about crowded tables and being raised up. There was a vine-covered sanctuary and conversation church. And who can forget the Dr. Suess liturgy? We welcomed back old friends and said goodbye to others. People were baptized and confirmed and welcomed as new members. We learned how to read the Bible and shared pots of soup and chili. Through it all, our relationship with God in Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit grew, as did our sense of belonging to each other. Thanks be to God.

– *Pastor Marietta Nelson-Bittle*

Council President's Report

Council's focus was Belonging...to each other, to our fellow congregation, colleagues, to our community, to the world. These are some of your council activities this past year:

- Initiated official job descriptions for many tasks around SOLL
- Upper bathroom flood repaired
- Engaged new council members in retreat
- Change of leadership in Little Doves
- Working on security grant. Completed boulders and security system. Gate is being installed. Parking lot lighting delayed until late spring
- Improved signage at entrance
- Grateful for building and grounds group. Many tasks are being taken care of by more than one person!

– *Bonnie Ruehs-Lutz*

Building and Grounds Team

We are the Lord's, and he requires that we act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with him. The founding members acted on these words and built the Spirit of Life Lutheran Church to provide a place where we can connect with God and establish relationships with the community. The building is a place where people can worship, serve, and receive care. For the children of Little Doves, it offers a safe place for growing. For those that are hungry for food or the Word, it offers a place at the table to be nourished.

The building we call "Spirit of Life" (SOL) is a busy place indeed. Like people, the SOL building and grounds need care, too. The Building and Grounds Team (BGT) provides oversight and care (i.e., maintenance, repair, or improvement) of the SOL building and grounds. The team meets on a regular basis to discuss and address maintenance needs. In 2024, the BGT has weeded, pruned, cleaned, painted, changed lightbulbs, cleared land, fixed sinks and doors, burned yard debris, installed a new floor in the sacristy, and worked with contractors. The BGT coordinates its activities with the Church Council. Projects on the horizon include: repairing/replacing the roof on each shed, replacing fluorescent lightbulbs with LED lightbulbs, and, of course, the never-ending tasks of weeding and pruning.



Thank you for your help in caring for the building and grounds. All are welcome to participate in any of the BGT activities or to take on any task on your own. Please contact Walt Sippel should you wish to learn more about the BGT or how you might help on future projects.

– *Walt Sippel*

Treasurer's Report

As Treasurer, it is my privilege to write this short summary of the story of Spirit of Life's finances for 2024, which experienced a positive net operating income of \$53,400 overall. The Food Bank had a negative operating result of \$1,639 in 2024. This compares favorably with the budget projection of a negative result of \$9,936 for the year. This result was due to a combination of lower Food and Purchase expenses with more generous Donations and Grants than the budgeted estimate.

- Little Doves had a positive operating result of \$83,293 in 2024. The benefits of higher total tuition and lower expenses resulted in the larger positive operating result than the budgeted estimate of \$42,016.
- The Church had a negative operating result of \$28,682 in 2024. This is better than the budget projection of negative \$52,679. Tithes and Offerings were about 13% higher than pledged and there was unexpected grant income. Operating expenses were very near to budgeted estimates overall.
- The balance of the Special Gifts Account at the beginning of 2024 was \$58,287. Expenses and interest income resulted in a balance of \$55,527 in the Special Gifts Account on December 31, 2024.

This story is very condensed from full financial reports and the most recent versions of the year-to-date Profit and Loss Report and the Balance Sheet are posted monthly in the church office. Explanation of these or any other financial reports or processes is available to anyone by asking me.

Current Spirit of Life Staff

Marietta Nelson-Bittle – Pastor
Maggie Miner – Director
Anastasia Money – Program Supervisor
Michelle McMillan- Administrative Assistant
Kim Rohr - Finance Steward
Sarah Bruer – Cook
Emily Anderson– Teacher, Toddlers
Lisa Dike - Teacher, Toddlers
Judith Engle – Teacher, Toddlers
Tehani Nichols - Teacher, Preschool
Holly Caldwell - Teacher, Pre-K
Veronica Hurm - Teacher, Pre-K
Amarah Schoonover – Aide
Maelyne VanderDoes – Aide
Jordynn Gibson – Aide
Jacob LeRoy – Aide
Morgan Albright – Substitute
Louie Boe – Substitute

– *David Traxel*



Little Doves Children's Learning Center

While there have been a lot of transitions in 2024, we have strived to continually cultivate an environment of love and belonging. We are endeavoring to do this by strengthening relationships with and between Little Doves families and the Spirit of Life congregation. We are also working on building staff relationships through team building and improving and streamlining communication.

In order to strengthen our relationship with Spirit of Life, from August to December, we had different leadership members provide both meals and the devotional for our staff meetings. We also have a standing invitation to members of the congregation to attend chapel at Little Doves along with a tour afterward. In order to provide more insight into the day-to-day operation of Little Doves Pam Thiemann spent two days shadowing Anastasia, the Program Supervisor, and myself.

Since starting as director, I have implemented some small changes that I hope will further garner belonging with the families attending Little Doves. Now, when parents enter the center there is a new parent board on the entryway hallway. The board is divided into three sections. The sections provide current community information, new activities to try at home, information or articles relating to child development, and a place where families can post notes of encouragement or thanks to our teachers. Outside of the office, there is a new file holder with

Current Little Doves Enrollment

- Toddlers: 19
- Preschoolers: 10
- Pre-Kindergarteners: 18

a large variety of child development articles and different subjects or struggles parents might be dealing with at home that they can look through for further help. One of the biggest changes we have made is providing online enrollment BrightWheel app along with adding our parent handbook to the Little Doves website.

My major focus with the staff has been improving communication. The biggest change since June has been the change in directorship and the addition of a full-time program supervisor. With this, Little Doves has gone from having an on-site administrative presence 3 days a week to 5 days a week. Overall admin presence per day has also increased from 8 hours to over 10 hours. This has increased face-to-face administrative presence for both parents and staff. Another huge improvement has been the transition to a shared Google Calendar that all staff members have access to. This calendar provides Little Doves closures, scheduled staff leave, staff coverage, birthdays, and other center events. We have also created a "new employee mentor" position to help provide training and onboarding help to new staff members. Having this mentor cultivates an immediate relationship between new and old staff members and helps give new employees a feeling of support. In October I also added a new segment to our staff meetings where we do a short spotlight on a different teacher each month. We have also given teachers a quarterly budget to spend on items for their classrooms. We wanted teachers to feel supported in their efforts to create optimal learning environments without having to spend their own money to do so.

– *Maggie Miner, Director*

Life Care Community Food Bank

All-in-all LifeCare Food Bank had a pretty good year. Although the number of families and people served during 2024 was similar to 2023, the amount of food and in-kind donations decreased. At the same time, monetary donations increased significantly, preventing the food bank from digging into reserve funds for the purchase of food. TEFAP (USDA) food donations were also increased from 2023. Sadly, Big Lots closed its doors and donations from FISH food bank were significantly lower than previous years.

Each year has its surprises. This year the food bank was given the opportunity to apply for a grant that was used to purchase a new freezer, replacing two household style freezers with one commercial freezer that increases storage capacity while decreasing footprint. The grant paid for half the cost and the food bank used reserve funds to pay the balance. Another surprise was the delivery of several pallets of Coke Zero, which is always a treat for clients. A donor gave over 50 pairs of men's socks, and a similar amount of ladies and children's socks. Those were quickly snapped up by clients.

Total food and in-kind donations for the year are: 9142 food items which includes 372 dozen eggs; 3714 non-food items, 2486 food items from Big Lots; 6 dozen donuts from Lone Star Bakery; 327 banana boxes of food from FISH; 1436 loaves of baked goods from Franz; 2024 food items from Bremerton Foodline; 674 pounds of pet food from Kitsap Humane Society.



Total families served during the year was 637 which accounted for 2195 people. 125 of those families were new to the food bank. Total meals served was 26,340.

– JoAnn Smith

Lutheran World Relief

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ
1st Thessalonians 1:2-3

106 Personal Care Kits	@ \$20/ea = \$2,120	211 lbs
82 Baby Care Kits	@ \$80/ea = \$6,560	250 lbs
107 School Kits	@ \$25/ea = \$2,675	213 lbs
62 Quilts	@ \$24/ea = \$1,488	238 lbs

Total Value = \$12,843

Total Weight = 912 lbs

A total of \$100 was donated from congregational members for shipping costs.

Praise and Thanksgiving to all the congregational members involved in this vital outreach ministry.

– Janet Hane, Coordinator



Finance Steward's Report

For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord;

This part of the verse was hard for me to decipher because sometimes you just read words literally, instead of digging into it for deeper meaning, and then relating this verse to belonging was not an easy task. The verse was a reminder for me to make decisions based on what Jesus would do, what does the Bible say about how our character should be and am I aligned to it, how do I serve the Lord and how do I keep the Lord as a part of my decision process?

I looked up the word “belonging” on the internet, of course. One definition of “to belong” is to be a member of or a part of something. Besides the definition of belonging, the internet gave me websites from colleges doing research on the word “belonging” and websites of companies who used the word “belonging” in their diversity and inclusion policies. So, after reading many interesting articles, I concluded that a sense of belonging is a feeling of security and support where you can be your authentic self and there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion and identity as a member of a group.

At Spirit of life, I think all of us have similar beliefs, character and want to serve the Lord in some way. This creates the beginnings of belonging. Within our Church community, we are bringing our skills and experiences to serve the Lord together for a common goal of feeding the community through the food bank, by caring for our neighborhood children, by helping with church service and the day-to-day tasks of “running” the church. To continue building a community and a sense of belonging, it is up to us to listen to each other, to build our relationships with each other and our neighbors and to make those intentional connections. I read that we should make our Lord proud. I think Spirit of Life is doing that and I always feel that I belong here.

– Kim Rohr

Faith Community Nurse

Greetings from the Faith Community Nurse program!

- Our members have expanded in 2024. We now have Karen Boe, RN and Diane Taber.
- Our group belongs to 2 main organizations which give us opportunities for spiritual growth and professional growth.
- We participate with Congregational Health Ministries part of CHI / Virginia Mason. Monthly sessions help us with networking and training on topics such as grief, and healthy living along with many other topics.
- Recent training sessions called Faith, Activity and Nutrition (FAN) have helped us plan for 2025 activities that uplift our congregation and the wider community.
- The other organization is Lutheran Faith Community Nurses Association. This is nationwide networking with other nurses of the Lutheran Faith. This professional organization also offers many opportunities for learning especially focused on spiritual and mental health. The membership dues have been paid from the 300\$ budget allowed for FCN program. We thank our congregation for supporting our budget.
- Our work is voluntary but this year we accumulated about 305 hours of healthcare/welfare checks. We meet people via the Foodbank, phone, text, email and social occasions plus hospital and nursing home visits.
- Using current average wage of a registered nurse our “worth” comes to nearly \$13,000 this year.
- Most of what our team does is private and “under the radar”.
- Thank you for supporting our team and we look forward to continuing to work using the talent that God gave us to help others.

May God Bless us all!

– *Sue Ruedebusch, RN*
– *Carol Colburn, RN*
– *Karen Boe, RN*
– *Diane Taber, Associate*