



PO Box 1259, Livingston  
MT 406-222-0512

# ALC

## February 2025

### Newsletter



### Supporting Families

Dear Children of God at ALC,

I recently heard a startling statistic related to stress that parents are experiencing in the U.S. In a recent study, 48% of parents indicated that they feel “overwhelming stress” on a daily basis. In the news story I heard this in, the reporter first wondered if this is something new. Anyone who is a parent knows that raising children is stressful. It always has been and always will be challenging to raise children. However, there are some factors that make parenting today even more difficult and challenging. One factor has to do with social media. Parents feel more stressed when they see other parents post unrealistic photos or videos depicting an ideal family experience. There are also additional stressors that are unique to our time that place extra strain and anxiety on parents such as the increase in gun violence in schools.

I share all this because hearing this news story made me think about all the parents in our community. Especially all those parents who are connected to our congregation, including the parents of the kids who attend Elevate Montessori. It first made me pray for all those parents. I prayed that God would provide them with the support they need to raise kids in our community. I prayed that parents might experience some peace and relief from all that stress. I also started to wonder what we as a congregation might do to support parents in our community.

I thought back to our adult education session during the summer that focused on learning about the challenges for schools and families in our community. Both the presenters that day (Lori Dust and John Gregory) talked about how vital relationships are for kids and families to thrive. I wonder how our congregation might offer some supportive relationships to parents of young

kids in our community? Many of you have experience raising your own children and even for those of you without your own biological children, you have helped care for raise your “children through the heart.” How might we share some of our relationship experience and how might we build more relationships with parents in our community who are in need of support? What might we do to offer some parents some reprieve from the stress of raising kids in Livingston in 2025?

There are of course many possibilities of ways we might answer these questions through our congregation. There are many ways we can live out our guiding principles through responses to these questions: gathering to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, seeking God’s will, reaching out and welcoming all people with unconditional love, living with a generous spirit, and serving our hurting world with love and compassion.

I would encourage you to keep listening to our community and listening to God. What might God be inviting us to join in? And when an idea pops into your head, share it and let’s see how we can work with God to care for parents in our community!

Peace,

*Pastor Melissa*



## **Dreaming God's Dream**

Much is happening at American Lutheran Church right now. As we move ahead into 2025, we have reviewed the state of our congregation at our Annual meeting on January 19th. During the meeting we approved our Ministry Spending Plan for 2025. It is a bold plan reflecting the work of the Building Task Force and its Phase 1 plans. A new line item for 2025 was included called Building Repairs and Improvements. That line item was approved for 2025 in the amount of \$50,000. That amount will allow us to move forward with the plans to repair and mitigate potential problems with the outside of our building and other building needs. In that Phase 1 plan we will also be taking down a potentially dangerous chimney and replacing an aging furnace that heats our fellowship hall. I am confident and thankful for the work put in by the Phase 1 group going forward to help obtain a contractor that can do the work for us.

During our Annual Meeting we also voted in new officers for 2025 with me being your President, Leslie Beffert as Vice President, Curt Gosda as Treasurer, Jane Haugen as Secretary, and Lana Sheen as Financial Secretary. Two new council members were also voted in, Nancy Curtis and Karla Pettit. I am thankful for the council team that is now assembled, and I look forward to working with this new council in the coming months. It is so good to have some familiar faces again and have new people on board.

As part of the Building Task Force, a Dream Team was formed. This group will have met by the time this message reaches you. I am excited about the ideas that will emerge as this group looks at our untapped resource, our building, to see what might be possible to further the ministry of our church, focusing on our community and for the people who call ALC home. The Finance Team has also met and is listening to a course on Capital Campaigns. The stewardship aspect will be a vital piece of our building projects moving forward. And last, we have a group that will meet to determine what resources we have, for example in available space as well as determining the needs of our space to

update or make the space more usable. I thank everyone who said YES to working in these groups.

Finally, we had our first Prayer Vigil that was attended by 18 people. It was an incredible experience. Pastor Melissa put together a format for the time that people could use, or they simply prayed during the time slot. From the feedback we will do another Prayer Vigil in February so see the details on page 8.

I have a request. I would ask that you pray for one another, pray for our church, pray for your council, pray for your Pastor and pray for our community. Let us lift up our concerns, our joys, our fears, our thanksgiving to Jesus who walks with us in our journey.

Yours in Christ,

***Randy Mogen***

### February Birthdays

- 2 Dennis Harms
- 3 Don Sheen
- 4 Doug Linstead
- 5 Kim Fink
- 10 Mollie Waldum
- 18 Jerry Happe
- 21 Annette Hart
- 21 Sue Muza
- 26 Tanner Johnson
- 29 Dana Latsch



### Electronic Giving

Whether you choose to give online or in person, your support is vital to the continued ministry of our church community. We are so grateful for your generosity and commitment to our shared mission. Thank you for your continued support of ALC!

Donation envelopes are also available in the church hallway.



## **Lutheran Disaster Response**

To give assistance for the fires plaguing California, donate by phone call 800-638-3522.

Checks or money orders can be mailed to:

Lutheran Disaster Response

PO Box 1809

Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

Online: <https://give.elca.org/page/77859/donate/1>

## **ALC-LWR Quilting**

The quilters are back at work!! The first morning was spent organizing all the materials that were donated since last spring. Before and after photos! We're on our way to making a 100 quilts to send around the world through Lutheran World Relief! Come and join us on Tuesday mornings from 9 to Noon. No experience is needed. Truly anyone can help us with this mission.

Are you cleaning out closets? We can use donations of colored sheets (not twin size) and lightly used blankets.



## Developing a Prayer Life

Do you want to do something that will dramatically change your life and maybe the lives of others around you? Something that anyone can do, and it won't cost you anything except a few minutes of your time each day. Spend quiet time each morning with the God who created you! I know. You've heard that before, and while it sounds good, the benefits can be elusive. But have you ever started to do it and stayed with it on a regular and daily basis?

Think about it with me for a minute—I am suggesting that you spend a quiet period of time with the Lord every morning before you take off for your day. If your schedule is anything like mine there may be a few days where that commitment is interrupted, but I still try to find time in that day to keep my commitment. Try not to let those exceptions affect your decision to set aside one on one time with the Lord and dissuade you from starting this hopefully life-changing transforming journey.

I highly recommend doing it in the morning; I love to get up early and watch God at work making a beautiful sunrise. Things seem to come up in the afternoon, and maybe you'll be too tired at night. Get up ten, fifteen, or even twenty minutes earlier to allow for whatever time you need to start with. Maybe have a pad and pen with you. Have a Bible at hand—preferably one that is easy to understand. Maybe start reading a chapter or two from John, or whatever book you wish. Pray for a few minutes—remember, you're just talking with the Lord. You might make some notes on what crossed your mind while you were praying. You may think your mind wanders, but maybe the Lord is telling you something He will come back to later.

Moments spent with the Lord are always well spent. If you have never done this before, try to commit ten minutes each morning to begin with. If you have been doing this on a regular basis, try to increase your time. These few minutes can be life changing!

*Dale and Gloria Guidi, LPA and wife*

## Fireside Chat: Exploring Pathways for Chaplaincy in the ELCA

Join us for a virtual fireside chat with the Seminaries of the ELCA and the ELCA Chaplain Corps, as we explore the in's and out's of serving as a Chaplain in the ELCA!

Thursday, February 13th: 6:00-7:15pm (Mountain time)



## Remember In Prayer

Randy and Linda Holland

Mike and Vicky Ryles

Mollie Waldum

Holly Happe

Carole Fagerli

Anita Bueling

Lynnette Evanson

Bea Huber

Larry Lovely

Denice Harris



Do you have a few spare hours this month to help out with Meals on Wheels? We definitely need more help. This month we will be delivering meals on Wednesday, the 19<sup>th</sup> and Friday, the 21<sup>st</sup>. (Monday is Presidents' Day, so, no meals that day.)

## Spiritual Practices

*“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” -1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Our day-long prayer vigil in January was such a meaningful practice for so many people who participated, so we are going to do it again on Monday, February 24, 7:00am- 7:00pm. You are invited to sign up for a 30-minute time slot to come to ALC’s sanctuary to pray.

Some of the participants in the January Prayer Vigil shared that during their time of prayer in the sanctuary they experienced peace, comfort, strength, encouragement, and God’s love surrounding them. People said it was “spirit lifting”, restorative, wonderful, calming, and grounding. Others said it was nice to have silence and uninterrupted time to pray without all the distractions that are part of our daily lives. Many folks noted that they experienced God’s presence in their time of prayer.

You can pray for our church, our community, your own needs, and our world in whatever way you choose. There will be some prayer stations set up as well as some guidance provided for those who want some suggestions on what to pray for or how to pray. Check out the sign up sheet on the volunteer board.

Come experience this time of gathering together to pray!

We continue to serve the evening meal at Loaves & Fishes on the third Monday of each month (that’s **February 17th** this month). If you would be willing to help, please let Pastor Melissa or Cookie Linsted know or just come down to Loaves & Fishes at 10am and/or 3:30pm.





## Worship Teams



### February

February 2	Curt & Dee Gosda
February 9	Tena Versland, Dale & Gloria Guidi
February 16	Diane Mueller, Ian & Jenna Flatgard
February 23	Randy & Joan Mogen

### March

March 2	Jane Haugen & Dana Latsch
March 5	Doug & Cookie Linsted
March 9	Jim & Bonnie Evanson
March 16	John & Diane West
March 23	Billie Roberts, Anna Smith, Karla Pettit
March 30	Dennis & Billie Kaye Harms

## Benevolence

February's benevolence contributions will benefit **Loaves & Fishes**, an organization that offers complimentary meals daily from 4-6 pm to families and individuals in need. A "community help room" is available where food staples and other donated items are distributed Monday-Wednesday-Friday from 11 AM - 3 PM and as needed. Loaves & Fishes does not discriminate on race, color, national origin, sex, religious creed, disability, age, or political beliefs. Funded entirely by donations, most of our help is from volunteers. Write "benevolence" on your envelope if you would like to help this worthy cause or click the "Give" tab on the church website.

December's benevolence went to the **Elk's Christmas Basket Program** in conjunction with Livingston Resource Center. A donation of \$330 was given. January's benevolence is going to the **Warming Center**.

## **From Your Director of Evangelical Mission, Pastor Kay Wittman**

*Last month, I shared about Hope Lutheran in Bozeman and how their Christmas ministry changed because of work with the Faithful Innovations process.*



This month we'll hear from AMERICAN LUTHERAN, LIVINGSTON, MT, how engaging with Faithful Innovations has changed them.

"Out with the old, in with the new!"

With this saying, we experience the spiritual movement that allows us to see that what we take out of our lives and our churches can be as important as what we bring in. In churches there seems to be a longing to look back, to hold on to the past. Yet the future God is calling us to may require us to look ahead, as many stories in the Bible illustrate.

American Lutheran Church in Livingston, Montana had no idea of what would come of their invitation to join in the Faithful Innovations process, but they soon recognized they had been prepared to begin a new congregational chapter in an unusual way. After the pandemic and with new pastor Melissa Johanson, American had done something every church needs to do—clean out the church. It was time to let go of the stuff that had accumulated, to let go of remnants and relics of the past.

How we maintain our physical spaces has spiritual implications. We become more open to God when we lighten our grip on stuff. Take a look around your church or home—what do you see? Honestly, it might take someone else to see what you can't; familiarity often blinds us to what is in front of us and is holding us back.

Pr. Melissa and the congregation looked anew inside their church building, but especially at the third floor and the classrooms that were a physical reminder of American's glory days when 300 students gathered for Sunday School each week. Ten classrooms hadn't been used since 70's. You can imagine why they hadn't looked closely for years—there is grief involved in confronting the fact that you are not the same church you used to be. The old color crayons, remnants of Sunday School materials, and old technology sat as a museum of the church of 50 years ago. In another space, they were surprised to find two electronic organs that had been tucked under a tarp! Since other items had been stacked around the organs, no one knew they were there. The old organs have since found new homes. Anything useful was recycled or taken to the thrift store and loads were taken to the dump. Other parts of the church got cleaned out as well.

One member who was part of the cleansing process said: "It was not just the space that got cleaned out; it felt like it was soul cleansing for us too."

That soul cleansing created an opening for the Faithful Innovations process which is rooted in deep listening to God and the community. With their coach Jenny Kunka, the listening process caused them to recognize that their focus was on themselves, their building and their own needs.

Further, they thought they knew the Livingston community but realized through presentations by non-profit leaders that they didn't. Listening came with a shock as they heard about the hunger, homelessness, and mental illness, including statistics that said nearly one half of children in the area struggled with food insecurity.

New windows in the first floor were a metaphor for what was happening inside the hearts of congregational members: the windows allow the congregation to see out

and the community to see in. They now say yes more often, not only thinking about the congregation's needs.



In May, the congregation began sharing several classrooms with a Montessori school. There is now a hospitality room that provides welcome to the Montessori staff and a place of rest and respite for families.

Pr. Melissa wrote: "The Montessori asked us if they could have their holiday program in our sanctuary. We said yes. We got a Thrivent Action Grant to pay for treats and light appetizers and snacks afterwards. We had 97 people in our sanctuary with about half of them being under the age of 5 (our average worship attendance is 30-35). It was SO GREAT. It was fun. We had about 10 church folks come. The parents and staff were SO appreciative of the hospitality we provided."

The mission of American, Livingston hasn't changed: it has been and continues to be to love Jesus and share Jesus' love. And yet Paul's words in Philippians 3 are helpful: "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus." Out with our old concerns and in with the future to which Jesus is inviting us!



## Letter from the Freedom in Christ Board

Dear Friends,

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1*

This verse is one of my favorites. It reminds me that there is always a beginning and an ending. That life is an evolution and not static. That change is inevitable. This is what helps me embrace any difficult change that comes along. We humans are not wired to accept change easily! My friends, we at Freedom in Christ understand this, but we must tell you that the season for Freedom in Christ Prison Ministries is coming to an end in February of 2025.

For the past few years, the board of Freedom in Christ Prison Ministry has been grappling with changes in the ministry. Our season started around 2006, when our synod was called to provide spiritual care to the men inside Montana State Prison because there was no full-time pastoral care available to them. FIC became a Synod Authorized Worshipping Community in the prison in 2011 and a full-time pastor was called to serve offering worship services, Bible studies, and one-on-one pastoral visits. Because the men cannot be members of any type of organization inside the prison, they have always been unable to financially support the ministry, and we had to rely on outside support from churches, organizations, and individuals.

Finances have always been a concern for the ministry. COVID was a strange blessing for us, otherwise we may have closed much sooner. During the pandemic we received funds from the government that put us in the black for the first time in the history of the ministry. For one year. After COVID gifts and donations began shrinking and we went back to operating at a loss. This year we are at a \$13,000.00 deficit and our COVID reserve has dwindled. This is after our

pastoral leader has dropped to half-time and receives no benefits.

And so, as everything has a season, it is time to close the ministry. We want you to know that this has been an extremely difficult decision to make, and it breaks our hearts. The Synod Council has been notified of our intent to close and they will tell us what the next actions look like. But, for now, we anticipate the end of February is when we will cease all activity within the prison.

## Shout Outs!!

Shout Out and thank you to those who are making a difference in our community and church! These people and their stewardship are examples of God's loving grace.

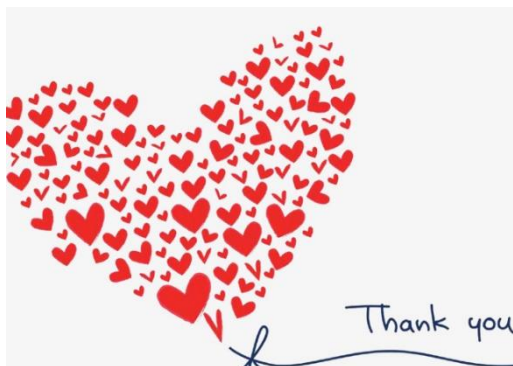
(Remember you can submit something for the shout outs at any time to [alclivingston@gmail.com](mailto:alclivingston@gmail.com)).

Shout out to...

♥ Dale Siegle for serving for six years as a council member. Thank you for helping to lead the congregation.

♥ Dana for his many, many years of serving as the Financial Secretary. Thank you for your role in keeping the finances of the church in order.

♥ Everyone who attended the prayer vigil. Thank you for being willing to spend time praying for our church, our community, and the world and deepening your relationship with God.



♥ Dennis S for his role in leading the team that is getting bids and coordinating work for the exterior of the church. Verne, Dale G, Jerry, and Don for their help on this team as well. Thank you for helping to make sure we are good stewards of our church home.

♥ Annette and Pastor Melissa for all their extra work on the Annual Report. Thank you for helping us to share the story of the ministry ALC did this past year.

♥ Diane M for all her work in creating the Ministry Spending Plan. Thank you for helping us to plan and keep track of our finances.

♥ The Faithful Innovation Team (Dale, Gloria, Lana, Randy, Curt, and Dennis) for their continued willingness to engage difficult questions and consider how to help our congregation get closer to each other, God, and our community.

♥ The quilters for their work in creating beautiful works of love that will go around the world to help people experience God's love.

♥ Diane Mueller & Lana Sheen for organizing and maintaining the ALC-LWR Quilting, Personal Care Kits, and School Kits. These programs continue due to their dedication.

♥ The Mission Endowment Committee (Dale G, Leslie, Anna, Bonnie B, and Larry) for their work in stewarding the funds in ALC's Mission Endowment Fund. Thank you for helping ALC be able to continue to do more ministry.

♥ The Dream Team of the Building Task Force (Jenna, Randy, Dee, Nancy, and Lana) for their initial work in dreaming what might be possible for the future of the church building.

♥ Verne & John for keeping our sidewalks clean and safe!

♥ The crew who took down and put away the Christmas decorations. Thanks for braving the cold and snow!



## **Council Minutes, January 7**

*Financials:* Diane thoroughly addressed the discrepancy from December. The council appreciates Diane's accurate and complete information. An updated amount for the Endowment Fund was provided.

*Pastor's Report:* Pastor thanked the council for the Christmas gift. The Park County Ministerial Association raised \$8,520.19 with the help of ALC and other churches. The Elevate Montessori Christmas Program was a blessing; thanks to those that helped make it possible. 8 Thrivent grants of \$250 each were available.

### **Old Business**

*Benevolence:* January went to the Warming Center. February will go to Loaves & Fishes.

*Building & Grounds:* Motion carried for Boise Brothers to remove the chimney and Graybeal to replace the furnace. Boise Brothers also gave an estimate on other work on the outside of the church.

*Finance:* The 2025 Ministerial Spending Plan was finalized for the Annual Meeting.

*Nominating:* Pastor, Randy, and Lana will have met with the committee to finalize position nominations for 2025.

*Building Usage:* The heating/cooling were installed. Elevate found some mold in 2 areas; KILLZ was applied prior to painting. Elevate appreciated the use of the sanctuary for their Christmas program. Elevate has also contacted ALC regarding the purchase of an AED and this was approved.

*Personnel:* The reviews for Pastor & Annette were completed.

*Annual Meeting:* will have been Sunday, January 19.

*Insurance premium:* the premium estimate was included in the 2025 Ministerial Spending Plan.

### **New Business**

*Circular Window:* Jerry will check with Nevins for a cost on getting the circular window above the entry replaced.

*Meeting with Hope Lutheran:* Similarities exist between our congregations so a meeting between the councils to share information and ideas will be in the works.

*Next meeting:* February 9.



# Christikon Clips

**February, 2025**

*Information for our Congregations*

**Welcome to Pastor Heather Wigdahl as our new Executive Director. She will be on-board the middle of this month.**

She begins with us on the recruiting trail with Taryn.

We are currently **recruiting staff** for the upcoming season. If you know someone who would be a good fit, direct them to <https://christikon.org/employment/> for more information and/or to apply.

**Register NOW** for camp and don't forget to invite a friend!

Go to: <https://christikon.org/registration-individual-information/>.

**Family Adult opportunities** can be found on our website. Our speaker for the Continuing Ed Retreat and Mountain Weekend is Dr. Dave Ellingsen. Register and see details at: <https://christikon.org/adult-family-programs/>.

**Work Weekend** is May 23-26, 2025. Join us in readying the camp for the 2025 season. All are welcome! Register NOW!

**Donate online!** You can use the Internet to make a gift, or to find out more about this special ministry. Go to [www.christikon.org](http://www.christikon.org).

**Save the dates: The Annual Christikon Benefit Auction at the Billings Depot** is coming on **Sunday, April 27<sup>th</sup>**. Do you know of an item, service or getaway that would be a great auction item? Please contact the office!

Watch for further updates on our website or notices at your church.

**Our plans for the 2025** season are going forward and we are excited to welcome you to Christikon this summer! Watch for updates on our website.

**It is the mission of Christikon to awaken and nurture faith in Christ exploring God's creation and the adventure of life together.**

**CHRISTIKON** • 1108 24<sup>th</sup> Street West • Billings, MT 59102  
406 656-1969 • [secretary@christikon.org](mailto:secretary@christikon.org) • [www.christikon.org](http://www.christikon.org)



## Open Position!! Director of Northern Rockies Institute of Theology (NRIT)

We are announcing the opening of Director of NRIT, please download the job description below for more information about the position and responsibilities.

The Northern Rockies Institute of Theology is the continuing education ministry of the Montana Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that equips both lay leaders and clergy for their various ministries.

Agape Circle is a women's Bible study that meets monthly either at church or in a group member's home. The group uses the Bible study out of the Gather magazine. This month we will meet Thursday, February 27 at 7pm at Kim Fink's home.



### Meet with Pastor Melissa

If you didn't get a chance to meet with me over the summer (or want to meet again), I have a sign-up sheet available in the

sanctuary or just reach out to set a time. I look forward to visiting with you!

**2025 Church Directory:** The updated church directory is now available! Grab a copy at church this Sunday.

## Adult Education

**Sessions in February will be this Sunday, February 2nd and the 23rd.** Pastor be sharing about two books I recently read that were published in 2024. Both Sundays we'll hear a bit from the authors of the books (via video) and then have some conversation about how we might apply what these authors wrote. The book I'll share about this Sunday is *Funding Forward: A Pathway to More Sustainable Models for Ministry* by Grace Pomroy. The author conducted research of churches across the country that are engaging in creative new ways of financially sustaining church ministry. ***"Funding Forward provides a path to help a congregation discern God's mission, reconnect with the neighborhood, and find a new, more economically sustainable model for ministry."*** Join me this Sunday to be inspired by churches who are thriving in ministry and discern how we might use these tools to do likewise.

