



First of the Month @ CLC

February 1, 2023

Dear Christ Lutheran Church,

Every year I go in for my annual physical. My doctor does all sorts of tests and scans and then tells me about my health (at least from her professional opinion). Every year, I also prepare a State-of-the-Church address to the Church Board in January. In many ways, this State-of-the-Church is an annual health report. The Church, like our bodies, gives information about our relative health. I hope you find this report interesting and helpful.

If the “church physical” would be like my medical physical, I would imagine my doctor saying something like, “you are in the process of change; get ready for a new normal.”

To begin with, we look at worship. Worship is a key indicator of how a Church is doing. Our faith is predicated upon giving priority to the Lordship of Jesus and honoring him with the best of all of us (i.e., time, talent, and treasure). And since COVID, things have changed and we have entered a new normal. In 2022 the average on-campus Sunday attendance of our English-speaking worship was 202.7. The average on-line worship viewership was 95.8. In 2022 the average on-campus Sunday attendance of our Lahu-speaking worship was 47.5. The average on-line worship viewership was 132.4. Our combined 2022 worship averages are: on-campus = 250.2; on-line = 228.2. The chart below shows a comparison with 2021 and 2019 (pre-COVID).

2019 English	2021 English	2022 English
317 on-campus	166.3 on-campus 97.05 on-line	202.7 on-campus 95.8 on-line
2019 Lahu	2021 Lahu	2022 Lahu
58 on-campus	46.4 on campus 82.8 on-line	47.5 on-campus 132.4 on-line

What you see is that COVID became a game-changer in terms of tracking worship attendance. While English on-campus worship numbers have grown, on-line has remained level. And Lahu on-campus has remained level, but on-line has grown. The challenge behind these numbers is not knowing who is worshipping on-line, whether they are members or visitors, and if they are engaged elsewhere in ministry. It appears this will be a challenge as we continue to offer on-line worship.

It is worth noting that on any given Sunday, our on-campus worship is made up of roughly 13% non-members. There is no telling how many non-members are tuning in to our on-line worship.

We also look at financial giving. Our total financial giving (member and visitor non-designated) for 2022 was \$1,000,726. In 2021 it was \$989,316. In 2019 it was \$1,072,302. This would indicate that, while our giving dropped from 2019 to 2021, it has picked back up for 2022. The even better news is that our pledge drive in 2022 had 154 giving units pledging \$800,890 for 2023, up from 138 giving units pledging a total of \$661,534 in 2021 for 2022!

Another aspect of this “new normal” is the ability for folks to give on-line. In 2019 there were 58 donors who gave \$178,460 on-line. In 2022 there were 117 donors (45% of our regular givers) who gave \$315,317. This past year we added Venmo and Zelle as on-line giving options. My guess is that, as we add younger folks to our membership, on-line giving will increase.

We also look at statistics of membership activity. In 2022 we celebrated 14 baptisms (7 of which were Lahu). Comparatively, in 2021 we celebrated 7 baptisms. In 2022 we had 7 funerals/Celebrations of Life, and mourned the passing of four members (Charlene Engelsingaard, John Mann, Vicki Harden, and Eleanor Hawkins). Comparatively in 2021 we had 10 funerals/Celebrations of Life (mourning 8 members). In 2022 there was only one wedding (McKean-Fabing), compared to 2 in 2021. And in 2022 we welcomed 36 new members (16 of which transferred from St. James Lutheran Church), and released 17 to inactivity or change of church.

It must be re-stated that, due to the possibility of on-line worship, it is not always easy to know the membership status of those who do not worship in person. It will be “the new normal” to go the extra distance in staying connected to those who are not present on-campus on Sundays.

Membership activity went well beyond the typical reported numbers. In 2022 there was never a loss of events/programs/outreach taking place on the church campus and on-line.

- Weekly, a dozen or so folks provide a meal for 40 +/- residents in housing transition at The Majestic Lodge, and the Sequoia Lodge, and during the cold season dozens of members serve at the Warming Center
- Weekly dozens (mainly seniors) gather for an on-campus and on-line stretching class called “Faithful Fitness.”
- This fall CLIPArts returned to activity with 21 children participating in the production of “Annie.”
- This year ChristKids Preschool has had its enrollment challenged due to Universal TK, but is doubling their effort to reach families and be a resource to them in educating children and grounding them in the story of Jesus. At year-end we had 45 children enrolled (in past years, we would average 60 enrolled).
- Regularly dozens of members attend the Mary-Martha Circle, Hannah Circle, and Well Women Bible studies, the Friday morning Men’s Bible study, the Tuesday Bible-Meets-World Bible study, the Thursday on-line Theology on Tap Bible study, Thursday’s Small Group for Big Questions, and the Sunday Morning Bible Study.
- We had three sessions of small groups (Lent, summer, and fall) with an average of 55 participants in each.
- Worship Choir has blossomed under Paul’s leadership with a total of 28 singers, 12 ringers in the bell choir, and the worship band has 20 participants helping to lead worship.
- Our pre-K through 6th grade Sunday school averages 15 children, our middle school and high school “Deeper” class averages 22, and our college “Relate” group averages 7.
- Last year the senior high school winter retreat had 16 participants, and the summer senior high servant trip had 18.
- Our quilters have been busy. Our regular quilting group made 5 baptismal quilts, 10 quilts for people in need, 7 quilts for the Church Street Christmas, 25 quilts for Parenting Network, and 39 quilts for Visalia Emergency Aid. The Global Cut-and-Sew group made 56 quilts for the Lutheran World Relief in-gathering, 99 backpacks/school kits, and 5 quilts for My Father’s House. In addition, both groups took on the project of making 40 napping mats for ChristKids Preschool.
- Weekly folks gather on-line for a Caregivers Group, a Christian Meditation group, and a prayer group.
- Throughout any given week we have ten 12-Step groups that meet on campus.
- Congregational events were well attended, such as the Harvest Festival, the Fourth of July worship and potluck, the JPEG event in Exeter, Family Camp, and the Church Street Christmas.

- Weekly seven 7-8 Grade Confirmation students meet for class, and monthly five 9th Grade Confirmation students meet for class.

Of course, another “new normal” aspect of these days is my pending retirement, and the work to call a new lead pastor. This past year CLC has engaged the help of The Joshua Group (consultants Jeff Kjellberg and Rick Heltne) to facilitate our pastoral leadership transition. There have been surveys, interviews, presentations, meetings, and recommendations. A Transition Team has been built, and a Call Committee convened. The amount of work that has gone into this process has been significant. More work is yet to be done. The Church Board is working closely with the Bishop’s office to secure an interim who will help guide the way until a new pastor is called. Hopefully (and prayerfully) what is a “new normal” will result in a newer normal of pastoral leadership that will take CLC into the future of God’s design.

The conclusion of this State-of-the-Church report is to suggest that Christ Lutheran Church is a healthy ministry site, ready to embark on the challenges of what lies ahead, and capable of exceeding past ministry accomplishments. As one who dearly loves who and what this church is, you will remain in my prayers.

Pastor Brian Malison