

Congregation Assembly Minutes—Feb 2,2025

1. Governance Board (GB) Chair, Todd Wegman, opened the Congregational Assembly on Sunday, Feb 2, 2025 at 1:00pm.
2. Elder, Michael Schaffer, led the opening devotion and prayer.
3. **Attendance:** 63 attended in person. 4 online. Quorum required: 44 voting members present (20% of 217 voting members). Quorum achieved.
4. **Minutes** from Sep 22, 2024 Congregational Assembly were provided online. Friendly typo amendments were provided. Pam Mann then noted there were discrepancies with finance numbers not adding up on the minutes. Motion to table approval of minutes until next month. Motion seconded and Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.
5. **Vision statement** was read by the congregation in unison led by Todd Wegman (see PowerPoints).
6. **Ministry Action Plan** was reviewed by Todd Wegman (See PowerPoints).
7. **Pastor's Report.** Pastor Flahn reported on three areas: small groups, prayer, and the work in Liberia. Currently 8 small groups are meeting and several people have expressed interest in beginning new groups. We thank God for what is happening in small groups. A Congregational Prayer meeting occurs on the 1st Wednesday of the month in the sanctuary. A planning team has been formed to strengthen this monthly meeting. Pastor Flahn encouraged everyone to consider this monthly prayer gathering which is powerful. "Let's build a house of prayer." The mission team is leaving for Liberia next week and the school that OSLC built will be dedicated while the team is there. A vision that started 14 years ago has come to fruition with the help of God! While Pastor Flahn is in Liberia, Pastor Diefenthaler will be on call.
8. **Elder's Report:** Official Acts from 2024 and 2025:
 - Baptisms 2024: 7; 2025: 1
 - 1st Communion 2024: 4
 - Confirmations 2024: 4
 - Marriages 2024: 1
 - Deaths 2024: 5; 2025: 1
 - Transfers out 2024: 4

Additionally, Rene Stein reported that Elders are responsible for the worship and spiritual life of our congregation. She shared that there is still an urgent need for ushers, worship and communion assistants, streamers, soundboard operators, slide operators, readers, greeters and altar care volunteers. If you are interested in serving in any capacity, please use the serve-card in the pew racks or contact Stephanie in the office.

9. HR Team: Lee Bodden, HR Team lead, provided background and information on HR team accomplishments. The HR team was established by the Governance Board to evaluate and update current human resource-related activities, guidelines, procedures and policies for OSLC's 40 plus employees and make recommendations regarding benefits and best practices. In the last year they have accomplished much including:

- Review and Update Human Resource Guidelines and Procedures defined within the Employee Handbooks, producing an up-to-date edition for GB Approval.
- Interact with GB to Obtain up-to-date versions of OSLC Policies for Handbook inclusion.
- Review and update OSLC position descriptions to reflect current titles and duties.
- Review and ensure that a fair performance review process is in place for all employees.
- Define and support employee onboarding and offboarding activities.
- Collect and version control all forms and checklists used for onboarding and offboarding.
- Clarify Exempt/Non-Exempt timekeeping policies for full-time and part-time employees.
- Review Current OSLC benefits and recommend additional essential benefits needed.
- Review the OSLC retirement plan and recommend vital improvements to the plan.
- Support the Call Committee with hiring incentives and retirement plan recommendations.

Lee also shared current and proposed employee benefits. The HR team is recommending short and long-term disability, life insurance and retirement benefits funded by OSLC and OA. The total cost of retirement benefits alone would be between \$44, 000 and \$90,000 (Thrivent 403B vs Concordia Plan). Other benefits would require additional funding.

10. Open Arms. Becci Stewart, Director of Open Arms, reported on OA events since the last Congregational Assembly, including the Harvest Festival, Open Arms Thanksgiving Feast, Christmas Concert, and combined Church/OA Christmas party. She thanked the congregation for their significant financial and volunteer support for all those activities. She also provided information about the staff professional development days. The new HVAC system requires some work to provide heat as designed. Tom Moser, OSLC facilities director, is working very hard with the contractor to correct the issues. Martha Steinbach enthusiastically shared about the very successful Lutheran National Schools Week. "Read Across America" is the next big opportunity for congregational members to support Open Arms by reading to the children. Finally, note the Pizza Fundraiser going on now!

11. Youth and Children's Ministry. Fox Wilmot, Director of Youth and Children's Ministry, shared the blessings of a strong volunteer corps of Sunday School Teachers /Leaders and a large participation of children in the Christmas performance of "The Empty Manger." Goals for Children's ministry include seeking feedback to determine needs; fostering a sense of community with Open Arms families; connecting with local elementary schools; inviting more community families for VBS and building a robust children's program. Challenges include consistent Sunday School attendance and

low enrollment/participation and that more children are present during the 10:45 service than the 9:30 education hour. Youth Ministry accomplishments include new communications tools, youth engaging in faithful conversations; youth individually seeking to come and participate; and progress is being made toward Youth gathering Fundraising goal. Youth ministry challenges included inconsistent attendance, transportation needs of youth and lack of email interaction. Goals for youth ministry include enforcing youth safety precautions; establishing more streamlined communications; beginning continual Bible study/reflection with High Schoolers; participating in a SED Middle School Retreat in March; sending youth to New Orleans this summer for the Youth Gathering and involving more parents/youth in confirmation using a small group approach.

- 12. Financial Report.** Brian Modeste, GB assistant financial officer, presented the current financial picture for Our Savior and Open Arms. Current picture is very good because we have received some large gifts including a bequest from the estate of Nancy West and we are still not paying the salary and benefits of a senior pastor. Thus, giving is ahead of expectations and spending is below budget. BUT we passed a deficit budget in September, meaning we are expecting to dip into cash reserves if our giving decreases and/or spending increases. Please consider your own investment in God's work at Our Savior. We are still accepting pledge cards.

Cash on hand as of Jan 31, 2025: \$823,162 compared to \$593,560 on Aug 31. 2024

Mortgage Balance as of Jan 31, 2025: \$1,254,324 compared to \$1,324,842 on Aug 31, 2024: \$70K pd against principal since Aug, '24. Monthly payment is \$18,427.00. The term on note is 2035 but our payoff may be a few years earlier.

Church financial activity FY 25: 9/1/24-1/31/25

General Fund Giving: \$ 432,422

Designated fund giving \$ 76,032

Total Giving \$ 508,454

General Fund Expenses \$ 263,190

Designated fund expenses \$ 40,254

Total Expenses \$ 303,444

Net General Fund Activity \$ 169,232

Net Designated Fund Activity \$ 35,778

Open Arms financial activity FY 25: 9/1/24-1/31/25

Tuition/Contributions \$ 655,844

Open Arms Expenses \$ 628,432

Open Arms Balance \$ 27,412

- 13. Pastor Flahn's Vision. The Governance Board asked Pastor Flahn to share his thoughts with the congregation after the meeting earlier in the month.** In Aug '23, Pastor Peter asked Pastor Flahn to consider stepping up to the role of full-time associate Pastor during the time of a senior pastor vacancy. Pastor Flahn had many questions, which were answered before he accepted the position. Some members of the congregation were unaware that Pastor Flahn had completed not only a bachelor's degree in theology but also the LCMS EIIT (Ethnic Immigrant Institute of Theology) program qualifying him for ordination in the LCMS. He also has a Master of Divinity from Lancaster Bible College. Pastor Flahn has served as a bi-vocational assistant Pastor at Our Savior for twenty years leading the New Hope Congregation and working with Pastor Peter to integrate New Hope into Our Savior. Pastor Peter and Pastor Flahn's vision was to further strengthen Our Savior as a diverse multi-cultural disciple-making church. Pastor Flahn's last 16 months have been exhilarating, and he is so appreciative of the support, prayers and encouragement he has received. Pastor Flahn also addressed some recent comments about racism and disrespect. He adamantly proclaimed that OSLC is not a racist congregation. If it were, he and his family would not be here. He suggested that every church struggles to build a diverse community. However, he has felt an unfair pressure from some to move to Liberia more quickly and he has felt that some have seen him as a hindrance to calling a new senior pastor which has been hurtful to him. Pastor Flahn and his wife, Marie do have a vision to return to Liberia to manage and expand the new school which OSLC has built. There is not a specific timeline for that move as it will take time to raise support and prepare for a move after 25 years in the United States. Until then, Pastor Flahn desires to continue to follow God's call to serve at Our Savior and continue to work with us to solve our challenges together. He asked us not to be anxious but to trust God in the process. Pastor Flahn stated, "I am available to continue serving my congregation, Our Savior Lutheran Church in any capacity." He said he would not mind walking alongside a new senior pastor as he discerns God's timing and plan for himself.

Discussion comments included support for Pastor Flahn, the potential for him becoming our senior pastor, the need for a transitional interim to help us address issues and help us to move forward in ministry; the current leadership void as many of the CEO tasks of the senior pastor have been disbursed to volunteers, and Todd Wegman, chair of the Governance Board clearly stating that the GB has full confidence in Pastor Flahn and his ministry among us.

- 14. The Governance Board proposed an amendment to our Bylaws** to allow real-time online attendance and voting at congregational voting events be made available at the discretion of the Pastor or Governance Board. Motion was seconded. Question was asked about platforms that would be used. Answer: a specific platform is not named in the bylaw. We have used both Zoom and live-stream platforms with voting via chat or phone call/text to special number. Question was called. Vote was unanimous in favor of the bylaw amendment. Bylaw amendment is below:

4. Attendance, Quorum and Voting Regulations:

a. Attendance. Real-time online attendance may be made available at the discretion of the Pastor or Governance Board.

b. Quorum. Twenty (20) percent of the Congregational Assembly members shall constitute a quorum for any Congregational Assembly. In the absence of a quorum, those present in-person and online (real-time) may fix a new date for the meeting, said date to be publicly announced at least seven (7) days prior to the date of the meeting. Those members present in-person and online (real-time) at the reset date shall constitute the quorum.

c. Voting Regulations. There will be no voting by proxy or absentee. Voting procedures will be conducted in a manner which validates Congregational voting membership. Validated Members who are present in person or online (real-time) may vote.

d. Affirmative Vote: The affirmative vote of two-thirds of the votes cast at a meeting shall be required for adoption of any of the following matters...

...The affirmative vote of a simple majority (i.e. > 50%) of the Congregational Assembly members present in-person and online (real-time) at a meeting shall be required for adoption of any other proposal or action by the Congregational Assembly. A written ballot shall be used for any matter at the discretion of the Chair of the meeting of the Congregational Assembly or upon request of three Congregational Assembly members. Those members voting online (real-time) may still vote but may not have the benefit of a secret ballot.

- 15. Call Committee proposed a resolution** for an Intentional Interim Call Process. Prior to the introduction of the resolution, Robb Wilmot and Robin Miliner provided additional background information. There is a sense of urgency as the number of candidates is limited, so if this resolution is approved, the Call committee will move quickly to interview and make available information with a tentative call service scheduled for Feb 23rd. Discussion included questions about the nature of the relationship of the intentional interim and Pastor Flahn and Pastor Diefenthaler stated that the intentional interim would be the senior pastor and would supervise all the staff including Pastor Flahn. Pastor Flahn would not be pushed out but rather would continue to fulfill his duties as the associate pastor. Several questions were asked about providing specific job descriptions, expectations, boundaries, etc. we would hold for the intentional interim. Pastor Diefenthaler again stated that the intentional interim would serve as the Senior Pastor and one of the things he would do is be responsible for assessing the needs of the congregation. Tina McGuffey read a segment from the LCMS Transitional Interim Ministry website that states that the congregation will establish a transition team to work with the transitional interim. Ethel Rukenbrod asked the resolution be considered and seconded. Additional discussion included more information available on the Transitional Interim Ministry website and the fact that the SED President recommended an interim for us. Finally, Ethel Rukenbrod stated that Pastor Peter was the longest serving pastor we have ever had and in 22 years in was involved and engaged in every aspect of ministry. We are all

grieving his departure and Pastor Flahn is also grieving his friend and mentor. The question was called and unanimously approved to end discussion. There was a friendly amendment to change the term Intentional to Transitional in keeping with the new LCMS terminology. The vote included about 58 yes votes and six no votes. The motion carried. Approved resolution is below:

Whereas Our Savior Lutheran Church's (OSLC) Divine Call on July 28, 2024, was declined, and

Whereas an anonymous survey of the congregation raised concerns about several issues and

Whereas the Southeastern District (SED) President recommended that OSLC consider calling an Transitional Interim Pastor to assist in, among other things, executive decision-making and the unification of our congregation and staff in our mission and ministry. Therefore, be it

Resolved that the Call Committee request the SED President provide a list of qualified Transitional Interim Pastors. And, be it

Resolved that the Call Committee interview the available candidate(s), seeking a good fit for the needs of our staff and congregation, and will provide an opportunity for congregational members to see recordings of the interview(s). And, be it

Resolved that the Call Committee organize a Call Service under the guidance of our Circuit Visitor or his designee where one or more candidate(s) who appear to be the best fit for OSLC will be presented so the congregation can prayerfully consider and issue a Divine Call to one of them. And, finally, be it

Resolved that should none of the candidates be a good fit for OSLC, the Call Committee will continue working with the SED President towards a successful conclusion.

- 16. Final resolution** was offered by the Governance Board to approve Roger Harrison as the lay delegate to the Southeastern District Convention in May 2025. Resolution was seconded. Roger indicated that he would represent us and would provide a report back to the congregation. Pastor Diefenthaler also mentioned that this is where District elections are held and our SED President is up for reelection for another three-year term. Question was called and vote was unanimous to approved Roger as the lay representative. Approved resolution is below:

Resolved that Roger Harrison be approved to be the lay delegate to the Southeastern District Convention in May 2025

- 17. Announcements and Closing:** Next Congregational Assembly will be held in June '25. We give thanks to God for his continued blessing on OSLC and for all the those who faithfully serve and are committed to the OSLC mission and ministries. Pastor Flahn closed us in prayer and in the singing of the Doxology. Todd Wegman closed our Assembly at 3:45pm