

President's Report

2024 January 21

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. Let me start off with the best and that is you, the people of St. Martin's. What a wonderful, talented, committed, and thoroughly delightful group you are! It has been my honor to represent you this past year. Thank you, thank you, thank you for stepping up, stepping in, and stepping out in so many ways. Commonly, an outgoing President will list all of his/her accomplishments for the year, but I have none. Anything of value is all thanks to you. So here are some of the things in which YOU were engaged for the past year while I rode shotgun. (Additional information and details can be found in the Pastor's Report.)

We appear to have a strong paid support staff to promote our "program church" activities. Pastor Ellen, of course, was instrumental in putting pieces of this puzzle together.

Thanks to just over a dozen of you who stepped up to provide extra-budget funding in 2022, Cecilia "Cecie" Suknaic Saulnier completed her vicarage at St. Martin's which culminated in her ordination at her home church of Triumphant Love Lutheran, Austin on October 1, 2023 after receiving a call to Sprit In The Hills Lutheran, Spicewood, TX.

Concurrent to Cecie's departure, our Director of Youth and Family, Cason Miller, decided to change careers to engage with the nurture of plants, another of his passions, at a nearly (sic) local nursery. Into the role of youth development, we contracted with the Center for Youth Ministries until May 31, 2026 to hire Austin Shortes part-time (25 hours/week). Austin heads up our High School youth ministry while also sustaining his life as a student at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Speaking of staff, I guess you already know we have a music department second to none in the city of Austin. To Dr. Tim O'Brien, Austin Haller, David Cross, and a host of "ringers" and volunteers...take a bow. It is well deserved.

After years of service as SMLC's business manager, Mike Kaase stepped aside while Katherine Lutter took the reins. Thank you, Mike, for your service then and now. And welcome, Katherine.

In case you didn't know, we continue to provide administrative support to Rev. Lea Walker-Clark and Palabra De Vida ministries. There is no impact on the budget, only a bit of time per month for bookkeeping and some office space. The ministry continues apace.

A Saturday contemplative worship service was conducted by Rev. Travis Fitzgerald for the latter half of 2023. It was discontinued at year's end due to low participation.

It looks like we finally have a defined path forward for remediating the sewage drain lines after the City of Austin rerouted its main line under Nueces. This has been quite the ordeal, but thanks to the persistence of SMLC folk who devoted their time, effort, and expertise, we may get this resolved in our lifetime after all.

While we're on the subject of facilities, we have engaged the services of two HVAC companies for the upcoming year. It is hoped that one of them, in particular, will get the system properly set-up so that it can be reliably controlled. The second company will primarily provide maintenance duties such as filter replacements.

In collaboration with the Facilities Committee, the Council managed to complete an update to the Building Use Policy—now renamed to Facilities Use Policy—to better represent the entire grounds, not just the building. The facility has been shared with the community at large with groups such as Conspirare, New School of Music, SoCo Women’s Chorus, the ARC of the Capital Area, Texas Lutheran University (Christmas Vespers), the Weihnachtsfest German Service, an informal basketball group, and the local homeless population.

On next year’s Council agenda (I presume) will be tweaks to the Manual of Operations, particularly as it relates to staff support and mutual ministry. On a larger scale, several SMLC members took on the project to update the SMLC Constitution & Bylaws. Last approved by the Congregation in 2008, this update seeks to align with the Synod’s 2022 Model Constitution. Special thanks go to Michelle McGovern, Linda Zander, and Jackie Chuter.

Under the able leadership of former President Anita Salmon and after numerous intensive meetings, the Strategy Task Force fulfilled its charter with a final report to the Council dated September 28, 2023. The report was received by the Council at its November 4th “retreat” and the President and President-elect were authorized to appoint members to a Strategy Implementation Committee (SIC) to, as the name implies, implement as warranted the recommendations of the Task Force. The SIC has been formed and you will be hearing much more from it very soon. A profound thanks to the Task Force for their dedication. The final report is included in the documentation supporting this Congregational Meeting.

Also under inspiring leadership of Director Calla Woodall and a strong School Board, the Preschool is stable and exemplary, and enjoys a favorable reputation in the community. You really should check out their open programs such as the holiday programs they put on. Their Christmas program, for instance, was the epitome of chaotic cuteness. The altar area was packed with the little ones singing, more or less, Christmas tunes to a nave packed with parents vying with one another to capture their darlings on their cellphone cameras. It gives one a glimmer of hope for the future.

Sadly, in a sign of the times, extra security measures have been put in place at SMLC. In addition to security cameras, members are now required on weekdays to code-in with their assigned passcode as well as sign in and out in the office during business hours. This is also a safety issue to help ensure that, during an emergency, the facility is completely evacuated when necessary. Signing in is not (yet) required to attend Sunday worship services but the entrances are monitored. Safety courses have been held with more coming.

Following up on the approval of the Congregation at the last annual meeting, the 2023 Endowment Fund distributions were tapped to help cover some of the cash flow gap while \$350,000 from the Child Care Relief Fund (CCRF) distribution as a part of the American Rescue Plan Act was set aside to restore the cash flow to a safer, pre-COVID balance. In addition, the Executive Committee was authorized to post the West Ave. property for sale. This was done and at a Special Congregational Meeting on December 10, 2023, the Congregation approved the proposal of a buyer to purchase this property for \$2,350,000. The final contract is on schedule to be signed no later than January 31, 2024. The third approval was to pursue a lease or sale of the parking lot on the western block. At a Special Congregational Meeting on May 21, 2023, the Congregation approved pursuit of negotiations with The DMA Companies to lease the property for 65 years. The negotiations with DMA are to construct affordable apartments for Seniors while maintaining adequate dedicated parking for SMLC. DMA is attempting to qualify for highly competitive City of Austin grants for such housing that are essential to make it financially viable to them.

Applications for the grants are considered twice per year. The outcome of an application in January will not be known until March. This effort is still in motion, but is running into roadblocks that will eventually need to be addressed to ensure a desirable outcome.

Meanwhile, the WELCA "Tack 'n' Pack" group meets weekly to create backpacks with school supplies for children, hygiene kits, and hundreds of quilts for Lutheran World Relief. The Stephen Ministers are quietly comforting folk in need of a sympathetic ear. The Connections Committee has hosted several fun events featuring the musical ensembles directed by David Cross. The Mop & Hammer group continues to keep our facilities in shape, saving SMLC many dollars in contract and labor costs. Then there are the handbells, choir, Altar Guild, Flower Guild, Sunday School groups, Lunch bag ministry, Austin City Lutherans, Austin Helps Honduras, A/V volunteers, archivist Jim Parkhurst, Move-In Ministry, and many other ad hoc committees and standing ensembles contributing to the worship and liturgy¹ of St. Martin's. St. Martin's is a busy place and as with the ELCA's invitation to Holy Communion, *all* are welcome and invited to participate. Do not be afraid.

Peace be to you.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen E. Ottmers, Ph.D.

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¹ "Worship" comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word *woerthscripe*, which means "to ascribe worth." Liturgy is derived from *leitourgia* which is constructed from *leitōn* "pertaining to the people" and *ergon* "work," in other words "the work of the people." Worship and liturgy are frequently used today interchangeably. [Senn, Frank C. [The Witness of the Worshipping Community](#), Paulist Press, 1993 pp.5-6.]