

The Visitor

January 2026
No. 26-01

Complex world. Thoughtful church.



Thoughts From Pastor Amanda Simons

Happy New Year! And happy Epiphany to you!

As we begin this new year of 2026, I am delighted that I have the honor and joy of serving as your lead pastor, accompanying our congregation in our shared ministry to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. While I was personally very disappointed to miss worshipping in person with Hope on Christmas Eve due to influenza, I smile every time I remember that there's next Christmas Eve, and I delighted in worshipping online with our congregation and listening to the stories of God's incarnation that shape us for this coming year together.

As we move into this new year and season of Epiphany, a season in which we intentionally look for the beauty of God's presence in our world, marvel at God's manifestation, and ponder anew what God is revealing to us, I wonder: What are the hopes, dreams, and resolutions that you carry forward into 2026? As you see the manifestation, the presence of God, in your life and that of others, what is God revealing to you this season?

On Epiphany Sunday, I included these words from theologian Frank Thomas in my sermon: "Once you see the divine revelation, then you do not need the star, because the external power of the star goes internal."

How is the external power of the star moving internally for you? What does it mean for you as a follower of Jesus to be a blessing for others, participating in God's purpose of tending to justice, cultivating peace, and broadening hope?

These are the questions I am asking myself this Epiphany season also.

These are a few of my resolutions for 2026: Marvel at the stars. Insist on hope. Choose gratitude. Do what I can when I can. Try new things, fail, learn, and try again. Remember that God is at work in the world. Lastly, to remember that I am part of a community, a community that believes in justice, peace, and hope, and that together the community makes a tremendous difference in God's world towards God's dreams.

What are yours? And – what are ours together as University Lutheran Church of Hope?

Let's be stargazers and journeyers together this Epiphany season.

Lastly, I ask you to read and ponder one of my favorite poems "For Those Who Have Far To Travel" by Jan Richardson. For several years this was the poem I read daily to begin my prayers with God. It is the prayer that I read before I met with Hope's call committee. It is the prayer that I read when I accepted Hope's call as pastor. I entrust this piece of myself with you. Thank you for the ways you welcome and entrust yourselves to me. It is a precious gift.

In gratitude, Pastor Amanda Simons



For Those Who Have Far to Travel

*And there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising
~ The Gospel of Matthew 2:9*

If you could see the journey whole,
You might never undertake it,
Might never dare the first step
That propels you from the place you have known
Toward the place you know not.

Call it one of the mercies of the road:
That we see it only by stages
As it opens before us,
As it comes into our keeping,
Step by single step.

There is nothing for it but to go,
And by our going take the vows the pilgrim takes:

To be faithful to the next step;
To rely on more than the map;
To heed the signposts of intuition and dream;
To follow the star that only you will recognize;

To keep an open eye for the wonders that attend the path;
To press on beyond distractions, beyond fatigue,
Beyond what would tempt you from the way.

There are vows that only you will know:
The secret promises for your particular path
And the new ones you will need to make
When the road is revealed by turns you could not have foreseen.

Keep them, break them, make them again;
Each promise becomes part of the path,
Each choice creates the road that will take you
To the place where at last you will kneel

To offer the gift most needed –
The gift that only you can give –
Before turning to go home by another way.

Jan Richardson, *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*.

Worship & Music

Night Songs: Sunday, February 15 at 7:00 p.m. - Save the date for another Night Songs performance with our own Hope Choir and other local choirs! Many things will be like past years, but last time, this event was so popular that we weren't able to seat everyone who showed up. So, this time all attendees (choir members are the only ones who don't need a ticket) will be required to get tickets online in advance, to help ensure there is a seat for each person who comes. Watch for a ticketing link through Eventbrite coming soon and get your tickets early!

Paul Stever, Minister of Worship & Music

Children's Ministry Dates - Mark your calendars!

With Madeline's departure, we are going to experiment with Sunday School again this coming spring. Rather than gather before or during worship, we will gather, parents and children together, one Sunday each month. Our hope is to plan these gatherings on the same day as the fellowship meal (the third Sunday, generally) so that everyone can also eat lunch. After the meal, we'll have some time with parents and children together and then split up into a time for parents together and a time for the kids together. Parents will talk about topics such as incorporating faith practices at home, talking with children about difficult topics in a faithful way, and more! Children will play, do art, or dive deeper into a Bible story together. The hope is that this will be an opportunity to build deeper relationships amongst both the adults and the children - something we have heard a desire for - as well as help support faith formation at home in addition to church.

Additionally, during worship, we will continue to have children's messages, activity bulletins for kids related to the story of the day, and other appropriately themed activities in the children's area each Sunday. Your children are an important part of our community and our worship life together.

Mark your calendars for the following dates for Family Formation Gatherings; 12:30pm to 2:00pm:

January 18th

February 15th

March 15th

April 19th

May 17th

****These dates are subject to change, but we will do our best to give you plenty of advanced warning!****

Pastor Maria Anderson-Lippert

Wild Church Gathering



Wild Church will be taking a break in January. You're encouraged to still join with your human and creation community to remember our relationship and connection with one another on your own time. Contact Pr. Maria (mariaa@ulch.org) with any questions. Check out our new Wild Church Twin Cities website: www.wildchurchtc.org.



Hope Birthdays

Let's celebrate! The birthday list below is of Hope's members who are 80 years and older, in addition to some who may be homebound, living in assisted living or a care center. Their contact information is in the ULCH directory. A phone call, card, or note from folks in our community is always appreciated!

January Birthdays

Jan 2nd – Millie Caspersen
Jan 4th – Sandy Robinson
Jan 19th – Susan Scherer
Jan 19th – Kathy Knudson (80)
Jan 22nd – Karen Johnson
Jan 22nd – Lynn Quello (80!)

February Birthdays

February 3rd – Paul Quie
February 7th – CJ Robinson
February 7th – Steve Schreuder



Beacon's 2026 Convening

Hope members are invited to Beacon's Convening 2026: *Faith in Home*, Tuesday, January 20, 2026 at 7:00 p.m. Please register now at beaconinterfaith/events and let them know you're with University Lutheran Church of Hope. Beacon Interfaith on Affordable Housing's Convening is an annual gathering of the faith communities of the collaborative, where we hear inspiring music and speakers and get set to advocate for housing justice in the legislative session. So many of you participated in the federal advocacy over the summer in our post card campaign to our federal lawmakers, we believe we can bring a strong group to this event – our voices are an important

part of the chorus calling for Minnesota to be the best state in the US for supportive housing. When you register, you're helping us toward our goal of organizing 10 members to attend from Hope! You'll also start to hear updates on the special guest speakers as they are confirmed! As the date approaches, Donna Neste will be at the information table to sign people up and we will be making plans to carpool from the church to Convening at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis.

If you have any questions contact Donna at d_nestea@yahoo.com

Fellowship Meals

THANK-YOU to all who helped with the December Fellowship Meal. There were the cooks, those who set tables, others who had entertainment for the kids, those who cleaned up, and all ate well and joined in the conversation. Thank you!

The next Fellowship Meal will be on Sunday, January 18 after worship service. More details to come!

Sheila Hougen

Bible and Brews January 19th at 6:30pm



Exactly what it sounds like: bring your Bible, your favorite brewed beverage, and a penchant for laid-back but totally engaging conversations about faith, scripture, and current events. We meet the 3rd Monday of each month from 6:30pm to 8:00pm. Watch the Thursday Epistle or contact the church office for location.

Reflections and Resolutions for the January Sunday Forums

We will be celebrating our heritage as a Reconciling in Christ church, reviewing the importance of self-care, and exploring new challenges to serve through ISIAH and Bridging for this month.

January 4: Self-Care: A Sacred Practice - We on the forum team are so glad that the Compassion Care leaders are willing to share on the topic of self-care. It's the perfect time of year to address this issue for Minnesotans trapped in the dark and cold for a few more months. What could be better for us to consider as New Year's resolutions are launching? Ann Agrimson, Pastor Maria, Muffi Abrahamson, and Karen Jorstad will talk about what self-care really is, why it's important, and possible ways to care for yourself.

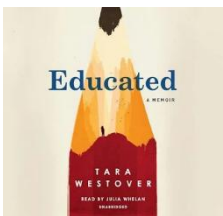
January 11: Bridging - Joel Bisser, the Community Engagement Coordinator for this organization in the Roseville area will speak about their important mission. Bridging collects gently used furniture, dishes, appliances, etc., to outfit the homes of folks who have recently been unhoused. Clients make appointments (typically through social workers) and shop just as they would in a large warehouse store. Our Hope member, Lynette Lamb, has volunteered and found it to be a fulfilling experience.

January 18: ISIAH Update - Twenty-five people from University Lutheran Church of Hope attended ISIAH's 2026 Anti-Authoritarian launch event, "A Light In The Storm," on Saturday, Dec 13. Come and hear what ISIAH is planning, both as a resistance movement opposing our slide toward authoritarian government, and a legislative agenda here in Minnesota to combat the cuts to SNAP, Medicaid, and public education. You will hear from event attendees and learn how you might become involved in this vital effort.

January 25: Celebrating Reconciling in Christ - University Lutheran Church of Hope has a rich tradition of inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community. On this day that Reconciling in Christ (RIC) congregations have chosen to celebrate, a Hope member panel will present and discuss. We are fortunate to have Betty and Steve Scheuder to start with the general history. They were involved since the beginning of Lutherans Concerned, which then progressed into RIC. Kirsten Mebust and Alden Tetlie will lead the discussion of Hope's unique pathway from Affirmation of Welcome to RIC.

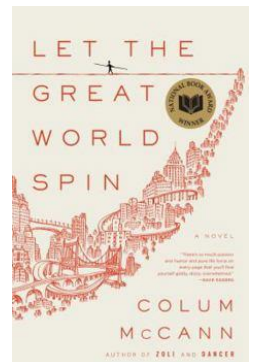
Hope Book Club

Sunday, January 11th, 2025, 7pm on Zoom



Jan 11th - Educated, by Tara Westmore: "Tara Westover was 17 the first time she set foot in a classroom. Born to survivalists in the mountains of Idaho, she prepared for the end of the world by stockpiling home-canned peaches and sleeping with her 'head-for-the-hills bag'." www.goodreads.com

Feb. 8 - Let the Great World Spin, by Collum McCann: "A dazzlingly rich vision of the pain, loveliness, mystery, and promise of New York City in the 1970s." [Let the Great World Spin by Colum McCann | Goodreads](#)



Please contact Sonja Peterson for the Zoom link and/or with book suggestions at dunn.pete.law@gmail.com or 612-242-8711.

"All words are masks, and the lovelier they are, the more they are meant to conceal."
August Eschenburg, Steven Millhauser

The Baker and the Prince: Finding Devotion in Our Next Bread Bake

Our fall bread bakes have been a great success, not just for the delicious loaves produced, but for the inspiring connections made. In October we were honored to host **Jerry Jerabek**, a U of M graduate student who eagerly lent a hand, from shaping loaves indoors to baking at the wood-fired oven.

Jerry, who is busy preparing for high school history student-teaching, showed remarkable openness in spending a Saturday morning tackling a new skill with our seasoned team. His presence was a gift, and he shared something even more valuable over a warm slice of bread: a surprising link between his graduate research and our kitchen endeavors.

Jerry is researching the story of **Wenceslas**, including his commitment to personally providing the elements for Holy Communion. He shared a passage from one of his primary sources, *Legenda Christiani*, which beautifully describes Wenceslas's dedication:

“...during harvest time, in the deep still of night, he would go to his field together with his most faithful companion, about whom I shall later relate a special miracle that beautifully demonstrates both their merits. And having reaped the Wheat, he would carry it home on his own shoulders and grind it in a hand-mill. Being both baker and prince, he would sift the flour, and then, also during the night, he would go for water, drawing it with the words, ‘In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.’ And when he brought it home, he would mix it with fine flour and make wafers from it. And he would hasten to the vineyard, pick grapes, press them with his own hands, pour the wine into pitchers, and save it for use at the holy sacrifice.”

This historical account reminds us that the simple act of bread-making is truly an ancient, devotional endeavor.

Interested in joining our next bread bake on January 10th? Come join us! Email John Jacobson (jacobsonif@gmail.com) or Donna Graveson (donnagravesen@yahoo.com) to sign up to help on January 9th, 10th or 11th. Email Kathy Kufus (kmkufus@icloud.com) to reserve your loaves of bread. We'll be baking: Sourdough (Seeded & North Roads), Whole Wheat, Rosemary, Maroon & Gold yeasted breads, and fantastic scones!

Many thanks!
Rebecca

Young Adult Ministry - Gather Twin Cities

Gather is a ministry for young adults in the Twin Cities; a place for those who are hungry for community and connection with other young adults in the metro area. Setting the table for connection and rest through worship, meals, and monthly events. A place for you to deepen in faith as you discover your identity, uncover your vocation and develop as leaders who do justice in the world. Gather is LGBTQI+ affirming and eagerly invites siblings of any sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression into full leadership and participation. Follow our Facebook and Instagram pages for more information @gathertwincities.

January 10th – 11th - Retreat at the Shores of St. Andrew Bible Camp

Accessing Your Contributions and Community Directory

2025 End of Year Contribution Statements will be mailed in the middle of January once everything has been updated for 2025.

The church has successfully upgraded to using ICON as our church database software system. You can now access your giving records, update address and contact information as well as view the church directory. If you have not set up your account, please email Nathan in the office and he can send you a login email with instructions. Once the email is sent from within the ICON system, you will have 24 hours to complete the setup. Let Nathan know if you missed that window and he can resend the login.

Update! Hope Women's Retreat January 2026

Coming Soon! Hope Women's Retreat January 23-24, Fri-Sat. 2026

The 2026 Women's Retreat will be held again at University Lutheran Church of Hope.

"Mary Magdalene - Spiritual Teacher, Mystic and Embodiment of the Sacred Feminine"

Registration will begin January 4

Schedule:

Friday - 5-9 p.m. including dinner and time for connecting.

Saturday - 8:30-4 p.m. with lunch, programming both in the morning and afternoon.

We'll end with a craft project and a final closing ceremony.

Please contact Ann Beane, spirit.beane@gmail.com or Beata

Rydeen, beatarydeen@comcast.net with any questions you may have.

Recommended reading (optional) :

"The Meaning of Mary Magdalene, discovering the woman at the heart of Christianity" by Cynthia Bourgeault.



President's Report

If you still read newspapers, you might have seen the Oct. 9 op-ed piece by the Rev. David Lose, pastor at Mount Olivet in Minneapolis. Pastor Lose is a friend of our congregation, having been a guest preacher in our pulpit. He also preached at the funeral of our former pastor, the Rev. Craig Shirley.

His commentary challenged one of my core beliefs: that we and our clergy should be publicly outspoken about the moral issues of our day. Pastor Lose was explaining why he had chosen not to add his name to the letter signed by hundreds of faith leaders (including Hope's pastors) urging a special legislative session to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Pastor Lose's argument is nuanced, so I won't pretend that this is a comprehensive summary of his view, but only a glimpse: That he and his colleagues are "committed to preaching, teaching and leading in a way that will not give our members reason to fear that, if we knew how they voted, we might not welcome them to our fellowship." He referred to his position as "an attempt to offer an alternative to the current and increasingly violent us/them pull of partisan politics."

Reading his comments, I was troubled. Partisan politics? There may be partisan politicians involved, but efforts to make our schools and streets safer are bigger than politics. They are matters of right and wrong, of following Jesus' call to love our neighbors. The church can't abandon topics like climate change and racial equality – remember when they were considered uncontroversial? – just because a political party's leaders have decided to exploit them. We are called to be good stewards and to love our neighbors, no matter what.

But we are also called to welcome everyone into our community of faith. That's the admonition from Pastor Lose's commentary that I take to heart. Scripture says that nothing can separate us from the love of God. I hope and pray that no one among us fears being shunned for voting their conscience.

In Christ,

Eric Ringham, Interim Congregational President

Treasurer's Report

November Financial Highlights

- General giving for November was \$47k. YTD totals are \$465k, 91% of the budgeted giving, a strong increase over October numbers.
- Income YTD totaled \$643k at 95% of the budgeted number. This number includes general giving, PEASE Academy rent and rental income; increased from last month's 91% of budgeted YTD.
- Expenses YTD totaled \$691k, which is just 2% above the budgeted amount, an improvement over October. The staff, V&G Board, and Facilities team continue to monitor these expenses.
- We continue to encourage ministry areas (Education, Hope in the World, Worship, Relational and Youth & Young Adult) to continue to utilize allocated funds for their dedicated purposes.

Our new Financial Administrator, Catherine Menick continues her efforts to reconcile accounts, catch up with overdue transactions, set up new ACH payments to improve payment efficiency, and move toward completion of our transition from Old National (formerly Bremer Bank) to Sunrise accounts.

Your support in supplying timely member pledges has been very much appreciated. We have received a strong response to the recent pledging campaign which allows for more accurate and reliable planning for next year's budget. The budgeting process is well underway, and I will be offering an overview of Hope's financial status and the proposed 2026 budget during the Adult Forum on Sunday, February 1. Please come with your questions and comments regarding our congregation's finances. Thank you again for your faithful support of our community and mission.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at jackdant@comcast.net.

Best regards, Jack Dant, Interim Treasurer

Life Events

We're a community called to hold one another in prayer in every season—in our deepest need and grief, and in our experiences of new life. Here are a few of the life events affecting our community. We need your help to know for what we can pray. Please alert a pastor or contact the church office. We include in prayer...

Welcoming children and Baptisms—We pray for all who await and welcome children through joyful and challenging times.

Marriages—We pray for all those preparing for marriage, and for all relationships of commitment.

Deaths— We pray for God's strong embrace for all who grieve deaths and losses, those that are recent and those that were many years ago and whose memories fill us especially in this holiday season.

Significant Illness—We pray for those living with illness, cancer, recovery, uncertain diagnosis, hospice, chemical dependency and other addictions, and mental health struggles. We also pray for caregivers.

We pray for all who are impacted by **new beginnings, separation, divorce, retirement, moves, graduations, and the civil rights movements of this time** trusting in God's love, grace, and guidance at all times.

Join William P. Brown in January for the Rutlen Lecture on Faith and Creation

Event Details

Be-Wilded by Wonder: Just Creation in the Book of Job
January 13, 2026, 6–8:30 p.m.

With William P. Brown

Olson Campus Center, Luther Seminary
1490 Fulham Street St. Paul and livestreamed

Both options are free and open to the public. Registration is required.

Far too often, readers of the Bible find the beginning of the book of Job more fascinating than its ending. But Job's encounter with the God of the Whirlwind marks the climax of the book, a surprising ending that reframes everything before it—including Job's character, God's character, and all creation. What would it be like to read the story of Job by reading the ending first? How does one understand the book of Job as a whole, with creation taking center stage? And what about all those wild animals God presents for Job's consideration? In this presentation, William P. Brown attempts to recover the value of God's creation in Job and for us all in the face of climate crises.

[Register for the In-Person event](#)

[Register for the Virtual event](#)



January 2026 Calendar of Events

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Building and offices closed 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School	2 Building and Offices Closed	3
4 10:30am - 11:30am Worship in Sanctuary, w/ YouTube 10:40am - 11:30am Noisy Offering during worship 12:30pm - 1:30pm Hope in Community	5 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 9:00am - 1:00pm Quilters 12:00pm Thursday Epistle Submission Deadline 6:00pm - 9:00pm ISAIAH Caucus Training 6:00pm - 8:00pm Parents of PEASE support group - 206	6 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 11:00am - 12:00pm Staff Meeting 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School 6:00pm - 8:00pm Parents of PEASE support group - 206 6:30pm - 7:15pm Personnel Committee 7:15pm - 8:30pm Executive Committee	7 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 8:00am - 8:40am Centering Prayer 7:00pm - 8:30pm NO Hope Choir rehearsal	8 Office Hours 9am- 2pm Pickup Basketball 9:30am - 11:00am Dorcas Circle 12:30pm - 2:30pm Spiritual Support Group 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School 6:30pm - 7:30pm AA Group 7:00pm - 9:00pm Worship Planning Team	9 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 2:00pm - 7:00pm Baking Hope preparatons 7:00pm - 10:00pm Craft Group	10 5:00am - 2:00pm Baking Hope Preparation
11 9:00am - 1:00pm Baking Hope Team 10:30am - 11:30am Worship in Sanctuary, w/ YouTube	12 2025 Contribution Statements preparation and mailing this week. Office Hours 9am- 2pm 9:00am - 1:00pm Quilters 12:00pm Thursday Epistle Submission Deadline	13 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 11:00am - 12:00pm Staff Meeting 1:00pm - 3:00pm Baking Hope Board Meeting 1:00pm - 3:00pm Baking Hope Board Meeting 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School	14 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 8:00am - 8:40am Centering Prayer 6:00pm - 8:00pm Facilities Team 7:00pm - 8:30pm Hope Choir rehearsal	15 Office Hours 10am-2pm Pickup Basketball Visitor Article Due 12:30pm - 1:30pm Music that Makes Community 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG 4:30pm-6pm Compassion Care 6:30pm - 7:30pm AA Group	16 Office Hours 9am- 2pm	17
18 9:30am - 10:20am Hope Choir 10:30am - 11:30am Worship in Sanctuary, w/ YouTube	19 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 9:00am - 1:00pm Quilters 12:00pm Thursday Epistle Submission Deadline 6:30pm - 8:00pm Bible and Brews	20 Office Closed 11:00am - 12:00pm Staff Meeting 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School 6:30pm - 8:00pm Vision & Governance Board	21 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 8:00am - 8:40am Centering Prayer 7:00pm - 8:30pm Hope Choir rehearsal	22 Office Hours 9am- 2pm Pickup Basketball 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School 6:30pm - 7:30pm AA Group 6:30pm - 7:30pm Hopeful Hope Team	23 Office Hours 9am- 2pm Women's Retreat	24 Women's Retreat
25 9:30am - 10:20am Hope Choir 10:30am - 11:30am Worship in Sanctuary, w/ YouTube 12:00pm-2:00pm Confirmation	26 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 9:00am - 1:00pm Quilters 12:00pm Thursday Epistle Submission Deadline	27 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 11:00am - 12:00pm Staff Meeting 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School 7:00pm - 8:30pm Racial Justice Team	28 Office Hours 9am- 2pm 8:00am - 8:40am Centering Prayer 7:00pm - 8:30pm Hope Choir rehearsal	29 Office Hours 9am- 2pm Pickup Basketball 3:00pm - 9:00pm P.E.A.S.E. APG After School 6:30pm - 7:30pm AA Group	30 Office Hours 9am- 2pm	31

University Lutheran Church of Hope is a welcoming Christian community of faith centered in God's grace
and called to demonstrate God's love for all the world.
601 – 13th Avenue SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414 ✉ Tel. 612-331-5988 ✉ Fax 612-623-0693 ✉ www.ulch.org

Staff

Pastors:

Rev. Amanda Simons
Rev. Maria Anderson-Lippert

Minister of Worship & Music:

Paul Stever

Church Administrator:

Nathan Obrestad

Financial Administrator:

Catherine Menick

Custodian:

Geremew Beshah

Sunday Opener/Closer

Evan Peterson

Working in partnership with Lutheran Campus Ministry:

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