Worship & the Arts

2026 Annual Report

- Spring & summer of 2026 youth and members of the congregation were invited to provide special music for our worship services.

- **Easter Sunday** included brass quartet, timpani, the Sanctuary Choir & the Celebration Ringers Handbell Ensemble

- The 4 pm service on **Christmas Eve** highlighted an 'Intergenerational Orchestra', which included both youth and adults of the congregation

- Lenten services provided *Holden Evening Prayer* with members of the sanctuary choir as music leaders

- Worship in the park – planned for August 16th – was canceled due to the aftermath of the derecho storm

- Music Program:
    - Sanctuary members: currently 30 members
    - Celebration Ringers: 11 members
    - Treble Makers Handchime choir:
        - May not happen this season due to low attendance and lack of interest
    - Renovations to the Music Room and Handbell Room was completed in August of 2026; it has been well received and appreciated by all those who use the space.
        - Thank you to Milan Coburn for his work on removing one wall and creating 2 rehearsal spaces with easy access.
    - In place of a Youth Handbell Ensemble (due to lack of interest), various youth will be invited periodically to participate as instrumentalists and provide music for Sunday worship services.

Christ Lutheran YOUTH

Youth Ministry - Annual Report 2026

Year in Review

2026 has been a year of transition, growth, listening, and learning for CLC Youth Ministry. Karina Barlow began serving as Youth Leader in January, and one of the most important things learned this year is that successful youth ministry begins with listening to our young people.

As we have worked together throughout the year, our youth have become increasingly comfortable sharing what is working, what isn't, and what they want their ministry to look like. They are bringing friends, developing stronger relationships with one another, and beginning to take greater ownership of the community we are building together.

Our goal continues to be creating a place where young people can have fun and build friendships, while also giving them a safe and welcoming space to ask difficult questions, explore their faith, and discover what it means to be part of the life of the church.

Programming Updates

Circle – 9th–12th Grade
Our weekly Circle gatherings resumed in August, with consistent attendance of approximately 12–15 youth. Each Sunday evening begins with dinner together, followed by a game and time for conversation. Discussion topics rotate between questions submitted by the youth and conversations centered on the Scripture readings heard in worship that morning.

This format developed with significant input from our youth representatives. After some trial and error early in the year, we listened to what our youth told us they wanted from Circle and adjusted accordingly. That willingness to communicate has become one of the strengths of the group. Our youth are comfortable telling us what is and isn't working, bringing friends, developing close friendships, and helping shape Circle into a ministry that belongs to them.
We also enjoyed opportunities simply to be together this year. We held an outdoor movie night at CLC during the summer, with more than half of our Circle youth attending. A planned pool party was disrupted by the derecho and its aftermath, but instead of canceling, we relocated to a movie night at Karina's house. Nearly all of Circle attended, while parents gathered upstairs for their own game night.
We also ended the previous program year with a Senior Night honoring our two graduating seniors—with games, at their request!
Going forward, we hope to build on this foundation with additional social events, guest speakers, service opportunities, and deeper conversations about faith.

Fusion – 5th–7th Grade
Fusion continues its journey through our Bible Survey curriculum, with this year's lessons focusing on the New Testament.

One significant change this fall was moving our 8th graders into their own dedicated Confirmation class during Formation Hour, making Fusion specifically a 5th–7th grade ministry. We welcomed 15 students in grades 5–7 on our first Sunday of the new program year. This group tends to be a little quieter than our older youth, but they have shown themselves to be focused and engaged participants.

We are grateful to have two adult teachers, as well as a high school senior volunteering with Fusion. Recruiting additional adult volunteers remains a priority so that we can return to a team-teaching model and consistently have two adults serving together.

Confirmation – 8th Grade
In August, we celebrated two young people as they affirmed their baptisms and completed their Confirmation journey. Both demonstrated tremendous commitment to the process. Despite plenty of scheduling challenges, they continued to show up and give us their time. They completed meaningful service projects—some of which are still continuing—and wrote thoughtful faith statements.

We are especially grateful for the wonderful mentors who walked alongside them throughout their Confirmation journey.

Our next Confirmation class began during Lent with six students, each paired with a mentor. This fall, we made a significant change to the program by giving 8th-grade Confirmation its own class during Sunday Formation Hour.

Finding a weekday meeting time that worked with increasingly demanding student schedules was difficult, and we also wanted to address the decline in Formation Hour participation that has historically occurred among our 8th graders. Meeting on Sunday mornings gives these students a space specifically designed for where they are in their faith journey while making participation more accessible for families already attending worship.

Using the Lutheran Confirmation portion of our curriculum, we will focus this year on the history of Lutheranism and what it means to live a Lutheran life. Karina will serve as the primary teacher, with support from Pastor Tim as he is available, and our Confirmation mentors will rotate into the classroom throughout the year.

This group is energetic, comfortable with one another, and loves to talk! One of our goals is to channel that energy into deeper conversation—helping them become comfortable asking meaningful questions about faith, listening to one another, and preparing for the more discussion-based environment they will eventually encounter in Circle.

Retreats, Camp & Fellowship

In February, four carloads of CLC youth and adult chaperones traveled to Quake in Wisconsin Dells. Approximately 20 middle- and high-school youth participated, along with five adult chaperones. The weekend included worship, speakers, music, small-group activities, recreation, and plenty of opportunities to build relationships. By all accounts, it was a wonderful weekend for our youth.

Five CLC youth also attended Confirmation Camp at Lutherwald this summer. Camp took place shortly after a major storm, which created some unexpected challenges, but our youth and leaders adapted and were able to participate in the week together.

As we plan for the coming year, we are exploring additional retreat and summer camp opportunities that may provide greater flexibility and additional options for our youth and families.

Fundraising & Congregational Support

Fundraising continued to be an important—and fun—part of youth ministry this year.

Our Easter Sunday Bake Sale was an incredible demonstration of congregational generosity. Members donated enough baked goods to fill four tables, which we offered between services and following the final service for free-will donations. By the end of the morning, we had sold nearly everything.

Trivia Night in April was another highlight. We sold out all ten tables, welcoming both CLC members and guests from outside our congregation, and raised more than $1,500 for youth travel and camp scholarships. Our youth played an important role in the evening, serving dinner, refilling table snacks, and helping throughout the event.

Special thanks go to Amy Knauff for co-organizing Trivia Night, Heather Abbring for helping secure donations from Family Express, the Budnick family for creating the trivia questions, and the Venstrom family for serving as our emcees. It was a genuinely fun evening made possible by many hands.

September brought another Popcorn Fest and another tremendous volunteer effort. This year's booth featured Italian sausage, with a crew setting up Friday evening, volunteers working shifts throughout Saturday, and another crew returning for teardown Saturday night. Our youth worked alongside adults throughout the day as they were able.

The booth raised more than $1,300, and the congregation helped us turn our remaining food into an additional fundraising opportunity the following Sunday, contributing approximately another $500 through free-will donations. Special thanks go to Denise Matagos for developing the menu and Kris Albers for organizing the operation of the booth.

Our annual Silent Auction will return this fall, with Amy Knauff already working to secure donations. Youth will help promote the auction and contact our winning bidders.

Funds raised through these events help offset the cost of camps, retreats, trips, and other youth experiences, including preparations for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering. Our hope is to continue reducing the financial burden on families and to make these opportunities accessible to every young person who wants to participate.

Looking Ahead

As we look toward 2027, one of our biggest priorities is helping our youth recognize that they don't simply belong to a youth program, they belong to Christ Lutheran Church.

We want to create more opportunities for young people to participate throughout the life of the congregation, whether that means serving as lectors, assisting with Communion, learning to help in the tech booth, participating in service projects, or finding other ways to contribute their gifts. Several of our youth are already serving as lectors, and we hope to see that participation continue to grow.

We also hope to expand Circle with more social events, service opportunities, guest speakers, and deeper faith conversations. Recruiting additional adult volunteers remains another important goal across our programs.
Planning is also beginning for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering. Interest among our youth is high, and we are exploring opportunities to partner with other congregations as we navigate the planning process and prepare for this experience together.

Our eight-member Youth Board—six adults and two youth representatives—continues to meet monthly and communicate regularly between meetings. Board members and Circle parents have also generously provided transportation, volunteer hours, and countless other forms of support throughout the year.

Every Sunday evening, volunteers provide dinner for our Circle youth. Every fundraiser depends upon people donating food, money, supplies, and time. Our Confirmation students have adults willing to walk alongside them as mentors. Our programs have teachers, drivers, chaperones, organizers, and people willing to show up whenever something needs to be done.

Thank you.

Whether you donated baked goods, made a free-will donation, provided a meal, worked a Popcorn Fest shift, donated an auction item, drove a carload of kids, taught a class, mentored a Confirmand, or simply showed up to support our youth, your generosity communicates something important to our young people; they matter to this congregation.

Perhaps what I am most proud of this year cannot be measured by attendance or dollars raised. Our youth are increasingly comfortable being themselves, speaking honestly about what is and isn't working, inviting friends into the group, and taking ownership of the community we are building together.

Circle has changed because we have listened to one another, adjusted when something wasn't working, and figured out together what we want this ministry to be. There is still plenty of room to grow, but I am proud that we are building something our young people feel belongs to them.

Our youth are not simply the future of Christ Lutheran Church. They are part of the church right now.