

LIFETIMES

June 2026

From the Pastor



Kai Nilsen
Senior Pastor

Many people have started asking about my upcoming Sabbatical. Some have even said, “Why are you still here? I thought you were gone?” Others, “What will you do?”

To clarify the timeline, I’ve been granted a three-month sabbatical (Sabbaticals are a long-standing commitment we have made to our leaders at Incarnation) that will begin August 1 and run through the end of October.

What will I do? In my two previous sabbaticals with my former congregation, I was finishing huge projects—my Doctor of Ministry Degree final paper for the first one and the first full draft of my book for the second one. Though it was a different and very creative use of my time, for both sabbaticals, I had deadlines looming over my head, and it was not nearly as restful as I would have hoped.

For this one: Rest and renew.

My wife, Patty, and I will do some traveling to be with family and some to experience places we love. While she is here working, I’ll read what I want to read, not what I have to read, likely a good combination of fiction and other life and spiritual encouragement. I’ll run, work out, and sit on the porch with my dog (and my wife Patty!).

No deadlines.

I’m grateful to Incarnation that sabbaticals are part of the commitment we make to our leaders. I’m also grateful for Pastor Joy and, now, Pastor Lamont, who will be guiding the ministry while I am away. Our competent staff will launch all the fall ministries just like they would have done if I were here. I’ll be back before you know it. Some of the cabin dwellers over the summer will even say, “I didn’t know you were gone!”

So, now you know what I will be doing. Here is what I expect you will be doing:

- Continuing to be open to the ways the spirit of God is working in your life.
- Continuing to generously support the ministry we are doing together. Summer is a critical time for your financial giving.
- Continuing to serve our church and community so that we can “co-create a better, more loving world.”

In other words, continuing to do what the Spirit is already leading you to do!

Peace, Kai



*Ted Trahan
Council President*

I like the name “Realm”. That is the name of our current church management software. It is evocative of the spiritual realm described in the Bible. Or perhaps the earthly realm, where we participate in bringing the Gospel to life. I am grateful for the earthly realm and intrigued by the spiritual realm. But the church management system? That Realm is going away. Realm is notoriously difficult to get data into, and even harder to get data out of. Realm is being replaced by “Planning Center”.

The name Planning Center is evocative of... church management software. Woot! Ok, I’m slightly less inspired by the name of this software. And when I said that at the Council Forum in May, someone quipped that we should call it “Ted.” Thanks, but no thanks. I am, however, inspired by what Planning Center will allow us to do.

Over the past year, when I have pulled contact information from Realm, about half of the email addresses were obsolete. Planning Center will be available to everyone as a downloadable app on your phone. In the Planning Center app, you will be able to update your own contact information. Huge step forward. In the app, not only will you be able to see what small groups are available, but you can sign up for them. You will be able to see service and volunteer opportunities. Staff and ministry leaders will be able to reach out to us who have indicated interest in particular areas. Here’s something I find exciting: Planning Center has a flow for following up with visitors and new members. “Connection cards” will be in the pews. Once a visitor fills out a Connection card, that information will be entered into Planning Center, and we can establish a trajectory for contact and relationship-building.

Planning Center will be enabling. More information will be forthcoming in June, and the system will go live for the congregation in July. It will be a good tool. If only it had a sexier name. Maybe we could name it after a biblical era tool. What tools were used then? Plowshares for preparing the soil, chisels for shaping material for tabernacles, and plumb-bobs to ensure worship infrastructures were straight and true. That’s it! Church management software is infrastructure. The app may be called Planning Center officially, but in my mind, I will call it Plumb-Bob.

A new bishop, Reverend Justin Grimm, was elected to lead the St. Paul Area Synod (SPAS). That’s great, but what does the synod really mean to us at Incarnation?

The synod is a fount of resources for congregations, starting with the bishop. One role of the bishop is to be a pastor to the pastors. Imagine being a pastor at a church in St. Paul or Minneapolis during Operation Metro Surge. In such gritty times, pastors benefit from pastoral TLC. The synod is instrumental in connecting congregations with pastors. Pastors Kai, Joy, and Lamont have all come to us through the synod. The SPAS website has resources for congregations, including guidance for compensation, church finances, child and vulnerable adult safety, and cybersecurity. Incarnation’s endowment committee recently funded (in part) two SPAS programs – Planting Hope travel for Young Adults and Planting Hope mini-grants. We have a global partner with Tanzania through the synod’s Bega Kwa Bega relationship with the Iringa diocese. Another aspect is that the synod supports the development of new church leaders, with programs to reduce seminary student debt and sponsoring synod internships. SPAS is a valuable partner!



There was another important moment at the assembly. The materials sent out ahead of time included a resolution that was slated for a vote. After a string of “Whereas” clauses, the resolution read, “NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT

RESOLVED that in 2026, the youth and adults in the congregations of the Saint Paul Area Synod be encouraged to study gun violence and then act as peacemakers by urging friends, parents, teammates, fellow students, co-workers, and neighbors to write, visit, and phone their Minnesota and Federal legislators to ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazine sales.”

I went into the assembly fully expecting plenty of people raising green cards (vote to adopt) and red cards (vote not to adopt), with the possibility of emotional statements for and against. And then the author of the resolution was introduced.

The author was an eleven-year-old boy named Connor. Connor knew what had happened at Annunciation School. He wondered what our church could do about it. With the support of his grandpa, Connor brought the issue to Bishop Lull.

Connor’s presentation was well-spoken and well-rehearsed. (His grandpa, sitting in a pew behind the microphone, mouthed the words they had practiced so much.)

It was at once inspiring and heartbreaking that an eleven-year-old would bring this issue before the synod.

At the time of the vote, green cards were raised high throughout the 500+ person-filled sanctuary. There were a couple of red cards that were held discreetly. The resolution was adopted.

I don’t know where individuals within our Incarnation community stand on the issue of ownership or general availability of assault weapons. But for me, I find hope in the fact that there are grade-schoolers out there who see what’s happening in the world and believe that it does not have to be this way.



Pivoting to another topic, what are you doing this summer? Pickleball is done for the year, so we’ll have to get our wiggles out some other way. For sure, Incarnation people will still be driving ministry: small groups, service groups, volunteering. Thank you, Incarnation community, for all you do! Meanwhile, the Incarnation staff is hip-deep in planning for fall programming – worship, music, faith formation, and Plumb-Bob Planning Center.

Photos: [Saint Paul Area Synod](#)



Thank You to All Hands & Hearts Friends

Thank you to all our Hands & Hearts Friends who volunteered with the Kids in Need Foundation recently. This fabulous crew of 15 volunteers filled 810 backpacks with essential school supplies in less than 2 hours. The backpacks will find their way to young hands who are in need of basic resources to learn and grow. Volunteers and donations are essential to meeting the needs of students and teachers in the classroom. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

This was the last Hands & Hearts project until fall. It's been another meaningful and uplifting season with an amazing group. Thanks to all for your support and passion for spreading God's love and care to others!



Vacation Bible School 2026 | Snowball Mountain Challenge!



**Monday, June 15-Thursday, June 18
9 AM – Noon | 4-year-olds – 4th grade**

You're invited to join us on an unforgettable adventure with Snowball Mountain Challenge! We will have an exciting week of winter sports events where we become challengers, gearing up for frosty games, snowy surprises, and hands-on lessons about resilience and faith, teaching kids "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). Register at www.incarnationmn.org/summer

Vacation Bible School 2026 | Volunteers Needed!

Monday, June 15 – Thursday, June 18 | 9 AM – Noon

Adult & Youth Volunteers are needed to make this amazing week possible!

We're looking for approximately 50 Adult Volunteers & 80 Youth Volunteers. If you're able to give your time, it ends up not only being an amazing week for the kids, but many volunteers say it's the highlight of their summer! Signup at www.incarnationmn.org/summer



All Hands on Hope MobilePack™ Makes a Global Impact

The 2026 All Hands on Hope MobilePack™ is complete, and once again, the community came together in an incredible way to make a difference for children around the world. This year marked the 19th MobilePack hosted at Incarnation Lutheran Church, continuing a tradition of faith, service, and hope.

From April 22–26, more than 1,800 volunteers joined hands to pack an amazing 614,304 meals. Those meals will provide daily nourishment for 1,683 children for an entire year through the work of Feed My Starving Children. Our community also reached our goal of raising \$180,000 to pay for the meals we packed!



Volunteers came from across the community, demonstrating the true spirit of “*All Hands on Hope.*” Participants included Kiwanis and Rotary groups, Scout troops, student volunteer teams from local churches and schools, Incarnation small groups, families, and many individual community members. Together, volunteers worked side by side to help feed God’s hungry children around the world.

This year’s event also introduced an exciting new focus on sustainability. Incarnation’s Creation Care and FMSC Action Groups partnered to make the MobilePack more environmentally friendly and reduce event waste. Their efforts produced meaningful results, including:

environmentally friendly and reduce event waste. Their efforts produced meaningful results, including:

- Nearly 200 pounds of organics were delivered to composting sites, including paper towels, spilled ingredients, and food waste from team meals
- A full dumpster of cardboard was recycled
- More than 200 pounds of plastic were donated to a local school working toward collecting enough material to create a recycled park bench for its playground

These new sustainability initiatives added another layer of impact to an already meaningful event and reflect Incarnation’s ongoing commitment to caring for both people and the planet.



Thank you to every volunteer, donor, organizer, and supporter who made the 2026 All Hands on Hope MobilePack such a tremendous success. We look forward to building on this momentum and expanding our waste-reduction efforts at the 2027 MobilePack™.

Mark your calendars for the 20-year anniversary of the All Hands on Hope MobilePack™, currently scheduled for April 14-18, 2027. Follow weekly Incarnation emails, Lifetimes newsletter, and our social media accounts to stay up to date on the latest news. Facebook: [All Hands on Hope MobilePack](#) | Instagram: [fmsc at incarnation](#)



Twenty-five Scouts and family members of Troop 9416 (which meets every Monday at Incarnation) and Pack 367 (which meets at Cross of Glory) participated in the Feed My Starving Children MobilePack™ event at ILC on Friday, April 24, 2026. The volunteers at this event packed 322 boxes, which will feed 190 kids for a year! After the shift was done, the Scouts helped sanitize tables and sweep the floors in preparation for the next day's shifts. If you or someone you know is interested in scouting, contact Wes Erwin, Scoutmaster, 651-728-0248.

Senior Ministry News



Patty Nilsen
Senior Ministry Leader

Morning Musings Journaling

June 1, 10:00-11:30 AM

Fireside Room

Interested in Journaling?

'Morning Musings' to start June 1

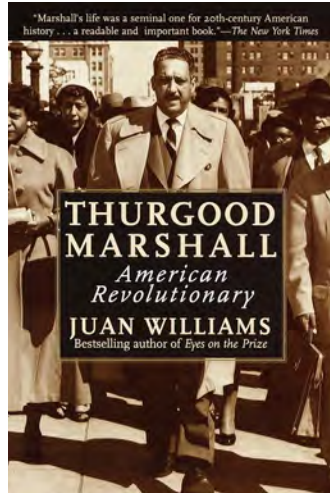
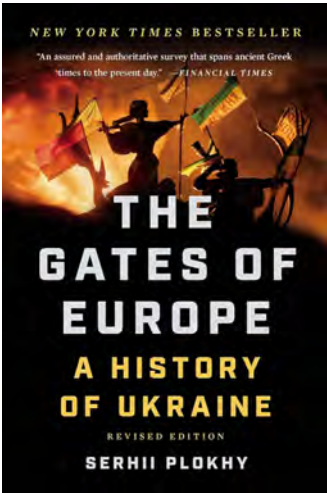
In response to requests from people who recently attended a Wellbeing Wednesday session on prayer/spiritual journaling, monthly journaling sessions will be held this summer. Participants said they were energized by the process of writing in the presence of others.

Anyone interested in journaling is welcome. Attend as your schedule permits. The first session will be held in the Fireside Lounge on **Monday, June 1, 10 AM to 11:30 AM**. The plan is to meet the first Mondays of the month, but the July date will be

discussed at the first meeting, as it falls near the 4th of July.

Sessions will begin with a short opening discussion, followed by "bursts" of writing. A prompt/topic will be introduced and participants will have 5-10 minutes to write about it. Following that, people will discuss how the process worked for them. Sharing is optional and no one will be asked to share what they journaled. Since this is a new endeavor, we may fine-tune the format as time goes on.

Bring a pen and journal. Beverages and snacks will be provided. Please RSVP to [Patty Nilsen](mailto:Patty.Nilsen@incarnationmn.org) so we will have a good idea of how much seating to have available.



The Men's History Group meets on the **first and third Tuesday at 9 AM** in Bethany Lounge to discuss a non-fiction history book selected by one of the members. Anyone interested in the subject is invited to attend any session, even if you have not read the book of that month. Here are the next books:

JUNE — *“The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine”* by Serhii Plokhy. No one can understand today’s sad, tangled confrontation over Ukraine without some knowledge of the complex influences that have shaped Eastern Europe over the millennia.

JULY — *“Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary”* by Juan Williams. An account of a remarkable man with an outsized, multifaceted personality — a driven crusader, committed pathfinder, cantankerous dissenter, and unrestrained raconteur.

Questions? Contact Jerry Gilbert at dacta49@msn.com.

Among the Congregation

PUBLIC PRAYER CONCERNS: Candace Gruman; Dawn Schwantz; Sally Dorr; Dede Mattison; Karen Ruff; Ronald Anderson; Dottie House; Carlos Rodriguez; Erin Holmen; Karen Stauder; Kara Genia & family; Jon Nelson; Kate Tollefson & family; Carol Beckerleg; Marian Ness; Lowell Odland; Linda Hudepohl; Paul Howard’s sister; Linda Brynjulfson’s sister; Kara & Mike Johnson’s son & daughter-in-law; Katie Gray’s daughter, Erin; Nicole & Troy Heller’s brother-in-law; Kay Leerssen’s daughter; Grant Rykken’s brother-in-law; Sue Bernlohr’s mother; Mike Wielenberg’s mother;

Al and Carolyn Ek’s son; Judy Nelson’s friend, Leona; Nancy Haugen’s friends David, Michelle & family and Colette & family; Kim Wielenberg’s friend, Cindy; Dede Mattison’s friends, Allan and Yvonne; caregivers

SYMPATHY TO: Tom Henk & family on the death of his brother; the family of Deb Rykken on her death; Charlie Grafstrom and family on the death of his 105 year old grandmother; the family of Larrie Reese on his death; the family of Rachel Eklund on her death; Bill & Sarah Conlin on the death of their brother-in-law

Financial Report

FINANCE REPORT FOR APRIL 2026

From the Statement of Financial Activities Report

APRIL Actual Operating & Mortgage Revenue	\$162,866	YTD Actual Op & Mort Revenue	\$839,230	YTD Budgeted Oper. & Mort. Revenue	\$961,469
APRIL Actual Operating & Mortgage Expense	\$242,232	YTD Actual OP & Mort Expense	\$993,999	YTD Budgeted Oper. & Mort. Expense	\$1,018,779
OPERATING TOTALS	-\$79,366		-\$154,769		-\$57,310



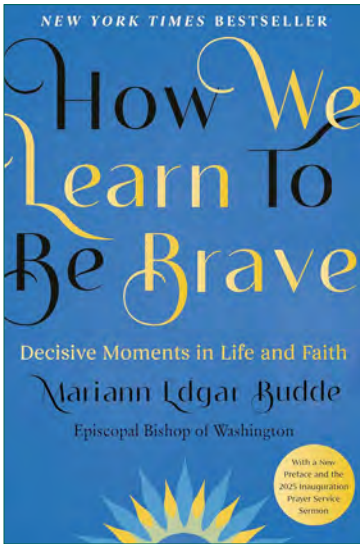
Welcome to the **Creation Care Corner**, information from the Creation Care Action Group. We hope to keep you informed about Creation Care projects at Incarnation and to provide ideas and resources for your own journey toward creating a more sustainable world. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact Nancy Stutzman at nancystutzman@comcast.net or Mike Vant at mjvant@gmail.com

Today's Topic: Summer Reading

School is almost out, the days are (mostly) warming, and you may be working on your summer reading list. The ILC library has many choices for folks looking for books on creation care, including several books by local authors. Check it out.

Here are just a few:

- ***So We and Our Children May Live, Following Jesus in Confronting the Climate Crisis*** by Sarah Augustine
This book offers hope for a better future and offers ways to work for sustainable change that follows Jesus.
- ***The Bullhead Queen: A Year on Pioneer Lake*** by Sue Leaf
In *The Bullhead Queen*, local author (raised in Roseville, MN) Sue Leaf reflects on the birds she peers at through binoculars and the Lutheran church that anchors Pioneer Lake's southern shore and contemplates how her relationship to nature has been colored by the Christian theology of her childhood.
- ***Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Hope and Healing in a Divided World*** by Katherine Hayhoe
In *Saving Us*, Hayhoe argues that when it comes to changing hearts and minds, facts are only one part of the equation. This is not another doomsday narrative about a planet on fire. It is a multilayered look at science, faith, and human psychology, from an icon in her field—recently named chief scientist at The Nature Conservancy.
- ***The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for an Endangered Planet*** by Jane Goodall
In *The Book of Hope*, Jane Goodall focuses on her "Four Reasons for Hope": The Amazing Human Intellect, The Resilience of Nature, The Power of Young People, and The Indomitable Human Spirit.
- ***A Kid's Guide to Saving the Planet: It's Not Hopeless and We're Not Helpless*** by Paul Douglas
Yes, this is meteorologist Paul Douglas, whom many of us watched on Channel 11. Despite what you may hear on the news, the situation isn't hopeless, and we aren't helpless. In this inspiring, informative book, nationally recognized meteorologist Paul Douglas clearly and thoughtfully presents the daunting problems of climate change. And he offers realistic solutions (including some that are already working!), and actions kids can take now.



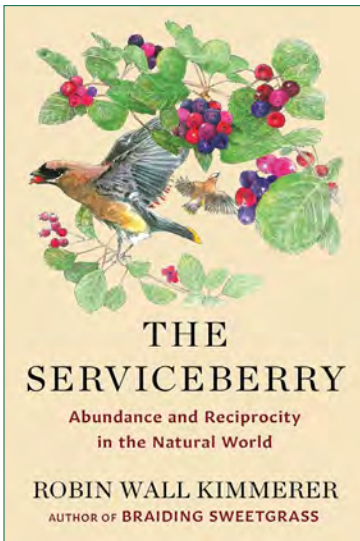
**How We Learn To Be Brave:
Decisive Moments in Life and Faith**
By Marion Edgar Budde

Most of us did not know the name Mariann Edgar Budde until January 21, 2025, when she led the prayer service for Donald Trump's second inauguration. We did not know her as the bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, D. C., nor as the author of several wonderful books. And we didn't know how brave she was.

How We Learn to be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith by Budde is an inspirational guide to those times in our lives when we are called to be more than we have thought possible. Her words on that January day did not just leap into her thoughts; they are the result of how she has become brave. She uses decisions as examples: the decision to go, the decision to stay, the decision to start, the decision to accept that which we did not choose, and the decision to step up

to the plate. You will find examples from Harry Potter and the Gospel of Luke, as well as Martin Luther King, making this title accessible to everyone.

This book is a highly readable and optimistic account of how to build the courage to face life's challenges in today's troubled world. With Bishop Budde's wisdom, readers will learn to live and to respond according to their true beliefs and in ways that align with their best selves. *How We Learn to Be Brave* will provide much-needed fortitude and insight to anyone searching for answers in uncertain times. We can learn to be brave — and merciful.



**The Serviceberry:
Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World**
By Robin Wall Kimmerer

The Serviceberry is beautiful — and not just because the cover has a gorgeous drawing of a Cedar Waxwing eating serviceberries. The illustrations inside by John Burgoyne are equally wonderful. But it is the prose of Robin Wall Kimmerer that is truly beautiful and will linger with you long after this small book is finished.

The subtitle of the book is: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World, and the back cover reminds us that “All flourish is mutual”. If these ideas sound familiar, it may be because of Kimmerer's book, Braiding Sweetgrass, which set her apart as both a Native American and a professor of environmental and forest biology. (Yes, our church library has a copy.)

We often remind ourselves of God's abundance in churches, but usually when referring to financial matters and the importance of sharing our resources rather than the scarcity we often think about in our world. Here we are reminded of our relationship with God's creation and ourselves. Kimmerer talks about the gift economy rather than the scarcity economic life in which we daily find ourselves. Her reminders of gratitude and of seeing ourselves as givers rather than takers help us see the abundance she speaks of. She urges us with a message of hope to respect ourselves, others, our community, and the world in which we all live.

Here's a memorable quote: “I want to live in a society where the currency of exchange is gratitude and the infinitely renewable resource of kindness which multiplies every time it is shared rather than depreciating with use.”



SUMMER BINGO
 INCARNATION LUTHERAN CHURCH LIBRARY
 MARK OFF A SQUARE WHEN YOU HAVE READ A BOOK...
 Use the empty space in the field to enter the name of the book you read.
 * denotes the section of the library where books may be found

... from the "New-to-the-Library" shelf	... set in Minnesota	... recommended in Lifetimes	... to present a devotional *240's	... you discussed with someone
... by an Indigenous author	... about hymns *700	... about Martin or Katie Luther *921	... about a liturgical or church holiday	... recommended by a Kairos presenter
... recommended in a sermon	... on display in the library	FREE	... to a child *E or J	... about the Saint John's Bible
... a biography not about an American *921	... by a Lutheran author	... checked out on a day other than Sunday	... with colorful illustrations	... a "new-to-you" translation of the Bible *220
... recommended by an Incarnation member	... with an historical background	... recommended by a small group	... by a Minnesota author	... recommended by the Care of Creation group

Summer often brings us more time to rest and relaxation — and reading! The church library group at Incarnation has a way to challenge you not only to make use of our church library but also to broaden your usual reading choices. A “Summer Bingo Card” is now available in the library, offering reading choices from many areas of our library during the summer.

We hope you will take up the challenge and learn a bit more about the interesting, informative, and inspiring books that our library has to offer. There are books beautifully illustrated, books to share with children, books to help you read the Bible with new eyes, and books to nudge you to talk about them with others. And more... (Yes, the middle space is always free.)

We would love to receive many Summer Bingo cards at the end of summer...!

Red Cross Blood Drive Thank-You

Incarnation hosted its twelfth quarterly American Red Cross blood drive on Tuesday, May 12. Our fourth year will start with our next drive on Tuesday, August 11.

You (congregation, donors, Incarnation staff, volunteers, and the Red Cross) have done marvelous things for our community and nation through these blood drives and generous blood donations to patients in need. We have collected 642 units of blood at these drives.

If you'd like to join the throng at the August 11 and/or November 5 drive, please follow the link below:

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/give.html/drive-results?zipSponsor=IncarnationLutheran>

If you're interested in Power Red donation and would like to learn more, follow this link:

<https://www.redcrossblood.org/donate-blood/how-to-donate/types-of-blood-donations/power-red-donation.html>

