# The First Edition

January 2026

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## Looking Forward to the New Year!

We have double the fun as followers of Christ. As we follow through the church calendar, we celebrate the New (church) Year as we go into December, just before the start of Advent. Now we celebrate the New Year again, beginning a new calendar year with those around us. In both celebrations we have the opportunity to rejoice in the faithfulness of our loving God and to look forward to the day when we live with God forever.

Now when we gather as God's people, we can look forward to the New Year. We look back on the past year and give thanks to God for the blessings given us, for the challenges God has brought us through, and for the fact that God has preserved us in the true faith for another year. We look forward as well, trusting in the promises of God and taking a good hard look at how we can continue to serve our Lord in this next year.

May God bless you as you worship and share God's love and throughout the New Year!

## Storytelling in Lent

This Lenten season we will have multiple opportunities to share stories together. As we echo the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the desert, we will share in a journey of learning about one another and growing together in faith. During mid-week Lenten service, we will continue to utilize the Holden Evening Prayer liturgy and we will hear stories of faith from First English members. Additionally, we hope to produce a devotional filled with stories and reflections from First English members that people can take home. More information to come! Reach out to Pastor Luke or Pastor Alison for more info.

First English Lutheran Church
Cannon Falls

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507-263-3042  www.firstenglishchurch.com

## Church Office

507-263-3042

Office Hours:
M-F, 9 am - 3:30 pm

E-Mail: info@firstenglishchurch.com
Website: www.firstenglishchurch.com

Pastor: Luke Hollander
507-218-1311
lukeh@firstenglishchurch.com

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alisonb@firstenglishchurch.com

Treasurer: Phyllis Althoff
phyllisalthoff@gmail.com

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kathye@firstenglishchurch.com

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jserres@mac.com

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janerichard@mchsi.com

## Church Council

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jacobsonphilip84@gmail.com

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Phyllis Althoff
Scott Johnson
Austin Noble
Amanda Thompson
Julie Gergen
Kelly Miller
Anne Shoemaker
Carna Visagie

## Foundation Board

Barb Elias
Dean Kautz
Emily Spicer
Denise Holz
Tiffany Kiffmeyer
Kathy Swanson

**Visit our Website for Updates!**

www.firstenglishchurch.com

## Pastor Luke

lukeh@firstenglishchurch.com
507.218.1311

## Note from the Pastor

People of FELC,

Happy New Year! 'Tis the season for reflecting on the past year and imaging what the next year might bring. First, I am full of gratitude. Gratitude for serving as the Pastor of First English – still the best job I have ever had and a marvelous community of people to serve alongside! Gratitude for our community's response to the Spirit's nudging. And gratitude for the energy of this place, to name a few. We have much to look back on and be proud of and much to look forward to.

Over the last couple of weeks, I keep reflecting on a conversation I had with a few parents of younger kiddos at a Family Fellowship event. I think it best articulates what has been happening here at First English and will help direct us into our future. In the midst of their busy schedules, these parents showed up on a weeknight by choice. We shared in friendly conversation before the conversation turned to our kiddos. At that point, we were all imagining what kind of church we want for our children: a place where our kids feel welcome and want to be, a community grounded in the wideness of God's love, and a church with opportunities to serve, to be in intergenerational community, and to be participate in the fullness of what it means to be church.

Thanks for 2025 and here is to a great 2026!

Pastor Luke

## Next Family Fellowship Event January 8

We hosted our first Family Fellowship Event in December. A few parents met and chatted. It was a great time for fellowship where we simply got to know one another, and we reflected on what kind of church community we want First English to be.

Our next events will be

**Thursday, January 8, from 6 to 7:30pm,**

**Saturday, February 7, from 10 to 11:30am, and**

**Thursday, February 26, from 6 to 7:30pm.**

Some snacks and beverages will be available, but if you feel like bringing anything to share, it would be welcome! Come for as short or long as you can!

This is a loosely organized fellowship time, mostly intended for us to be together and determined by the families as the events progress.

## Pastor Alison

alisonb@firstenglishchurch.com

## Note from the Pastor

A BIG THANK YOU to all the kids that participated in the **Christmas Program** this year – you did a wonderful job telling about Jesus' birth!

Thanks to all the teachers and parents that helped with the **Christmas Program** in any way. Your commitment to helping the children at FELC share the Good News is so appreciated!

**Sunday School classes will begin again on Sunday, January 11, 2026.**

Thank you also to everyone who helped with this year's **Youth Bake Sale** on December 21! Over $800 was raised to support summer youth trips.

## Upcoming Conversations

The **Faith and Life Conversations group** will meet again after worship service starting on Sunday, February 1 to learn about *STORYTELLING*. We'll experience what it means to begin to write your own faith story.

Here is the list of topics for the rest of the program year…

| Date | Topic | Facilitator(s) |
|---|---|---|
| *(No meetings scheduled for January)* | | |
| Sunday, February 1 | **A Somali Immigrant's Experience** | Sayid Ahmed Hassan |
| Sunday, February 15 | **Faith Journey Story Telling** | Pastors |
| Sunday, March 1 | **Dealing with Grief** | Kay Sabin |
| Sunday, March 15 | **All About Coffee** | Jeremy Irrthum |
| Sunday, April 19 | **Friends of San Lucas Update** | Bill Peterson |
| Sunday, May 3 | **U.S. Immigration System** | Pastor Luke, Brian McDonald |

## PRAYER Requests

The prayer concerns you fill out or email to me will be added to the prayer list each week which will be sent out to the Prayer Chain members.

There are several ways you can add a prayer concern to this list:

- Go to FELC's website and click on the "Prayer" link, then fill out the form online.
- Fill out a prayer card which you can find at the Welcome Desk in the Narthex.
- Put a prayer concern up on the prayer wall.

God listens to and answers prayer and the more "pray-ers", the better! There is power in corporate prayer. I encourage you to lean into this truth and trust your concerns with the Prayer Chain.

If you would like to be a member of the Prayer Chain, please let Pastor Alison know and she will add you to the Team.

### Special Prayer Request

A special prayer request was received for **Adam VanHandel** for a successful surgery and healing.

# New Baby?

## We want to know!

Are you expecting a child through birth or adoption? Do you have a new infant at home? In these sacred times of welcoming a baby, First English Lutheran Church is here for you. We have resources to support the whole family and look forward to connecting with you! Contact our office for more information.
For baptism requests, please fill out the Baptism Request form found on our website at www.firstenglishchurch.com.

# Women of FELC Gathering

## And Bible Study

Keep your eyes and ears open for information about the **Women's Bible Study**. We'll begin again in January on the second Tuesday of the month, **January 13** at **10 am** in the Family Room.

# This Month's Youth Program Updates

## Sunday School Update

We had good participation in Sunday School last year. The two primary factors for this are our amazing volunteer Sunday School teachers and the fact that our youth enjoy coming to church. Teachers, thank you for your commitment and for sharing God's love with our youth! Parents, thank you for continuing to bring your kiddos.

We have something fun in store for 2026. In talking to parents, we realized there are multiple things we want for our kids' Sunday School experience: we want them to enjoy coming to church, to learn what it means to be part of a Christian community/church, and to know God's love. Of course, there are others as well.

First off, we will continue to have Sunday School from 10:15-10:45 on Sundays when there is normal school (taking Sundays off when students have Monday off). And we are going to try a few new things during Sunday School time in order to help achieve these goals. The Sunday Schoolers are going to do more singing. We will continue to have a more traditional Sunday School on the first and third Sundays of the month and Pastor Alison will help with the curriculum. On the second Sunday of the month, we will try out some more family oriented activities. This could look like family fellowship or large group activities for the kids while the adults have discussion. On the fourth Sunday a month, we will be experimenting with some intergenerational programming. This could be a great opportunity for people across ages to participate in church life together.

We are thankful that Pastor Alison has joined us and will help lead us in these ministries.

**Schedule: Sunday School** in large group will be held on **January 11** and, on **Sunday, January 18,** children will sing during worship and family fellowship will be held after service. No Sunday School during the annual meeting on January 25.

## 2026 Summer Camp!

Good Earth Village is our area Lutheran Bible Camp. Pastor Luke serves on their Program Committee and is an advocate for their wonderful ministries! Camping Ministries are often formational in the spiritual development of our youth. We hope to lead a confirmation camp at Good Earth Village next summer and that youth from First English will start signing up for the multitude of their summer ministry offerings.

For more information, please go to www.goodearthvillage.org or talk to Pastor Luke.

# Confirmation Updates from December

Confirmation continues to be a high point for Pastor Luke. We continue to learn together about what it means to be Lutheran, ask questions, and discover what it means to live out our faith. We will resume our **Wednesday night programming on January 14**. We give thanks for our small group guides! Pastor Luke will continue to lead Confirmation programming going forward.

# High School Youth Group Update

Every Wednesday night, starting on January 14th again, high schoolers are invited to come for pizza at 6pm, then hang out in the youth room to play games and check in with Pastor Luke. We have a small group that comes every week and Pastor Luke continues to be inspired by their choice to come hang out at church. We could still use a parent volunteer to help with this.

**The lock-in has been rescheduled to Saturday, January 24**. All high school youth are invited to attend this fellowship event! We will begin gathering at 5pm and will lock the doors of the building at 6pm. We will order pizza, play games, watch movies, and simply have a good time. Students should bring their sleeping bags and pillows and we will have a number of Sunday School rooms they can sleep in. Pastor Luke still needs an adult volunteer to help be present for this event. **Please RSVP** to Pastor Luke so he knows who to expect.

First English is traveling to Guatemala again in the summer of 2026. High schoolers are invited to participate in this trip. See additional article for more details.

## Cannon Falls Food Shelf

For over 30 years, the volunteers of the Cannon Falls Food Shelf has devoted their energy to passionately advocating for the needs of our community family.

**Hours:**
**Thursdays**
**3-6 pm**

**Consider donating funds or food to restock the shelves for our community today.**

The Cannon Falls Food Shelf is run by a local volunteer board and is not under the administration of First English Lutheran Church.
Tax ID# is 30-0221349.
Contact Info: 507-819-0236, cannonfallsfoodshelf70@gmail.com

# About the Good Samaritan Fund

The Good Samaritan Fund is a joint effort of area churches (through the CCIC) to support community members with emergency needs. Donate to help your community members today! Any community members can donate to the CCIC Good Samaritan Fund directly.

The Good Samaritan Fund is available to assist Cannon Falls community members with funds for emergencies. Each household may use these emergency funds only ONCE during the calendar year. For requests, please contact Pastor Shannon Bauer at 507-298-7719 or Lori at 507-298-7282.

All other inquiries for monies should be done through the Public Safety Building - 918 River Rd., Cannon Falls.

**In Memory of Suzie Topp**
Sarah Novotny

# Let Us Know

## When Your Contact Info Changes

In this day and age when phone numbers, mailing addresses and email addresses are frequently changing, getting ahold of our church members can be challenging, especially when unexpected or emergency situations develop.

If your address, email or phone number has changed, please call (507-263-3042) or email (kathye@firstenglishchurch.com) with your current information. We will do our best to keep you informed of important notices.

# Love in Outreach Ministry

## This Month's Focus—Jesus Driven

The Love in Outreach Team has selected Jesus Driven as the ministry they will support in the month of January.

Jesus Driven is a nonprofit located in Red Wing, MN. They provide car repair and other services to low-income individuals and families. The need for this kind of support is so high that they have been growing a wait list. A couple started this ministry in 2018. If you'd like to learn more about them, check out their website: https://jesusdriven.org/.

On **Sunday, January 11**, we will have a noisy offering to support the Jesus Driven organization.

## FELC Office Hours

Our church office hours are
**Monday-Friday,**
**9 am-Noon, 1-3:30 pm**
Closed on Thursday, January 1 and Monday, January 19.

## First English Plans Third Trip to Guatemala

Join Pastor Luke and Bill Peterson as they lead a third team from First English on a cultural immersion trip to the western highlands of Guatemala. Our host is "The Mission" in San Lucas Tolimán, which has served the people of San Lucas since 1963. We will learn about Mission programs, visit communities and sacred places, and immerse ourselves in the ancient culture of the Mayan people.

**Dates of the trip are July 26 – August 1**. This trip is open to participants ages 15 and up (younger if accompanied by a parent).

This is a great opportunity to learn about international development work, to gain perspective on another culture and to experience first-hand what God is doing in San Lucas. We will end the trip with one night in the beautiful colonial town of Antigua.

**Cost of the trip is $1500**. This includes: airfare, trip insurance, ground transportation, hotels and meals. Everything except a couple of meals and souvenirs! Participants need valid passports (not expiring before 2027) and must be able to walk on uneven ground.

Please contact Pastor Luke or Bill if you need financial assistance.

**To register, make a $350 deposit with First English by February 1st. Group size is limited to 12.**

For questions, contact Bill at 612-325-3667 or bipet001@gmail.com. Bill is the recently retired Executive Director of Friends of San Lucas and has led dozens of groups to San Lucas. For more information about the Mission and Friends of San Lucas go to: sanlucasmission.org.

## Live Streaming Worship Services

The livestream of our 9 am worship service is available on YouTube via our website, www.firstenglishchurch.com and aired on the local HBC Channel 12 *(check local listing for schedule)* & MediaCom cable channel 12 *(11 am on Tuesday, 3 pm Wednesday, and 4:30 pm on Saturday)*

# Council Highlights

The First English Lutheran Church Council met at their scheduled meeting on December 18, 2025. Here are some highlights.

Approved agenda with additions Business/Action Items
J. Speaker in kitchen;
K. Sunday School

Approved November 20, 2025, council minutes.

Received written reports from Pastor Hollander and Pastor Bondy.

Approved Treasurer's Report, subject to audit. Phyllis Althoff reported that FELC is registered for the MN Paid Family & Medical Leave program.

Appointed Cathy Rehm to 3-year term (Feb 2025 – Jan 2028) on Audit Committee.

Approved 2026 budget to be presented at January 25 congregational meeting for approval.

Pr. Hollander and President Peterson will plan annual meeting. Annual meeting reports from all committees/teams/organizations due January 1.

Reviewed draft of job descriptions for Pr. Hollander and Pr. Bondy.

Scholarship policy group presented revised application process and application form. Discussion about perhaps being more specific with scoring used to award scholarships to prevent misunderstandings.

Permanent name tags have been ordered.

Somali outreach: Bill and Emily Peterson met with one of leaders of Somali community to discuss ways we can support/work with them.

Organist: Kathy Illa will continue to play, with Pr. Bondy helping out, as search for organist continues.

A speaker will be installed in kitchen.

Sunday School is exploring offering intergenerational trivia.

Austin Noble reported that we need to hire a tech person to help with final installation of security cameras.

Respectfully submitted,
Diane Johnson

## Next Council Meeting:

**Thursday, January 15, 2026**
**at 6 pm**

**New Year wishes just for you;**
**Happiness and peace in all you do;**
**May God bless your home and family too;**
**May God be with you the whole year through.**

# Mark Your Calendars!

## Congregational Meeting!
## Sunday, Jan. 25

Our annual congregational meeting is scheduled for Sunday, January 25 after worship! All hands are needed for this official meeting.

A special meeting to discuss the 2026 church budget will be held on Sunday, January 18 after worship.

## 2026 Offering Envelopes

The 2026 Offering Envelopes are available at the welcome desk. If you have been using envelopes or notified the church office that you prefer to use envelopes, a numbered box is now available to you.

Members do not have to use a special offering envelope in order to give. Please be sure to note your name or your 2026 household offering number if you are donating via cash or check throughout the year.

Questions? Please contact the church office at 507-263-3042.

# January 2026

**JAN 1, THU NEW YEAR'S DAY**
Church Office Closed

**JAN 4, SUN**
9 am Communion Worship
No Sunday School
10 am Decoration Takedown by Altar Guild

**JAN 7, WEDS**
No Confirmation Classes

**JAN 8, THU**
3-6 pm CF Food Shelf
6 pm Family Fellowship

**JAN 11, SUN**
9 am Worship
10:15-10-45 am Sunday School

**JAN 13, TUES**
10 am Women's Group Gathering and Bible Study

**JAN 14, WEDS**
6 pm Confirmation Supper and Class

**JAN 15, THU**
3-6 pm CF Food Shelf
6 pm Church Council Meeting

**JAN 18, SUN**
9 am Communion Worship
10 am Congregation Budget Meeting

**JAN 21, WEDS**
6 pm Confirmation Supper and Classes

**JAN 22, THU**
3-6 pm CF Food Shelf

**JAN 24, SAT**
5 pm Youth Lock-In

**JAN 25, SUN**
9 am Worship
After Worship Annual Congregational Meeting

**JAN 28, WEDS**
6 pm Confirmation Supper and Classes

**JAN 29, THU**
3-6 pm CF Food Shelf

**First English Lutheran Church**
511 W Belle St
Cannon Falls MN 55009

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# Thank You
## for Attending our Christmas Eve Services.

Thanks to all of you who helped make our Christmas Eve services so wonderful including—the Altar Guild, the Choir, the Bell Choir, the Brass Ensemble, the Children, the Sound Tech People, the Readers, the Ushers and Communion Servers. And of course, YOU, in the congregation!
The celebration of our Savior's Birth would not have been as beautiful without each one of you!