

**Immanuel Lutheran Church**  
**1998 -2023**  
**Into the New Millennium**

**Share the Love of Christ with All** In January 2002, a motion was made to pursue a visioning process at Immanuel. With the assistance of interim Pastor Terry Oliver, a Strategic Planning team was formed and with input from the congregation through cottage meetings and a church profile, a vision and mission were written, values and beliefs were identified and goals and action plan were developed. In August 2002, Pastor Aprille Jordan was called to serve Immanuel and assisted in supporting the planning process.

*Vision: Immanuel Lutheran is called to be a caring, compassionate and diverse congregation that is spiritually nourished through Jesus Christ and reaches out to the community at large.*

*Mission: Share the love of Christ with All!*

The strategic planning team continues to meet regularly to review progress on previous goals and set goals for the upcoming year. In 2003, a Capital Improvement Campaign was begun to make necessary updates and renovations to the building. Many improvements to the building were made to beautify and provide needed upkeep for the building.

**Scandinavian Smorgasbords** In 1981, The Lutefisk, Lefse & Meatball Dinners began as an annual event to support Camp Imlu. Over the years it changed from a “sit down-be served” dinner to a Smorgasbord of Scandinavian favorites, including lutefisk and lefse. Funds support the ministries of Immanuel and was a great opportunity for members to work together to reach out to the community.

When Immanuel began accessibility renovations in 2016-2020, the Smorgasbord was put on hold due to construction. Over that time frame, many of the faithful leaders of the Smorgasbord were no longer able to lead it. The congregation discerned that our membership had grown beyond the original Scandinavian heritage and wanted to explore other ways to celebrate becoming a more diverse and community-oriented church. Thus, while thankful for the fellowship, cultural celebration, memories, and charitable contributions that were part of the Smorgasbord, the congregation and council determined that it was time to “retire” it.



**Worship & Music** In August 2001, Immanuel hired Phyllis Huber as a Youth, Worship & Music and Education director. Under Phyllis' leadership, music evolved into five worship bands with paid worship leaders.



Following Phyllis' vision, Phil Johnston and Liz Hollers continued to lead two services, a contemporary Spirit Alive! worship and a traditional worship service. Liz Hollers also composed music and liturgy pieces for Immanuel. Allen Sasser-Goehner continued to lead the two worships until the COVID pandemic of 2020-2022, alongside culture shifts around church, led to Immanuel offering one "blended" worship.

**Focusing our Ministry** In May 2013, the Accessibility Committee was formed to address a strategic goal to "Develop a plan to make our building more accessible" In May 2014, Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner was called and under her leadership, Immanuel worked with Kairos and Associates to listen to the congregation to determine member's needs and the determine the feasibility of a Capital Appeal. This led to the 2020 Strategic Plan which included a **BUILD UP THE BODY Accessibility Enhancement Project** Capital Appeal to raise over \$700,000 to improve the accessibility of our building, including adding an elevator and ADA bathrooms. In addition, the strategic plan addresses deepening relationships across all generations, making a difference in our community and developing a stewardship culture that fosters clarity, unity, leadership development & impact.

Between 2018 and 2019 several capital improvements were made to the building including an elevator, ADA bathrooms, relocated offices, and an extension to the east side of the sanctuary for music leadership, and an updated 5th floor loft and music office.



Between 2015 and 2019, Immanuel created 2 listening teams that conducted almost 100 one-on-one conversations to help us determine focus for outreach and service and to help us rethink our own educational ministries. This resulted in our outreach to Washington Middle School and the development of the Faith Family Gatherings (FFG)

Following the COVID pandemic in 2020, Immanuel developed a new strategic plan with initiatives to reach diverse people and families, create closer connections among members, expand "hybrid" ministry, revise our governance model, and to pay off the accessibility enhancement renovations mortgage.

In 2022, Immanuel launched its EAR Capital Campaign - to **ELEVATE** our ministries, **ANTICIPATE** the needs of the future church, and **RESONATE** the good news of the Gospel . . . to the ends of the earth. (see Acts 1:8-9). The EAR Campaign Goal is to raise \$500,000 in actual pledges and gifts over a three-year period. EAR Capital Campaign funds raised will be used to retire debt on accessibility renovations, complete a separate dishwashing room, replace the roof on our education wing, install solar panels on our building and update worship seating. In 2023, the roof on the education wing was replaced and solar panels were added to the Sanctuary roof and the education wing roof.



**Youth and Family Ministry** From 2000-2015, Immanuel continued a **strong tradition of youth and family ministry** under the leadership of Phyllis Huber, Sara Westrope, Mark Mohorcich, Sonja Wolsky and Toni Johnson. Junior and High School students attended the ELCA National Youth Gatherings, Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp (FLBC) and participated in other service/ learning trips.

Wednesday nights at Immanuel included a worship led by the youth band followed by confirmation classes, high school youth and adult study groups. Vacation Bible School (VBS) continued to be a high-quality program staffed entirely by dedicated and talented IMLU volunteers that reached non-Immanuel youth and families. Our excellent preschool continued under the leadership of Julie Sager, a professional teacher and educator.



2015-2022 saw Immanuel developing partnerships with other ELCA Missoula churches to share middle school and high school ministry and retreats. Beginning in 2016, instead of the traditional weekly "learning hour" between Sunday services, the intergenerational **Faith Family Gathering** was implemented. One time a month parents, grandparents or other trusted adults bring their youth to church to create closer families, deepen the faith practices of prayer, bible study, and service, and to trustworthy relationships through church.

**Outreach** Immanuel has a long history of making a difference in our community. Immanuel has been involved with Habitat for Humanity since 2002 and has been one of the host congregations for Family Promise of Missoula since 2010. Immanuel was instrumental in assisting with building the Meadowlark to house the Family Housing Center in 2018 to provide shelter and services for families experiencing homelessness.



In 2017, Immanuel began a collaboration with Washington Middle School (WMS) focusing on at-risk youth. This resulted in Immanuel volunteers planning and leading an after-school Flagship program, “Cooking and Crafting” and two Flagship week-long summer camps.

With the addition of the elevator, our church is now accessible to host Red Cross Blood Drives. Our accessible facilities and WMS relationship led to the establishment of the Boys and Girls Club “Teen Club” in Immanuel’s lowest level which now has digital printers and a job simulator.

Under Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner’s leadership (2014-2023) Immanuel became an active member of the Missoula Interfaith Collaborative (MIC). Through our partnership with MIC, Immanuel helped to build several programs including 1) Missoula Works to provide employment for the long-term unemployed, 2) the Housing Advocate Network (HAN) to understand and address homelessness on an individual and organizational level, 3) Family Promise to support Missoula families with shelter, meals, and moral support, 4) the Meadowlark Family Housing Center, partnership with the YWCA Missoula, to provide emergency housing to families in Missoula, 5) Common Good Missoula—a coordinated effort to identify and act on issues pressuring our lives, using the skills and practices of community organizing, and 6) Recycling Works-Curb-side glass recycling and organics (compost) pick-up in Missoula.

In the fall of 2019, a **Reconciling in Christ (RIC)** team received training from Reconciling Works for “Building an Inclusive Church.” The purpose of the RIC Program is to ensure the welcome, inclusion, celebration, and advocacy for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions; work for racial equity and commit to anti-racist work and support the national program. The team conducted nearly 50 one-on-one conversations, offered multiple educational and discussion opportunities and developed a welcome statement. At the annual meeting in 2023, the congregation unanimously approved the statement and voted to become an RIC congregation. We celebrated the accomplishment on June 11, 2023 and marched in the Missoula Pride Parade.





In fall 2021, Immanuel welcomed **Luther Seminary Intern** Rebekah Cochrane. For one year, she served half time at both Immanuel and Emmaus Campus Ministry. In June 2023, Pastor Rebekah was ordained by Bishop Laurie Jungling at Immanuel Lutheran Church, and Immanuel called her as **part-time associate pastor** to begin in July 2023. Pastor Rebekah's focus is pastoral care, digital/hybrid ministry, and young adults. Pastor Molly Sasser-Goehner continues as Full-Time Senior Pastor.