

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



# A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDING BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON



Dear friends in Christ,

Over the past year we have continued to experience changes in the world around us. Even as our church finds ways to adapt to this changing world, we find hope in the unchanging and always present promise of God’s love through Jesus Christ. We change and adapt not to conform to the world but because we believe that the gift of God’s Son is for the world, and that our congregations and worshiping communities are places to gather and be sent into the world, where we will tell the story of God’s love in word and deed.

The ministries of our congregations, our synods and the churchwide organization provide ways for the church to move beyond the boundaries of structures and geography and to share God’s love with people in our neighborhoods, our cities, our country and beyond. We engage in this ministry knowing that our church walks by faith, trusting in God’s promise in the gospel, and that we exist by and for the proclamation of this gospel word. In John 15:5, Jesus reminds us, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” We are connected by the promise that we do all through Christ and can do nothing apart from him.

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. Just as we rely on God to sustain our faith, we rely on each other to sustain the ministries that offer God’s love to the world. Through your generosity to each expression

of this church — your congregation, your synod and your churchwide organization — you add to our collective voice proclaiming God’s love for all.

I am grateful for your generosity over this last year. My gratitude spreads far beyond your generous financial gifts. You’ve shared your gifts of time through countless hours of volunteering, serving and accompanying. You’ve shared the gifts of your voices as we’ve tried to discover and learn how God is calling us to be the church now and into the future. And, finally, dear church, you have shared the gift of the realness of God’s love with the world around you. Be well, dear church, and stand steadfast in the promise of God’s love and grace as you take that promise with you into the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” —John 15:5

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# 2023 Annual Report of Grace Lutheran Church

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***We are a community  
of believers in Christ  
called to be servants to all people.***

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Dear friends and fellow members of Grace Lutheran,

Another year has come and gone giving us a time to reflect on the past and to sneak a peak forward to what the new year holds for us. Of significant remembrance is the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the existence of Grace Lutheran Church. Countless individuals and families have worshipped, been baptized, confirmed, married, memorialized, expanded their faith through Sunday school and Bible studies, served our local and extended community through the vital Food Pantry, Book Ministry, annual food/clothing/financial gifts to local schools, support of blood drives etc, etc. 2024 will be another different and challenging year with unique opportunities, as has been the case for the previous 59 years. All of us as communicants of our church hopefully will reflect on how each and every one of us can be more supportive of our numerous community outreach capabilities and how we can increase in our donation of time, treasure and talents to spread the good news of faith and fellowship and to be the best stewards of all the gifts that we have been bestowed upon by our creator.

Praying for a blessed and healthy 2024 to each and every member of Grace Lutheran and that we all strive to live up daily to our calling of being a "community of believers in Christ, called to be servants to all people".

Blessings to all,  
Bob Masters  
*2023 Council President*





# Membership & Milestones

## Membership (as of 12/31/2023)

Baptized 189  
Confirmed 157  
Voting Members 126

3 Members  
Died

8 people transferred  
their membership to  
another congregation

1 New Member  
Welcomed



5 Youth Confirmed



1 Child Baptized



4 Children attended  
Communion Class



# Pastor Leslie's Report



## Virginia Synod & Tidewater Conference Events

- \* Monthly VA Synod Rostered Ministers Worship & Check-in Zooms
- \* Monthly Tidewater Conference Meetings
  - \* Served on VA Synod Council
  - \* Served as chair of the VA Synod Bishop Election Committee
- \* Served as a volunteer chaplain at Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp
- \* Tidewater Conference Church Administrators Gathering
  - \* Unconscious Bias Workshop
- \* Boundaries & Inclusion Education for Gender Justice
- \* "Way in the Wilderness" Bible Studies
  - \* "Looking to Love: LGBTQIA+ Conversations with Our Church" Webinars
  - \* Gathering of the Ministerium
  - \* Bishop Milton's Installation

## Community Connections

- \* Monthly meetings of CLASS (Communities Loving and Serving Schools)
  - \* Toured ForKids
- \* Toured the Chesapeake We Care Resource Center
- \* Volunteered at 4-H Reality Store at Western Branch High School
- \* Met with the principals of four local schools

## Continuing Education

- \* Completed "Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising"
  - \* "A Middle Eastern Christian Perspective on Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Readings"
    - \* Truth in Love Workshop: "Introduction to Conflict Management"
    - \* "A Hot Mess: Tackling a Congregation's Messy and Missing Records"
  - \* "Write the Sermon before Sunday"
  - \* ULS Lazareth Lecture—The Rev. Dr. Pamela Cooper-White speaking about her book "The Psychology of Christian Nationalism"
  - \* ULS Spring Alumni Convocation
    - \* "The 3 Gaps Hindering Your Church's Work"
  - \* "Churchonomics: A New Model for Funding Your Church and Revitalizing Your Community"
    - \* "Redefining Success for Small Churches"
      - \* "Depolarization Training"
  - \* LGBTQIA2S+ Cultural Competency Training



**2 Funerals**



# Worship & Music

## Average Sunday Worship Attendance

Onsite: 47  
On Zoom: 19

## Christmas Eve Worship (Hybrid)

Family Worship @ 5pm—29  
Candlelight Worship @ 7pm—50

## Ash Wednesday

7pm (hybrid)—50

## Maundy Thursday

7pm (hybrid)—42

## Good Friday

7pm (hybrid)—37

**Easter Vigil** was held at First Lutheran (Norfolk).

## Guest Preachers

The Rev. Jean Bozeman  
The Rev. John Wertz Jr.  
The Rev. Harry Griffith  
The Rev. Brett Wilson  
The Rev. Dr. John Myers  
The Rev. Beth Woodard  
The Rev. Kaye Hute



Savanna was hired and started as **Tech Host** in February.



Countless volunteers helped to make worship happen on site and online.

We received a **Digital Ministry Grant** from the ELCA, with which we bought an Owl (camera, microphone, speaker combo) to improve hybrid classes/meetings and new cords that allowed us to move the Sanctuary Monitor computer into the Vestry.



Many hands made light work for the **Hanging & Unhanding of the Greens.**



The **Bell Choir** played in worship 4 times during the year.

Seminarian Breezy served as our **Ministerial Fieldwork student** during the Fall Semester.



# Christian Education

## Sunday School

During both the Spring & Fall semesters, we offered age based Sunday School classes (Elementary, Middle/High, and Adults).

The Adult class included participants both online and onsite. During the Spring they used the ELCA's Faith Lens Blog and in the Fall started an overview of the Bible as part of a Confirmation refresher.

The children and youth prepared and recorded a Christmas program that was played during worship on Dec 31.



## Confirmation

We continued our Confirmation Cohort in partnership with Emmanuel (VB). There were 5 students from Grace, and they all completed the two year program and affirmed their Baptisms on Pentecost Sunday.

## Monday Bible Study

We gathered on Zoom most weeks to study the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah.



## Wednesday Night Bible Study

We continued to gather most weeks for a Potluck dinner and onsite and online for study.

Topics included: Galatians, The Apostles, The Refugee Crisis, Ruth, The Draft Social Message on Gun-related Violence and Trauma.

During Lent, we worshipped together using Holden Evening Prayer.

During Advent, we worshipped together around the theme of "Gifts of Advent."



# Fellowship

## Ladies Lunch Out

January—Olive Garden  
February—Black Pelican  
March—Southland  
April—Red Robin  
May—Forbidden Palace  
June—Wickers  
July—Smokey Bones  
August—Vino  
September—El Loro  
October—Waterman's  
November—Sunrise Pizzeria

The **Craft Group** met most months after worship to work on projects together.

**Men's group** met monthly for a potluck breakfast and work around the church.



A **potluck breakfast and egg hunt** were held between worship services on **Easter Sunday**.

The **"Fat Tuesday" Pancake Brunch** was held after worship on Sunday, February 19.



A **potluck lunch** was held after worship on **Pentecost Sunday**.



A **hot dog lunch** was held after worship on **Reformation Sunday**.



## Fellowship (continued)

We played **"Wrap Your Crap" Bingo** after worship on August 20.



A group attended the **Tides Game** on **Father's Day**.

A **potluck lunch** was held after worship and service projects on **"God's work. Our hands."** Sunday.



A **church picnic** was held after worship on July 16th.



Grace's **60th Anniversary** was celebrated with a slideshow and **potluck lunch** following the Annual Meeting on November 5.

The **Ladies Christmas Lunch** was held on December 9.





# Outreach

## Mission Support

(offerings passed on to VA Synod and ELCA)

\$20,069.85  
(~10% of our income)

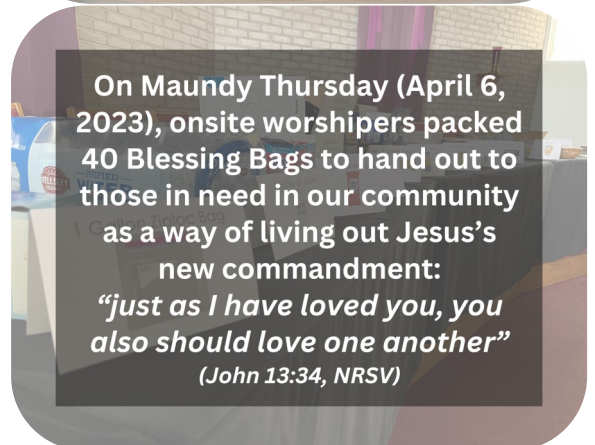
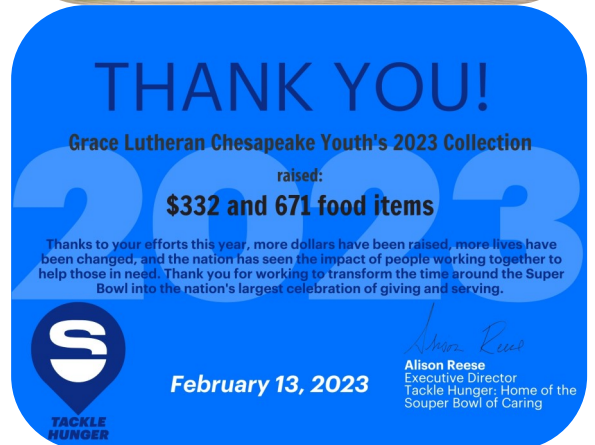
The **Threaders** made and distributed 140 walker bags.

The **Book Ministry** distributed books each week to Food Pantry clients. Including using Thrivent Action Teams to buy special books in honor of Black History Month, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

We hosted 3 American Red Cross **blood drives** resulting in 64 blood units being collected.

2 **Flea Markets** were held. Proceeds supported:

- Grace Preschool's Lisa Marie Justice Scholarship Fund
- Seminarian Breezy's ministerial fieldwork





# Outreach (continued)



In June, we collected the following items for Thalia Gardens Nursing & Rehab.

- |                                  |                                       |                                  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 10 bottles of body wash          | 5 packs of women disposable underwear | 2 sets of dominoes               |
| 7 bottles of body lotion         | 3 packs of men's disposable underwear | 1 mancala game                   |
| 7 bottles of body powder         | 12 pairs of ladies underwear          | 12 sets of playing cards         |
| 5 tubes of toothpaste            | 3 pairs of men's pajamas              | 1 set of checkers                |
| 3 toothbrushes                   | 10 pairs of men's underwear           | 1 tower tumble game              |
| 2 tubes of denture cleaner       | 3 ladies snap up robes                | 1 Jenga game                     |
| 18 sticks of deodorant           | 3 ladies sweatpants                   | 20 large print color books       |
| 6 containers of lip balm         | 3 ladies sweatshirts                  | 3 large print Sudoku books       |
| 4 bottles of shampoo             | 7 ladies nightgowns                   | 15 large print word search books |
| 4 bottles of conditioner         | 15 pairs of socks                     | 9 large crossword puzzle books   |
| 7 bottles of hand lotion         | 4 men's t-shirts                      | 1 dot to dot book                |
| 18 bars of soap                  | 8 lap blankets                        | 5 arts & crafts kits             |
| 7 combs/hairbrushes              | 20 walker bags                        | 4 packs of coloring pencils      |
| 17 bottles of nail polish        | 16 dry erase markers                  | 11 packs of crayons              |
| 2 bottles of nail polish remover | 1 small dry erase board               | 1 portable CD player             |
|                                  | 50 beanie babies                      |                                  |



We collected 62 winter coats and 12 knit hats for local students.

A \$250 Thrivent Action Team Grant was used to buy 15 turkeys and pans for the Indian River Middle Schools Thanksgiving Baskets.



In August, we collected school supplies for two local primary schools

- |                          |                            |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| • 48 Backpacks           | • 72 24-Pack Crayons       |
| • 50 Pencil Boxes        | • 26 pocket folders        |
| • 1,164 #2 Pencils       | • 9 pkg note book paper    |
| • 108 Pencil Sharpeners  | • 9 spiral notebooks       |
| • 104 Glue Sticks        | • 12 composition books     |
| • 86 Highlighters        | • 2 3-ring binders         |
| • 98 Dry Erase Markers   | • 1 pkg construction paper |
| • 64 Scissors            | • 6 report covers          |
| • 61 Colored Pencil Sets | • 18 file folders          |
| • 89 Rulers              | • 1 pkg index cards        |



In November, we collected 115 toys for Toys for Tots.

**Building Use Groups**

- \* Alcoholics Anonymous
- \* American Sewing Guild
- \* Good Mourning Support Group
- \* Girl Scout Troop 490



**"Drop Your Drawers" Sunday  
January 29, 2023**

We collected 374 new sports bras & pairs of underwear along with numerous new & gently used t-shirts for the Urban Renewal Center (a homeless ministry in Norfolk).



On "God's work. Our hands." Sunday (September 10, 2023) the people of Grace Lutheran worked on the following projects:

- Weeded flower beds around the church property
- Signed "cards" for members who are deployed, incarcerated, or away at college
- Made Communion Bread
- Packed 52 Winter Blessing Bags
- Packed 425 Staff Appreciation gifts for local schools
- Packed food bags for the Food Pantry to distribute
- Labeled books for the Book Ministry to distribute
- Sewed buttons on walker bags made by the Threaders

A \$250 Thrivent Action Team Grant was used to buy and fill Easter Eggs, which were distributed by the dozen to Food Pantry clients.

# Food Pantry

The Food Pantry distributed 114,641 lbs. of food to 7,313 individuals. This year we saw a large increase in the number of families coming to the food pantry each Monday. We have been averaging 50+ families receiving food each Monday. We experienced many new families and individuals coming to the Food Pantry. These were families who have come to the pantry for the first time or have not come in several years. Many have a limited income, recently lost a job or have family members who have moved back into the house. A lot of this is due to increased food, gas and rent prices. The people did not have enough money to purchase the food that they needed. The recipients were very appreciative of the food.

When delivering the food to the people's vehicles, we have many people say "They are so grateful that our church has the food pantry" and we receive countless "thank you's".

The food we distribute is made possible by the generous donations of money and food from our congregation, area churches, area schools, organizations, and individuals. In addition, we receive United States Department of Agriculture food from the Food Bank of Southeastern Virginia and Eastern Shore. In order to distribute and have the food, we have a dedicated group of approximately 11 volunteers on Mondays for distribution and 8 volunteers on Fridays to pick up food at the Food Bank of Southern Virginia and Eastern Shore in Norfolk, and bring it back to the church. The 3,000–4,000 lbs of food each week is manually handled three times—loaded onto trucks, offloaded at church, and put on shelves and in freezers. Without these volunteers each week, we would be closed and the hungry people in our community would not receive the food. Thank you for your prayers and support of the Food Pantry Ministry.

Everyone visiting our Food Pantry gets food. NO ONE leaves without food.





## Food Pantry (continued)



The Food Pantry received food and monetary donations from:

- Georgetown Primary School
  - Grace Preschool
  - Souper Bowl of Caring
- Woodland Heights Baptist Church
  - Girl Scout Troop #490
  - Indian River Middle School
- Norfolk Highlands Primary School
  - Miller Global Partners
  - Mayflower Food Drive
  - Aimaleigh's Boutique
    - Bunco Group
- Thrivent Action Team grants
  - GLC Members & friends
- and people in our community

### Food Pantry Financials:

Beginning Balance:	\$11,410.18
Amount of Donations:	\$4,629.43
Expenses:	\$6,125.13
Ending Balance:	\$9,914.48



The Food Pantry prepared and distributed 33 Christmas Food Baskets to families in our community. The items included one turkey and a large box of food which provided several meals. The baskets went to families in need of food during the holidays. A Thrivent Action Team was used to support this project.

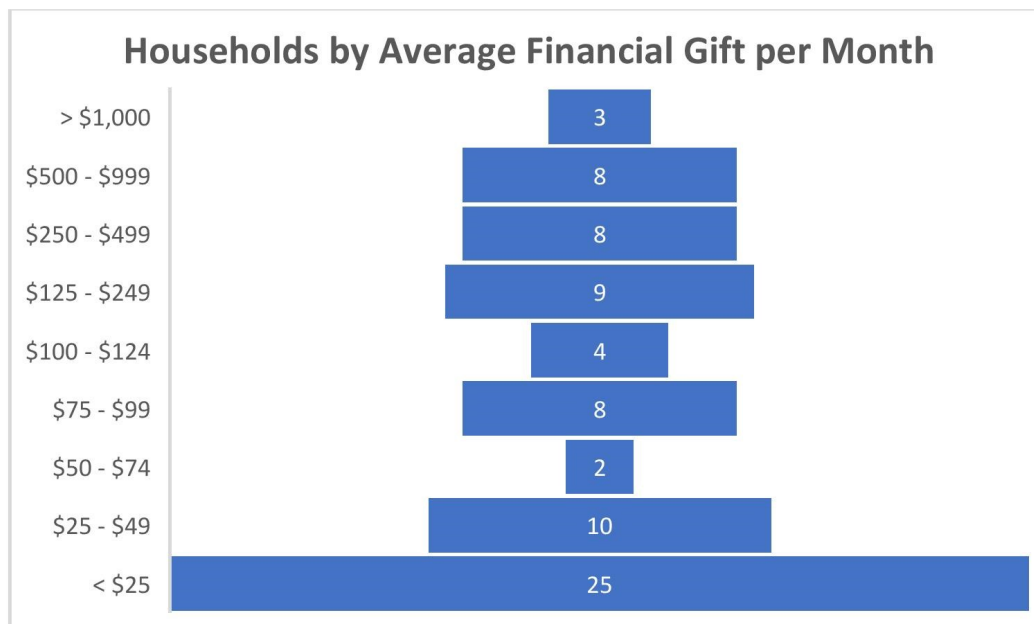
# Financial Secretary's Report

Total giving for 2023, including all contributions, was \$201,212. Total gifts were roughly \$20,000 less than our expectations for the year (from the 2023 Ministry Spending Plan approved in November 2022), \$20,000 less than total giving in 2022, and similar to giving back in 2021. Details are provided in the table below.

	2023 Actual Giving	2022 Actual Giving	2021 Actual Giving
<b>General Fund</b>	<b>\$189,572</b>	\$207,385	\$185,011
<b>Food Pantry</b>	<b>\$4,986</b>	\$3,661	\$5,346
<b>Growing in Grace</b>	<b>\$5,097</b>	\$6,796	\$10,801
<b>Endowment</b>	<b>\$0</b>	\$0	\$400
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$201,212<sup>1</sup></b>	\$221,580	\$201,558

Note 1. There were "other" designated funds this year (Fall Flea Market proceeds)

For 2023, there were 77 contributing households, the same number as last year. The distribution, by the size of the average monthly financial contribution, is provided below.

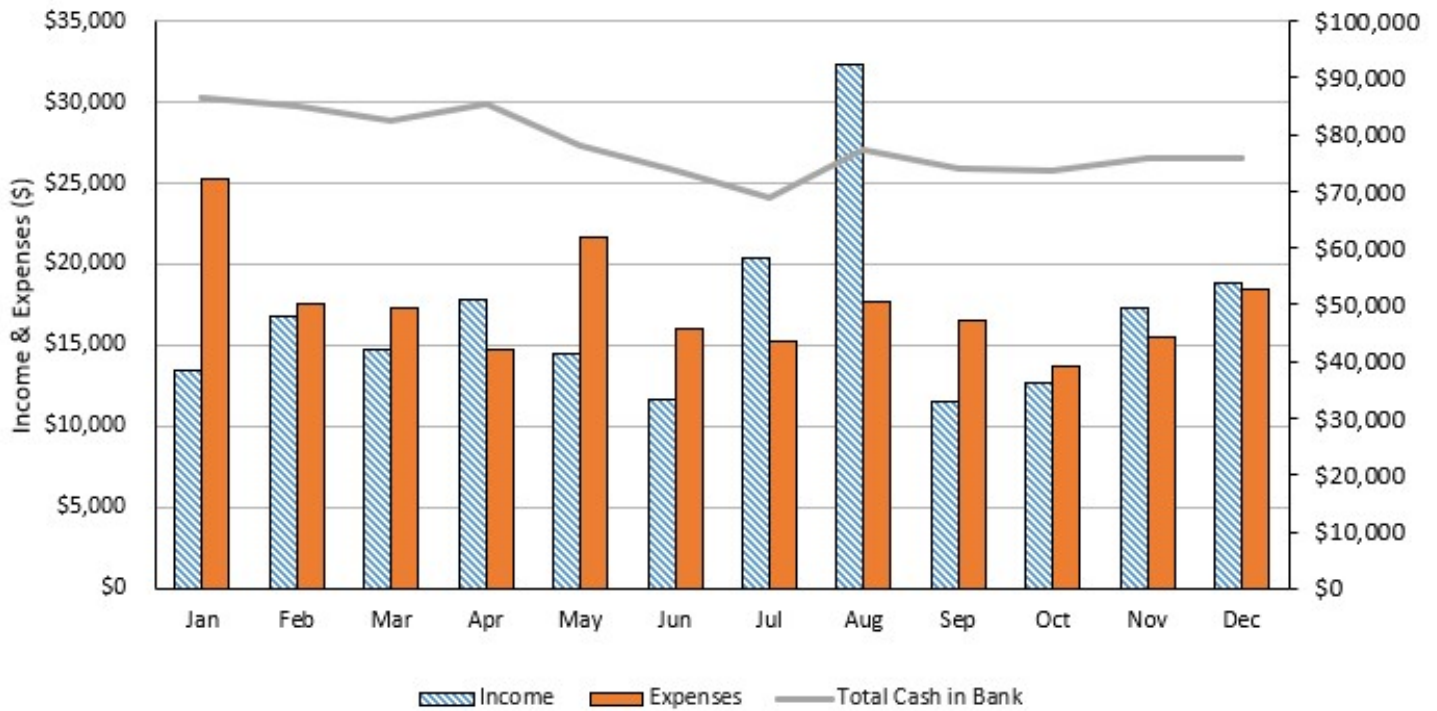


Of note, of the 77 households,

- 16 provided a single gift for the year
- 3 provided quarterly gifts
- 26 provided monthly gifts
- 13 provided weekly gifts
- 40 percent used electronic giving (accounted for 46 percent of the financial gifts)
- 60 percent provided "physical" gifts (accounted for 54 percent of the financial gifts)



# Treasurer's Report



	End of 2022	End of 2023
General Fund	\$63,763.77	\$46,912.18
Hubert Memorial Fund	\$10,340.42	\$0
Growing in Grace (Building Fund)	\$17,801.83	\$22,517.71
Memorial Fund	\$371.00	\$368.00
Sabbatical Fund	\$5,029.76	\$5,604.93
<b>TOTAL CASH IN BANK</b>	<b>\$97,306.78</b>	<b>\$75,402.82</b>
Endowment Fund	\$129,222.23	\$132,783.06

The "Bridging the Gap" Giving Campaign raised \$13,424 over a three-month period. Overall, 25 households contributed to the effort, and there were eight anonymous gifts.

In August, Council decided to contract with Clergy Financial Resources to prepare an application for the Employee Retention Tax Credit. The paperwork was completed, but the current wait time to hear back is 6-8 months, so we don't expect to hear anything until mid-2024.

# Congregational Meetings

## **Special Congregational Meeting Sunday, July 9, 2023 after worship**

When the Preschool ran short on money in Dec 2022, the Director stopped paying herself. She is owed ~\$16,000 in back pay. Due to low enrollment for the 2023-24 school year, the Preschool Board voted to suspend operation of the Preschool.

The congregation passed a recommendation from the Council to pay the Preschool Director's backpay using the Hubert Memorial Endowment fund and a life insurance policy that had been gifted to the church.

The Preschool Board will apply for the Employee Retention Tax Credit and hopefully will be able to pay the church back this money.

## **Annual Congregational Meeting Sunday, November 12, 2023 after worship**

- Elections
  - ◆ Nominating Committee (1 year term)—Sandra Frankel, Marlene Hubert, Kurt Longsworth, Monique Schroeder
  - ◆ Congregational Council (3-year term)—Brandon Breitsprecher, David Cooper, Fred Schleede
  - ◆ Congregational Council (1-year term)—Debbie Dougherty
  - ◆ Preschool Board (3-year term)—John Hawk, Kathie Rokitski
  - ◆ 2024 VA Synod Voting Members—Ed Opperman & La Quita Opperman
- 2024 Investment in Ministry Plan—Based on \$200,000 expected giving, the first draft of 2024 Investment in Ministry plan was \$20,000 over budget. To align expenses with income, Pastor Leslie will go to ¾ time and the Church secretary will go to a 4-day, 12 hour work week.
- Constitutional Updates—Updates were approved to bring Grace's Constitution in line with the fact that we are incorporated and no longer need Trustees. All changes bring sections into conformity with a section of the *Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. Article C16.04 now applies and only one congregational vote is needed.