



# Centering

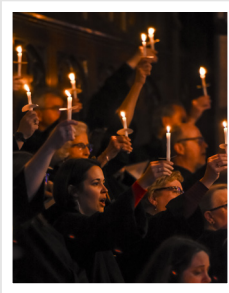
NEWS OF CENTRAL LUTHERAN | MINNEAPOLIS

WINTER 2024

Mary said, "Yes."

How do we  
say yes?





**"And Mary said,** *"My soul magnifies*  
*the Lord,* **and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."**  
Luke 1:46-47

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Cover art:

Central Choir raises their candles as they sing  
*Silent Night* at Christmas Eve worship 2023.

Photo credit: Tom Baker



# Mary said, "Yes." How do we say yes?

**M**ary said, "Yes!" The angel Gabriel was sent to Mary with a question: "Will you be the mother of God's son?" The angel waited for her response; it was her choice. Mary said, "Yes, let it be to me according to your word." Gabriel must have let out a sigh of relief. With Mary's yes, all of heaven probably burst into song.

Mary goes to see her cousin Elizabeth, and when the child leaps in her womb, Mary sings her song, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my savior." We know her song as the Magnificat, an expansive song of praise, memory, mercy, and justice.

This Advent and Christmas season we will dwell in the wonder of Mary's yes and in the songs we sing. The question is yours to ponder: where is God asking for your "yes?" After you respond to God's invitation, what are the songs you sing? Are they songs of hope, prayer, memory, longing, or wonder? Are there favorite hymns that ground you throughout the year? Are there favorite Advent and Christmas hymns that you look forward to singing this season?

For me, *Angels we Have Heard on High* captures the wonder of Mary's yes and the joy of heaven:

*Angels we have heard on high,  
sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
and the mountains in reply,  
echoing their joyous strains.  
Gloria in excelsis Deo;  
gloria in excelsis Deo.*

**"The question is yours to ponder: Where is God asking for your 'yes?'"**

I know that I just gave you an earworm song for this moment. Enjoy singing as you give thanks for Mary's yes and all the ways we sing our shared songs of faith.

Gloria in excelsis Deo! Glory to God in the highest!

*Pastor Peter*

Saying  
"yes" in

# Worship

The Worship Area Cluster centers on welcome, hospitality, and the central act of the church as people of God gather for corporate worship.

## Advent and Christmas

### God's song, Mary's song, Our song

This Advent and Christmas season we will celebrate songs. God sings creation into existence. Mary sings a song of renewal and new beginning. We sing songs of faith and hope. During the season of Advent, we will reflect on these songs of faith in worship. Advent devotionals will guide daily reflections. Two Sunday adult forums will invite us to ponder God's song and Mary's song. On Wednesday evenings in Advent, the midweek study will draw us into Mary's song, the Magnificat.

The season of Advent begins on November 30–December 1 and continues for four weekends, through December 21–22.

### Christmas Eve Worship

Tuesday, December 24, 3 p.m. and 10:30 p.m.

### Christmas Day Worship

Wednesday, December 25, 10 a.m.

### First Weekend of Christmas

Saturday, December 28,  
5 p.m. worship

Sunday, December 29, 10  
a.m. worship (\*Note: only  
one service on Sunday)

The second weekend of  
Christmas returns to the  
regular worship schedule.



*The sanctuary on Christmas Eve 2023.*

of the season, leading us to the star that shines on Christmas Eve. The parament designer hopes to complete this new set in time for this Advent, where, hopefully, we will dedicate these new additions to the glory of God.

We are grateful for the donor and for Jeff Wunrow, the liturgical designer and artist. We are also grateful that the vestments will bring color and variety into this important worship season.



*Augsburg Advent Vespers 2023.*

## New Advent Paraments

A generous donor has commissioned a new set of altar paraments, clergy stoles, and additional vestments for the presiding and assisting ministers for the season of Advent. The altar paraments are four panels that can all be used at once or can be added for each of the four weeks of Advent. The paraments and the vestments are in a variety of the blues

## Augsburg University Advent Vespers

Friday, December 6, 7 p.m.  
Saturday, December 7,  
2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

The Advent Vespers theme  
this year is a response to





*Pastor Melissa welcomes the congregation to Christmas Eve worship.*

the shared sense of anxiety we feel around the ongoing climate crisis. Our common concern for creation begins with a transformation of the heart, with a recognition that the world was created in love and that we are called to live in harmony with it. For Christians, the birth of Jesus represents God's full identification with, and within, the created world. In Christ, we "see revealed" God's decision to dwell deeply within *all* living creatures. What good and joyful news! Reserve your seats at [augsburg.edu/vespers](http://augsburg.edu/vespers).

## Conspirare Christmas Concert

Wednesday, December 11, 7 p.m.

The renowned Grammy®-winning vocal ensemble Conspirare is bringing their captivating Christmas concert to Minnesota for the first time. Come share a holiday tradition experienced and cherished by tens of thousands since its debut. Minnesota native Craig Hella Johnson and his company of voices are comprised of accomplished musicians from around the country, selected to come together to rehearse, perform, and record. Conspirare collaborates with a variety of other musicians and groups to expand their reach, most



*Scan for tickets!*

recently with the Miró Quartet and Isaac Cates's choir, Ordained. You can get tickets online by scanning the QR code.

## Casavant Organ Update

The design phase of the Casavant Organ project is nearly completed. One year ago, the congregation voted to authorize the design phase of this project, and work began in January 2024. We expect to receive these designs in January 2025. The next step will be to enter the construction phase of the project, which will be much longer. We will have an update about this at the annual meeting in February. In the meantime, we have released several videos about how the organ works, and the issues we will be addressing in this project. Those can be found on Central's website.

In regard to the current state of the organ: this summer saw significant deterioration of the 1980s-era electrical system. This has silenced 10 different stops (which is about 15% of the instrument). As of this writing, the organ has

not yet been significantly affected by winter dryness this season. However, as the weather gets colder, we expect to see more of the organ become unusable for the duration of winter, as has happened in previous years. As always, we are constantly working around these issues so that our musical life together can continue, but it's important to remember that they are ever-present nonetheless.



*Central's 1963 Casavant organ.*

# Save the Date

Advent and Christmas are full of opportunities for us to worship and be together in community.

**December 1**

**Sunday**

**9:30 a.m.**

Advent Fair




*The Advent Fair is fun learning for all ages.*

**December 4**

**Wednesday**

**6 p.m.**

Mary's Song Bible Study 

**December 6-7**

**Augsburg Vespers**

Friday, 7 p.m.

Saturday, 2 p.m. and 5 p.m.

**December 11**

**Wednesday**

**6 p.m.**

Mary's Song Bible Study 

**7 p.m.**

Conspirare Christmas Concert

**December 12**

**Thursday**

**5 p.m.**

Homeless Memorial March



*Volunteers serve the Christmas meal.*

**December 14**

**Saturday**

**5 p.m.**

Blue Christmas Healing Prayer Service



*The Sunday School kids share their interpretation of the story of Jesus' birth.*





*Kids big and small had a blast with a bouncy house, hoola hoops, face paint, balloons, and more at the Winter Family Festival.*

**December 16**

**Monday**

**11 a.m.**

Christmas Worship and Meal

**December 18**

**Wednesday**

**6 p.m.**

Mary's Song Bible Study 

**December 22**

**Sunday**

**10:30 a.m. service**

Sunday School Christmas Program

**December 28-29**

**First Weekend in Christmas**

**Saturday, 5 p.m.**

Worship

**Sunday, 10 a.m.**

Worship (\*One service)

**January 8**

**Wednesday**

**6 p.m.**

Winter Bible Study

begins 



*Did we mention there's face painting at the Winter Family Festival?*

**December 23-January 5**

**Restoration Center Closed**

**December 24**

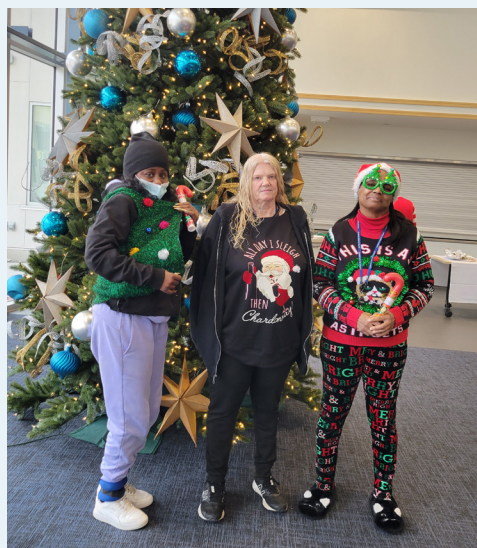
**Christmas Eve**

**3 p.m. and 10:30 p.m.**

**December 25**

**Christmas Day**

**10 a.m.**



*Dorothy, Theresa, and Sherry were the staff Christmas sweater contest winners in 2023!*

**January 13-17**

Community Organizing Training

**January 25**

**Saturday**

**10 a.m.-1 p.m.**

Winter Family Festival

**January 26**

**Sunday**

**11:45 a.m.**

Open Budget Meeting

**February 9**

**Sunday**

**Noon**

Congregational Annual Meeting

# Community through Grief:

## Blue Christmas and Healing Prayers

By Brenda Blackhawk

**G**rief is a common human experience. At some point in our lives, we will all experience the loss of a loved one. Coming to grips with our grief and living through it into a new life without the physical presence of our loved one(s) is challenging. The experience of grief is both universal and unique; we all feel a vast array of emotions but the when, where, and why of facing them is wholly our own. Grief can be isolating.

Often, when we feel isolated by our grief, we can find ourselves turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms, causing harm to ourselves and those around us. In her article "The Importance of Community in Overcoming Grief," family grief counselor Jill Cohen emphasizes how important it is to find your community during the grief process. She makes known that, "Social workers find that it's important, whether it be your family, friends, loved ones, or even your pets, to create a support system, to keep you grounded and help you process and understand what you're feeling."

The church community at Central strives to offer spaces where individual and collective grief can be expressed, shared, and supported

by the pastors and others in our church family. The Grief Support Group meets monthly on the fourth Wednesday at 1 p.m. for this purpose. Annually, on All Saints' Weekend, we light candles together and say the names of our beloved saints who died during that year. And, several times over the course of the last year, we have offered special Healing Prayer Services.



*Laying on of hands is one way the pastors offer support in times of grief.*

Beginning with a Blue Christmas service last year in 2023, Central's Prayer Ministry Team, supported by the pastors, have held four such services over the course of the year. Each service was themed around a specific kind of event that causes grief. In February, we gathered for a healing prayer service for those dealing with cancer or illness. In April, we held a service for those who have experienced the loss of a child in their lives. And in October, the healing prayer service focused on those with memory loss issues and their caregivers.

So, how did the Prayer Team identify the congregation's needs for healing prayer? Pastor Stephanie explains, "We tend to the needs of the congregation in a collaborative effort between church leaders and the prayer team. Through pastoral care conversations,





*Shared prayer is an important part of healing prayers.*

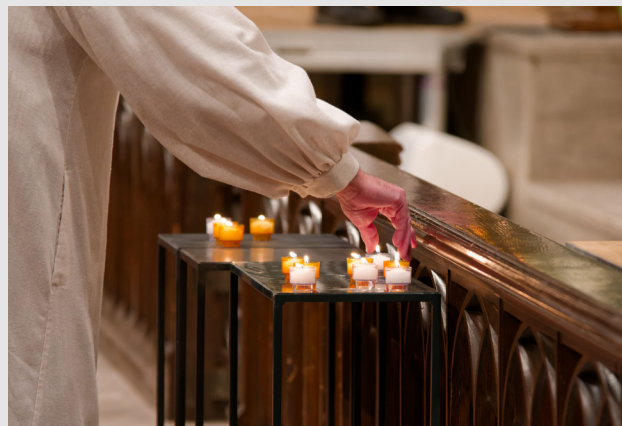
we have an awareness of people's deep need for care and compassion."

These healing prayer services are significant for those who have experienced grief. The Loss of a Child service was especially meaningful for Bobbie Spradley who shares that she was "especially comforted to share with one of the pastors that I have a daughter who is estranged from me and all my family. I shared the pain and loss I feel with that separation, and we prayed together for her and my family."

Healing Prayer Services aren't new to Central. Bonnie Weisenburger recalls that, "Healing prayers have been practiced at Central for a long, long time. From what I remember, it started with Pastor Dick Beckmen, who was instrumental in starting the Order of St. Luke, a healing ministry, here at Central. When he retired, the ministry sort of folded, so I am so glad that we have healing prayers here once again."

**T**his time of year (Advent and Christmas), the mood around us is often busy and cheerful and very focused on making happy memories with family. For someone in the

grieving process, this time of year can be especially tough. You don't want to be the downer in the room when everyone else is celebrating, but inside you're experiencing all the difficult emotions of grief as you miss your loved one(s). And so, we've worked to create a space for that grief in this season of anticipation and joy.



*In lighting candles, we remember those we miss.*

service for grief, loss, and loneliness. The Scripture and hymns are chosen to provide an opportunity for comfort and encouragement."

Please consider joining us for Blue Christmas Healing Prayer service this year, wherever you are on your grief journey. As Pastor Stephanie reminds us: "Healing services are essential in our shared lives because some of the most important work we do is anchored in caring for one another. Especially at Christmas."

Central will again host a **Blue Christmas Healing Prayer Service on Saturday, December 14 at 5 p.m.**

Long-time Prayer Team member, Marie Wiegert, describes Blue Christmas as being, "especially important as a Healing Prayer service [because it is] a safe

# Saying "yes" in Community

The Community Area Cluster centers on welcoming all into life-giving community where relationships are fostered and a range of human needs are met.

## Restoration Center Christmas Appeal

Christmas is a joyful season of remembering how Jesus, born in a lowly place to some very human people, was such a gift to us. This Jesus was born homeless and soon became a political refugee who had to flee with his family to a safer country. We celebrate this by giving gifts to the people we love. Many of you also celebrate this gift by giving to other people, like Jesus, who don't always have enough to live on, who may be without a home and fleeing oppression.

This Christmas please consider giving a special gift to the work of the Restoration Center. The gift you give will be used directly to assist people in need. In the last year, we have helped people fleeing oppression with the means to get home to Minneapolis. We have prevented people from becoming homeless through our Emergency Rental Assistance program in collaboration with Align Minneapolis. We have served hungry people a good meal most Mondays of the year, made with care and served to them by our remarkable volunteers. What you give goes into bus cards to get people to

medical appointments and for brand new underwear and reading glasses.

Many of these things seem very small and simple, and by having them available for the folks who need it, we care for all people in this amazing church. Thank you for being church together and understanding that sometimes the essentials are so simple. Please give

to the Christmas Appeal for the work of the Restoration Center.

## Restoration Center Holiday Hours

Closed Monday, December 23 –  
Sunday, January 5

## Homeless Memorial March

The Homeless Memorial March will be held on **Thursday, December 12 at Plymouth Congregational Church at 5 p.m.** The march route begins at Plymouth, loops through Loring Park, and returns to the church. At 6 p.m. there will be a service of remembrance inside the church. This service will also be livestreamed at [facebook.com/simpsonhousing](https://facebook.com/simpsonhousing). We gather together to remember all those who were homeless when they died, had been homeless but were housed when they died, and all those advocates who worked to end homelessness who have died in the past year. If you have a name to add to the list, please do so before December 2 on the Simpson Housing website.



*We march for lives lost during the Homeless Memorial March.*





*The community gathers for the Christmas worship and meal.*

## Christmas Worship and Meal

We will celebrate Christmas with the weekday community at Central on **Monday, December 16 at 11 a.m.** We will have a special worship service that day with all the readings that tell the story of Jesus birth. The scripture that foretells his coming and his parents reaction, the shepherds, and the angels. We will also sing all the favorite Christmas carols that day. If you are looking to celebrate Christmas a bit early, please join us for this jam-packed service at 11 a.m. The Christmas worship will be followed by the Christmas meal of turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, and all the fixings. It is a great kick off to the Christmas Season!

## Organizing Training

Too often when we try to address problems in our community, we end up stuck in cycles that can drain energy and don't move us forward. Maybe we get trapped studying and analyzing, maybe we struggle to tell our story in a way that compels others to join us, and sometimes we just don't even know where to start. Bring your favorite co-conspirators and join us for a week of community organizing training that will take us from the basics of power analysis and choosing an issue all the way to winning an issue campaign, filling your toolbox with effective strategies and methods that will help you and your communities win



*Organizers practice important skills at training.*

concrete improvements in people's lives. This training will serve both seasoned organizers as well as those who are brand new to using an organizing lens to work for change.

This is a week-long training that begins on Monday, January 13 at 9 a.m. and runs until Friday, January 17 at 2 p.m. It will be held at Mt. Olivet Retreat Center in Farmington, MN. There are options for staying at the retreat center for four nights, or a few nights, or being a commuter.

If you have any questions or want to sign up please email Pastor Melissa at [mpohlman@centralmpls.org](mailto:mpohlman@centralmpls.org).

## Align Fall Campaign Highlights

The Fall Campaign for Align Mpls focused on the work of Street Voices of Change and how listening to people who are the closest

to the issue we want to solve makes a big difference when it comes to solutions. We cannot solve the problem of homelessness without listening to the people who are without a home. Hennepin County has officially ended veteran homelessness and is on track to end chronic homelessness in the next

few years. They have been able to achieve such remarkable feats because they listen to the people who make up Street Voices of Change.

# Saying "yes" in Formation

The Lifelong Formation Area Cluster centers on lifelong faith formation where all can develop a closer relationship with God and deepen their call for mission.

## The Advent Fair

Celebrate the beginning of Advent by joining friends at Central for the annual Advent Fair on **Sunday, December 1 at 9:30 a.m.** This time-honored tradition sets the season in motion with displays, crafts, and food tastings that bring Advent to life. All the displays will be in the Great Room between Sunday services, and they are designed to be multicultural and fun for kids of all ages. There will be singing and picture-taking and more! Bring your curiosity and your wonder for this start to the beautiful season of Advent.



*There's so much to learn and do together at the Advent Fair.*

## Sunday School Christmas Program

The Sunday School children are having lots of fun learning songs and carols for this year's Christmas program. Plan to join them on **Sunday, December 22 at 10:30 a.m.** as they tell the story of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and Jesus' birth in a stable. Sharing the Christmas story is one of the most important ways that children embody and develop their faith. They engage with their teachers, their peers, and you in a simple retelling of the most cherished stories from the Bible.

Come and experience pure joy; listen and

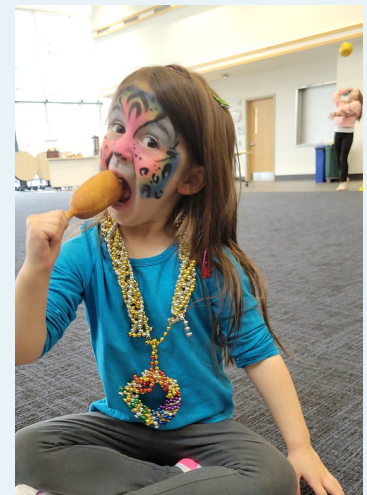
watch as the little ones sing and tell the story of Christmas in their own voices just for you.

## Winter Family Festival

Last year we introduced something new at Central for children and families and we're doing it again this year. **On Saturday, January 25, from 10 a.m.–1 p.m. we'll host the 2nd Annual Winter Family Festival.** Join us for an indoor play-day with a bouncy house, facepainting and balloon art, a DJ dance party, and more! Crafted for kids of all ages, parents and children are welcome to come for a morning of indoor play where it's warm inside and cold outside. After a morning of fun and activity, we'll have a kid-friendly lunch together and celebrate what it means to be church together. Mark your calendars now; you won't want to miss this great event.

## Adult Formation

Adult Faith Formation continues in the spirit of Community through the Essentials. We've had great conversations and learning around this theme



*The Winter Family Festival is a deliciously good time!*





*The Sunday School kids act out the story of Jesus' birth during the Christmas Program.*

throughout the fall and we continue now into Advent and Epiphany.

### Bible Studies

In December, Pastor Melissa and Pastor Stephanie will lead the Wednesday night Bible study by dwelling deeply in the women's stories of expectation and Mary's 'yes' to God's invitation to bear God's child. We'll explore themes of visitation, invitation, and expectation culminating in the Magnificat, Mary's beautiful song of acceptance and anticipation. Join us for these holy conversations **December 4, 11, and 18, in person or online, at 6 p.m.**

In January, we shift to Essential Stories from the New Testament. Having traveled through the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament) throughout the fall, the winter season invites an exploration of the essential stories of the Gospels. Our focus will be on the stories of Jesus' early life and ministry, the call of the disciples, signs and wonders, and the parables. We will wander through all four Gospels and discover the essential stories in each. **Winter Bible studies begin on January 8, in person or online, at 6 p.m.**

### Adult Forums

The Sunday morning adult forums also continue in the realm of Essentials. In December, Pastor Peter leads discussions on

Mary's story and God's vision and in January, we move into the practice of faith in daily life. Throughout the winter months, we'll be looking at forgiveness, vocation, formation, and prayer with tools and resources for you to deepen your understanding and practice of these essential elements of faithful living. Each week, **Adult Forums begin at 9:30 a.m. in the Lower Narthex.**

### Enneagram Retreat

It's been a few years since we've spent time in the Enneagram, so Pastor Stephanie is inviting us back into an exploration of the Enneagram and the ways in which it leads us to health and wholeness.

The Enneagram is a personality inventory that categorizes people into nine distinct types. The unique Enneagram types help us understand what motivates and calls us into particular behaviors and actions.

When we more fully understand ourselves and our neighbors, we move toward the abundant life that God intends for each.

You are invited to this important conversation. Whether you've had years of experience with the Enneagram or this is your first experience, join us! We'll review and explore the nine types, help you discover your own type, and deeply dwell with the Enneagram arrows and wings. More information will be coming soon, so watch the *Spirit* and eNews!



*Pastor Peter often leads adult formation.*

# Saying "yes" in Generosity

The Generosity Area Mission Cluster centers on the invitation for every child of God to share their gifts of time, abilities, and finances for the sake of God's mission in the world.

## Annual Meeting on February 9

You are invited to the annual celebration of ministry and mission on **Sunday, February 9**. We will gather for the community meal; the annual meeting will follow around noon. We meet to hear reports, review finances, approve the 2025 budget, elect leaders, hear the report and recommendation from the Casavant design bid process, and give thanks for God's call for community through the essentials. The meeting will be livestreamed, and you will have the option to call in or email questions during the meeting.

In preparation for the Annual Meeting, you are invited to the **Open Budget Meeting on Sunday, January 26, at 11:45 a.m.** We will gather in Fireside to review and walk through the detailed version of the proposed 2025 budget. This is the meeting for specific questions and conversation, rather than at the Annual Meeting.

## Fall Generosity Ingathering Thank You

Essential Gratitude was the theme that invited us to prepare to make our faith promises/ financial intentions as an act of worship on November 23–24. Thank you for all the ways you live a life of essential gratitude. Thank you for your remarkable financial support for

the ministry and mission of Central Lutheran. Your generosity is inspiring as we gather for worship, grow in faith, care for all in need as community, and live generous lives. If you have not yet returned your financial intention (pledge) you can do so online by scanning the QR code.



*Make your pledge*

Thank you to the Generosity Team for their leadership and work this fall with the appeal and ingathering: Kathy and Ron Fiscus, Tom Edelen and Ken Hardy, Deb Bauknight, Chris and Steve Dahlberg, John Severtson, and Seth Peter!

## Year-end Giving Reminders

Please note that year-end gifts need to be **postmarked by December 31 or received in the office by Monday, December 30**. If you are planning a stock gift or other distribution, please contact Sara Masters in the church office for any support you need.

## Strategic Plan Task Forces

The Congregation Council has created three strategic task forces after an intentional time of listening for God. The listening process began during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Executive Committee initiated a process for the council to reflect on God's call and strategic possibilities for this faith community. As we emerged from the pandemic, the



*Thank you for participating in the Fall generosity ingathering.*





*The annual meeting is a time to celebrate the ministry of Central and look to what is coming next for us.*

council continued the process of listening and learning. The categories that have emerged flow from the early Covid council conversations, guest speakers, the fall 2023 one-on-one conversation process, and the recent work of the council.

Three task forces were created:

1. **Connections, Invitations, and Communications (ICC) Task Force:** This task force will seek to build connections for all. There will be an emphasis on communication and invitations for people to share their gifts at church and in daily life.
2. **Seasons of Life Task Force:** This task force will seek to engage each demographic age group, working to provide invitations and offerings for deepened faith growth, care, and support in each season of life.

### 3. **Mental Health and Wholeness Task**

**Force:** This task force will seek to enhance support for the mental health needs of our community by exploring options for education, staffing, and community partnerships.

### Website Update and Invitation

Central Director of Communications, Brenda Blackhawk, and the Website Redesign Team have been hard at work in 2024 designing a new website for the church. With input from the pastors and staff, they identified goals, developed design layouts, and collected, sorted, and edited content and images for the new website.

Now, those elements have been handed over to the website developers at Sprung. We hope to unveil the new website by the annual meeting in February.

In the meantime, we will be inviting a diverse group of congregation and community members who regularly look at our website, to review the new site for us. If you are someone who regularly (more than once a month) visits Central's website, please consider being part of this group! More details will be available soon, so keep an eye on the *Spirit* and the eNews.

Much gratitude to Boyd Savage, Chloe Hjerpe, Joe Shelton, and Karen Knox for their work!



*Central's Congregation Council has created three new task forces based the results of the years-long listening process we've engaged in.*



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Christmas Eve  
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Christmas Day  
Service:  
10 a.m.

Winter Family Festival:  
January 25

Annual Meeting:  
February 9



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