CELEBRATING OUR MINISTRY

CALVARY SWEDE HOME & FIRST RISING CITY

A Silent Belfry Rings Anew: Church Bell Reaches New Ringers

Pastor Evan sat in his office pondering who might be able available to toll the bell for Karen Gestrine's funeral on the first Sunday of December. Out of respect for those who mourn, the family of the one being laid to rest is generally not asked to assist with things like ushering, serving lunch, or ringing the church bell. For Karen's services, this meant many of Calvary's frequent bell ringers would be processing as a member of the family.

"What to do, what to do?" he thought to himself.

This funeral was not the first time Pastor had scrambled to find a ringer, either. Thankfully, someone has always been available. But the stress persisted. Many of Calvary's long-time ringers are getting older, those shoulders don't appreciate being yanked as they did before.

So, in recent months, Pastor Evan has tried to introduce others to the belfry. He's sent Kamdyn Udey up to the bell tower as part of his catechetical formation (confirmation class). He's encouraged (read: guilted) other young men in the pews to join, too. But none of these young men have ever been the one solely responsible for ringing.

Could (… should?... would!?) one of these young men be willing to ring the bell for a funeral? What about tolling the bell? Pastor Evan took a chance and asked if Eli Fjell might give it a try. Rightly so, Eli wanted to practice. Thus, the Saturday before Karen's funeral, a workshop was held in the belfry.

Pastor Evan reached out to Kent Adelson to come and help Eli learn the ropes (pun intended). He also arranged for Kamdyn to come and join in the learning for confirmation credits. What an amazing surprise it was when Kent brought his son, Jacob, and Jen Fjell sent all the men in her house! Ten people tried to gather in the bell tower. Yes, they spilled into the balcony and stairwell.

Kent began with a lesson on tolling the bell. That's when the thin rope is pulled down and then "bounced" just a few inches for each toll of the bell. This is the more serious, challenging part of the job, for it is done in reverence at the conclusion of the funeral as the family and others exit the sanctuary and walk to the graveside. The bell is tolled once for each year the deceased lived .

After everyone had a hand at tolling, Kent showed them the more extreme task of ringing the bell. If you've only heard and never seen this done, you'd never know that the ringer must reach their hands way up high and pull the thick rope all the way to the floor. Then the rope is released which allows the hammer to strike the bell with a loud DING! When it's done right, the hammer strikes the opposite side, making a two-toned DING-DONG! This, of course, is done by getting into the rhythm of the rope rising and falling, essentially jumping with the rope, ensuring it travels the entire path for a full ring to take place. It is no job for the faint of heart!

This short, memorable workshop was a work of the Holy Spirit. What began as a small, yet important need being met grew into a memorable, holy experience shared by many of the young men of our community of faith. May Calvary recognize and give thanks for the commitment of those many who have faithfully rung and tolled the bell in years past and present, and may we encourage and welcome this next generation of ringers who will help us mark the beginning of worship and remember the saints for many years to come. And a tremendous thank you to Kent, Jacob, Ryan, Carter, Ethan, Ethan, Eli, Kamdyn, and Kris for coming to church that Saturday morning.

Announcements

The future will bring more food insecurities to those in Polk County. Please prayerfully consider our Swede Home Mission to help others and make donations to our Food Pantry. We serve Genesis House, Blue Valley and the Little Food Pantries. When you get groceries, consider buying an extra item or more to donate.

2026 is just around the corner! Happy New Year. It is time for the annual congregational meeting, bringing you up to date on the many ways we have been blessed in 2025 and have shared our mission to
"Know God, Love God and Share God's Love"

The annual meeting will be on Sunday, January 25 following the worship service. Along with the reports of the year, we will have election for the vacancies on the Church Council, Endowment Committee, and elect new representatives for the Synod Convention along with a nominating committee for the year 2027! Whew, following the meeting we will have a Congregational meal, catered again by JW Catering in York. They will be serving the traditional menu of fried chicken and roast beef with all the sides! Please plan on joining us.

Church committees please have your reports to Linda by January 15. We hope to have a hard copy of the report available on Sunday January 18 so that you may review reports prior to the January 25 meeting.

W.E.L.C.A. News

***Winter Retreat will be Saturday, January 17 in Grand Island at St. Paul Lutheran, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.** Registrations are due by January 7 and cost is only $20. Theme this year is "Joy in the Journey". From Psalm 16:11 – "You make known to me the path of life, you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Look for registrations in church entry.

*Our Annual General Meeting was on 12/7. At that meeting, you voted to donate the following from our Treasury: $1,200 to Polk County Schools meal programs for needy families ($300 each school); $1,000 to Genesis House; $600 to Dana Village Transition program; $350 each to Lakota Lutheran Center and Oaks Indian Mission; $300 to ESU 7 Needy Families; and $250 to both UNL and UNK Lutheran Campus Centers. Thanks for your offerings all year long. Thank you to Miriam Circle for hosting. This was the last event for the members of Miriam Circle, which has chosen to "sunset" and no longer meet as a circle. All women are invited to join in the second Wednesday morning 9 a.m. meetings of the month at the coffee shop and also the women's Bible Study led by Pastor Hillary on the third Wednesdays at 7:30p.m. at church.

*Election results at the General Meeting included Bonnie Carlson as Treasurer and Cheryl Jones as Secretary / Leader for 2026.

*Service for month of January is offering for local utility relief through Polk County REA.

*Altar care for January will be Kay Jones.

JANUARY

Offering only – please give to Bonnie (no meeting)

Bible Study – Jan. 21, 7:30 p.m. @ church

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, 'they are' a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

God's Blessings to you in this New Year!

Cheryl

Church happenings

LIVING LUTHERAN magazine is once again available in printed copy. Swede Home has gifted a subscription to members. IF you did not receive a copy in December and would like to receive the magazine, please let Linda know, we will activate a subscription. With this subscription, we will no longer have the "Taking Faith Home" weekly handouts. Please let us know if you miss that!

Thanks to all who provided poinsettias for Swede Home Service.

Diana Johnson: Husband Wally and other loved ones

Randy and Fran Lott: Mother Yvonne Stauber, Father Gerald Stauber

Heidi Paulson: Parents Max and Jan Ernst, Husband Don Paulson

Carol Jones: Husband Duane Jones

Lew and Carolyn Nielsen : All family members who have gone before us

Tom Hofmann and family : Wife and Mother Lynn Hofmann

Amy and Drew Harris: Parents Hank and Marlene Hanquist

Jill Westring : Mother Elaine Westring

Patty Teig: Husband Denny Teig

Monty and Cheryl Jones: For Loved ones

Don and Linda Fuhr: Doris and Ford Craig, Tom Zegers, Norma Fuhr

Family and Friends—in memory of Karen Gestrine

Rising City News

December Church Council Minutes
December 14, 2025

Present: Wally and Luanne Kilgore, Carla Crook, Ken Potter, Lee and Cindy Lorentzen, Rogene McMeekin, Pastor Evan Christensen
Pastor Evan opened the meeting with prayer.
The meeting was called to order.
Carla motioned to accept the minutes of the November meeting and Rogene seconded. Motion carried.
Lee motioned to accept the treasurer's report and Ken seconded. Motion carried.
The pastor's report was presented.

OLD BUSINESS
Ken contacted Mark Nebuda and the wooden nativity set will be done soon.

NEW BUSINESS
Congregational meeting was set for January 25, 2026, during the service.
Budget and regular council meeting will be January 18, at 12:30 pm.
Lunch for meeting was discussed: grilled chicken sandwiches and sides.
The church's constitution will be discussed and updated during the January meeting.
Discussion was held on possibly changing the church's insurance. Other churches will be contacted to see who they use.
Benevolence for 2025 is close to being met and will be supplemented from general fund.
Discussion was held about possible donations to Genesis House.
Lee motioned to adjourn the meeting and Ken seconded.
Pastor Evan closed the meeting with prayer by leading The Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Lorentzen

EVENTS

On Friday, December 19th—Pastors Hillary and Evan, along with Wilder and Sutton graciously opened their home with an Open House of our Parsonage.

Food, drink and fellowship was shared and approximately 40 people from Swede Home, First English Rising City, First Lutheran York, and Genoa attended and enjoyed the tour of the long awaited parsonage renovations! It was a relaxing evening of visiting old friends and meeting new!

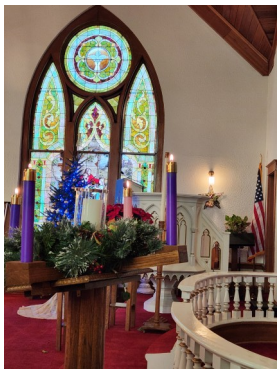
Thank you to the Christensens for sharing your home this holiday season.

EVENTS

Early in the 2025 Advent season, we were honored to host a Christmas concert by Brad Ramp. Brad is the Director of Worship Arts as Bethany Lutheran Church in Elkhorn.

He and his father (on trumpet) provided us with a 90 minute concert that was truly a gift. Refreshments were served following the concert.

Attendance was light, but those who attended all commented they were glad to be a part of the beautiful concert.



Did you notice a different Advent candle this year? Thanks to Don Fuhr, he used a podium that was in the fellowship hall. According to Wayne, this podium was from wood and pillars in the early parsonage. Don made a bracket for the candles and a Lincoln Church donated the oil advent candles. Thanks Don.

We Also thank the Haack family for the beautiful Christmas tree and Kent, Gia, Emily, Monty, Cheryl along with Mike and Anita for decorating the tree and sanctuary. Thanks also to Carolyn and Linda for all the other church decorations.

Christmas Greetings from the Sheridans -

The big adventure of 2025 was Rebecca's 23 week sabbatical this past summer, thanks to the Clergy Renewal Lilly Foundation.

After a one-week solo spiritual retreat for Rebbeca, the Sheridans traveled to Norway (Brother Andy and Family,) Ireland and Scotland (with Rih's mom, Sandy.) Rebecca met her parents (Brian and Deb) for a 9 day literary tour of England.

Rebecca, Erin and Grace also spent time with family and friends in the Omaha area.

In other news, Grace (8) is playing string bass and piano, enjoys dance and Girl Scouts along with Erin (10.) Erin continues to play percussion, piano and violin. She serves on the Student Council in fifth grade and will sing in the All County Chorus this January.

Rich completed his post-doctoral fellowship this fall and is in the process of opening his own clinical psychology practice.

On November 28, 2025 Karen Gestrine passed away as a result of an accident on Tuesday, November 25, 2025.

Karen was a life long member of Swede Home and will be missed. Please keep her family in your prayers.

Greetings Swede Home Friends.

I moved from Lincoln Senior residence to an Omaha senior residence called Rolling Hills Rance. I am in a fine studio apartment with a lovely courtyard. Kate is in Kansas City, Sam is in Omaha, Dave is in Tampa area and Tom is in Lincoln. May all your families be blessed with good health, with love, faith and all things needed to your own well-being.

Much Love—Merry Christmas

Joan Berggren

Dear Swede Home Members

On behalf of ESU 7 and all of our students and families, we would like to express our sincere gratitude! Your continued generosity helps to put a smile on each and every one of our students and provides a full Christmas dinner for many families.

We were able to buy gifts for 46 students and provide 13 Christmas meals for families in need.

Again, we could not do it without you.

Sincerely

ESU 7

Dear Calvary—Swede Home

Thank you for your donation to the lunch fund. Your support helps ensure that every child is cared for, and we deeply appreciate your partnership in this work.

With sincere gratitude

Osceola Public Schools

Calvary Lutheran Church
Nebraska Synod, ELCA
950 129th Road
Stromsburg, NE 68666
Church Phone: (402)282-1830
www.calvaryswedehomechurch.com
Email calvaryswedehomechurch@gmail.com
Facebook "Swede Home"

Every Member of the Congregation—Ministers
Andrew Adelson, Council Chair
Jenn Fjell, Council Vice Chairman
Missy Althouse, Council Secretary
Amy Harris and Janet Nielsen, Music
Linda Fuhr, Church Office Administrator
LeeAnn Willhoft, Custodian

Council Members:
Andrew Adelson, Jennifer Fjell, Dan Oquist,
Missy Althouse, Kris Udey, Randy Lott,
Jarrett Althouse, youth representative

Pastor Evan Cell Phone 402-689-5495 (text or call)
Email: evan@pastorchristensen.com

Pastor Hillary Cell Phone 402-980-1102 (text or call)
Email: hillary@pastorchristensen.com

IF you are texting or emailing a pastor, please include both pastors in the text or email

Please contact Linda Fuhr, Church Office Administrator at calvaryswedehomechurch@gmail.com or text or call 402-366-2091, If you have not done so, follow **Swede Home** on our Facebook page.

First English Lutheran Church
Nebraska Synod, ELCA
840 Butler St Rising City, NE 68658
Church Phone: (402)542-2217
Email : firstenglutheranchurchrc@gmail.com
Facebook "First Lutheran Church Rising City Nebraska
Every Member of the Congregation—Ministers
Council Chair: Wally Kilgore
Vice Chair: Ken Potter
Secretary: Cindy Lorentzen
Council Members:
Lee Lorentzen, Carla Cook, Rogene McMeekin
Luanne Kilgore, Church Office Manager

Meet Jennifer Fjell—council member at Swede Home

I grew up in Columbus with my parents and 3 siblings: Brian, Janell and Allison. I moved to Stromsburg after meeting Ryan and have lived here for almost 20 years. We have 4 children: Elise, Carter, Ethan and Eli.

I have been a student a good portion of my life! I graduated with my Associates Degree in nursing from Central Community College, my Bachelor's Degree in nursing from Midland University and my Master's Degree in nursing education. I continued to learn right along with my children!

Ryan and I enjoy the beach and try to vacation once a year but a majority of our vacations have been related to sporting events that our children participated in. These have led us to Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana, Nevada, Virginia, Florida and Colorado, just to name a few.

I enjoy taking walks down the country roads and admiring the outdoors. I love to garden and spend as much time as I can outside, but I also enjoy baking.

I am very passionate about being an advocate for my family, friends and patients. Being that voice when they need some extra support or guidance.

I enjoy baking for our after church gatherings on Sundays and I love that Calvary has been so welcoming to our family since the first day we came to church and the compassion and love our family has always felt being a part of this congregation.

We Reach to all our faith family in prayer and celebration

Remember in your prayers

June Larson
Beth Jones Wienck
Jan Wells Bachman
Carey Clauff
Bryce Anderson
Wayne Johnson

- Genesis House and Living Waters Rescue Mission, Blue Valley Action
- Bishop Scott Johnson and the Nebraska Synod staff
- Bishop Yehiel Curry and all ELCA congregations and members

To request prayers please email the church or call Linda (402-366-2091) or Cheryl (402-366-

Thank You

A very special thank you to Deb and Mike, Don and Linda, and Kay for assembling and delivering the Christmas Meals. We prepared 30 meal bags that were delivered throughout the county

January Swede Home

Assistant Minister—Jean Waller

Reader - Jean Waller the 4th, 18th, 25th
Gia the 18th

Ushers - Sandy

Acolyte -and Bell Ringer—TBA

Altar Care—Kay

Coffee—

Anniversaries

January

1 Brodyk and Taylor Ienn

22 Brad and Sue Sundberg

Birthdays

January

04 C- Fran Lott
09 C- Deb Hanquist
09 C- Mary Stevens
10 C- Mickey Berggren
14 C- Tyler Jones
15 C- Quin Rene Anderson-Cahill
15 C- Carole Dickson
16 C- Roxanne Czarnick
17 C- Linda Fuhr
17 C- Diana Johnson
18 F Lindsey Crook
20 C- Dan Ienn
23 C- Joel Cramer
23 C- Bryce Nielsen
24 C- Deb Cramer
27 C- Janelle Udey
28 F- Wilder Christensen
29 C- Ceagen Watts

We thank all those who agree to help with the worship service each month. **Please let Jean Waller or Carolyn Nielsen know if you can help**

The Sign-up sheets for 2026 are on the kitchen counter. Please consider when you can serve

January 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 8:45 Frist Rising 10:30 Calvary with council following	5	6	7	8	9	10
11 8:45 Frist Rising 10:30 Calvary	12	13	14 7 pm men's bible study	15	16	17
18 8:45 Frist Rising 10:30 Calvary	19	20	21 7:30 pm women's bible study	22	23	24
25 8:45 Frist Rising annual mtg following 10:30 Calvary with annual meeting and meal following	26	27	28	29	30	31

Christmas Eve—December 24, 2025

A foggy night, the illimunaries lit the way to Swede Home

The beautiful Christmas tree went from blue lights during advent, to the white lights of Christmas

We worship the birth of our Savior

Silent Night

Holy Night

Hosianna Choir

Rick Jones, Hank Harris, Dan Oquist, Kent Adelson, Maggie Harris, Pr Hillary, Jami Haugaard, Cheryl Jones, Amy Harris

Council Notes

December 2025 Calvary

Church Council met on December 8, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Missy, Jarrett, Jen, Kris, Andrew, Randy, Dan, Pastor Evan
Absent: None

All reports were approved or accepted.

Old Business

Septic Tank Proposal was passed at the Congregational Meeting on November 2. We are on the list for Spring to be done along with hydrants.
A Night of Christmas Worship with Brad Ramp was held December 6. Low turnout but had lots going on in surrounding towns.
Staff reviews will be scheduled.
Mutual Ministry Committee in 2026 will need 3 people from Congregation to review.

New Business

Highway signs were removed per state requirements. New signs at a standstill for now.
Parsonage work. There are a few items that still need done.
Church internet in fellowship hall. Andrew handling router piece.
Nominating Committee for 2026 positions.

Council, have 2 people
Endowment, have 1 person
Nominating Committee, have 2 people from Council

2026 Annual Meeting will be January 25 during worship with luncheon to follow.
2026 Budget was reviewed and will be approved at January 25 Annual Meeting.

Additional Items: 2 new computers for Pastors in future; check with Renee and Gia about Audit Committee
Missy Althouse, Council Secretary

Calvary Lutheran Church Treasurer's Report

	November 2025
Beginning Balance	**$8,538.69**
Offerings:	
General Offerings	7,699.00
Edgewater Insurance Premium Refund	168.00
Christmas Meals Offerings	350.00
ELCA Disaster Relief	5.00
ELCA Mission Share	500.00
First English Rising City October Share	3,061.14
First Evangelical York October Share	998.17
	12,781.31
Transfer from Thrivent SAV for Book Study:	126.45
Expenses:	
Vanco eCheck Monthly Fee	9.73
Office Supplies; envelopes	22.74
Text Messaging System-monthly fee	25.00
Cody's Computer Maintenance Plan	39.99
Advent Wreath	42.99
Pew Cushions	47.07
Pastor's Office	68.47
Book Study	126.45
Jocelyn Olivia Ad & Reception	174.89
Caldwell Piano Service; tuning & maintenance	255.00
Living Lutheran magazine subscription	799.00
Summer Mowing; church & parsonage	1,500.00
NE Synod ELCA Mission Share	1,595.00
First English Rising City; November Share	3,007.55
First Evangelical York; November Share	1,097.81
Utilities:	
Church	233.87
Parsonage	67.61
Salaries:	
Pastors Hillary & Evan Christensen	3,131.65
Portico Benefit Services	1,651.98
Commuting Reimbursement	162.50
SECA	297.05
Mileage Reimbursement	483.70
Cell Phone Reimbursement	65.00
Fall Leadership Lodging & mileage	209.64
Amy, Janet, & Diana	258.58
Lay/Music Mileage	215.60
LeeAnn	250.73
Linda	429.43
	16,269.03
Balance as of November 30, 2025:	**$5,177.42**

Our Guiding Principles

Mission Statement: Know God, Love God, Share God's Love

Guiding Principles:

1. **Jesus is Lord and Savior**
2. **All are welcome in this place.**
3. **Serving in love with generosity and hospitality**
4. **Provide an atmosphere for spiritual growth and reflection.**
5. **Teaching and sharing God's Word with joy**
6. **Mutual respect in relationships**

Return Service Requested

950 Road 129th
Stromsburg, NE 68666

CALVARY LUTHERAN CHURCH
NEBRASKA SYNOD, ELCA

.....IN SACRED PLACES....