



ABIDING TOGETHER
TO OUR
50th
ANNIVERSARY
AND BEYOND!

**Where We've Been &
Where We're Going**

**Abiding Presence
Lutheran Church
Fall 2023**



Abiding Presence Lutheran Church

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FROM THE DESK OF PASTOR KESELEY, SENIOR PASTOR

Dear Members and Friends of Abiding Presence,

As the apostle Paul first wrote to the Philippians, so I now write to you: “I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you...”

Thank you for your generous financial support of Abiding Presence this past year. Your faithful giving has made our ministry possible. We have formed faith, changed lives, fed and cared for our neighbors, and boldly preached God’s love for all people. None of this would have been possible without your support.

Thank you, too, for the leaps of faith you have taken over the years to bring us to this point. This year we celebrated our 45th anniversary, giving thanks for the ways we have been *Abiding Together* through the decades. The most significant part of that celebration was a meal-packing event that was true to who we are as a church that exists for the sake of the world. Over the past 45 years, we have lived into whatever bold vision God has placed before us, whether that be constructing a building, launching a food pantry, creating a mental health ministry, forming a robust summer program, resettling a refugee family, or so much more.

Now, we turn our eyes to the church God is calling us to be at our 50th anniversary, which we will celebrate in 2028. We want to put in place the foundation to enable Abiding Presence to continue to be the vibrant and Spirit-filled church it is today for the next 50 years and beyond. Looking forward, I am as excited as ever about our ministry together.

As you read through the pages of this book about our 50th anniversary vision and the steps we will take towards it this coming year, I hope you will be as



excited as I am about the church’s future. May the Abiding Stories of our community inspire all of us in our commitment to *Abiding Together*.

Our 2024 budget will require an increase of \$1,350/week in new giving. This increase will allow us to fully fund our existing vibrant ministry, engage in new ministry and contend with rising costs. At Abiding Presence, we form our budget based on the commitments the congregation makes towards it, which means every single commitment matters - no matter how big or small.

OVER THE PAST 45 YEARS, WE
HAVE LIVED INTO WHATEVER
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As my husband Ben and I look at our financial priorities, we recognize the immeasurable value of this faith community for our family. Our girls are growing up in an intergenerational faith community that cares for

them, provides them with opportunities they could get no place else and helps form them in the faith. You are our family’s church, and there is no putting a dollar on the difference that makes in our lives.

Ben and I will be increasing our giving this year in gratitude for all the church means for our family and for the community in which we live. I invite you to increase your giving, too. *Abiding Together*, we can fully fund the life-changing ministry that happens every day in this church.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Meredith Lovell Keseley, Senior Pastor



MARIAN (RIGHT) AT SUMMER CAMP THIS SUMMER

FEELING JOY: MARIAN'S ABIDING STORY

Marian is a Senior at George Mason University majoring in Social Work who was looking for a way to get involved in her community. She came across the Abiding Presence Food Ministry website and the need for volunteers. After receiving a warm welcome from Sharon, the Food Ministry Coordinator, and utilizing her fluency in Spanish and English, Marian became a regular greeter to Pantry guests.

Growing up without attending church regularly she felt pulled to Abiding Presence and the community here. After learning about and participating in the summer internship program, Marian got to know Pastor Meredith, Pastor Kelsey and Michaela. “In addition to the pastors and Michaela, the rest of the staff of Sharon, Heather and Dave are so welcoming and caring and they showed how they really value me and the other interns,” Marian recalled. “Being part of the ministry here helped me re-establish a relationship with God and gives me people to lean on who support me in my faith journey,” she shared.

Marian has been volunteering at the Saturday Food Pantry since August 2022 and that experience has cemented for her that she wants to help people through social work. “Seeing the people at the food pantry who we serve going through difficult situations gives me such a feeling of joy knowing I’m truly helping them,” Marian recalls. Having grown up in Northern Virginia for most of her life, Marian also spent 2.5 years living in her mother’s hometown in Bolivia to be immersed in the culture and become fluent in Spanish. “That experience allowed me to see firsthand what life is like there and makes me so much more appreciative of all that I have and the opportunities I’ve been given that some people only dream of having,” Marian shared. “I never want to take any of that for granted,” she said.

**“I TRULY JUST LOVE
THIS CHURCH.”**

Since she was 9 years old, Marian has loved dancing the Caporales, a Bolivian cultural dance, that connects her to her family heritage. “Dancing has allowed me to bond with my siblings as well as connect with people from the same and different cultures,” she shared. In addition to dancing, Marian enjoys playing the violin for the past 11 years. She even teaches lessons to upper elementary and middle school students.

“I just love this church where everyone creates a sense of comfort and home to all who come here,” she shared. “I truly just love this church.”



WHERE WE'VE BEEN IN 2023

Being the Church

Celebrating our 45th Anniversary this year, we've lived out being the church, forming faith and changing lives through

Worship & Music

- Increased in-person worship attendance
- Active livestream worship community
- Vibrant music ministry involving over 100 people
- Relaunching Youth Music with 14 teens
- Launching Abiding Kids Music with 13 kids

Adult Faith Formation & Relationship Building

- OWLs ministry connecting our older, wiser Lutherans with one another and the church
- Congregation-wide reading of Philippians to introduce daily Bible readings
- Adult Bible studies and small groups

Community Outreach

- Relaunching Mainly Music as a community outreach ministry with 29 kids and their grownups
- Hosting community events such as Trunk-or-Treat, Bagels with Santa, Hog Dogs & S'mores and more

"Next Generation" Ministry with Children, Youth & College-Age

- Over 220 registrations for 10 camps spread over six weeks
- Abiding Fellows, our High School ministry, reaching 25 10th-12th graders, including several new to the church
- College-Age internship ministry reaching 22 young adults, including several new to the church
- Launching an Infant, Toddler and Parent Sunday School class
- Innovative workshop-based Sunday School that has become an example across the wider church
- Godspell, Jr. the Musical, with 15 children and youth participating
- Confirmation ministry involving 46 7th-9th grade teens



**"WORKING SUMMER CAMP HAS BEEN HELPING ME UNDERSTAND WHAT MY FAITH CALLING COULD BE DOWN THE ROAD."
ETHAN DUKE,
ABIDING PRESENCE COLLEGE-AGE INTERN**

WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY: RALPH'S ABIDING STORY

Having been raised in different faith traditions, Ralph and his wife Chris seldom attended worship services together. After many years and many moves from place to place they landed in northern Virginia in 2014 and the church search began. The internet church search introduced them to Abiding Presence.

“We came to our first service at Abiding Presence feeling like the first day of school, and no fewer than a dozen people welcomed us, including Pastor Meredith,” Ralph recalled. Following worship that morning, they attended Abiding Table, the adult Sunday School, which includes a delicious breakfast. “We felt welcomed and invited back. We both agreed we wanted to come back again,” Ralph stated. “What is amazing about Abiding Presence is that it seems like everyone comes as they are and who they are, not as somebody else wishes them to be,” Ralph shared. For Ralph and Chris, it is important that we all find a way to be accepting of others regardless of having the right car, status in the community, and not feeling like a country club. “If you can’t find that feeling of acceptance in a place of worship, that’s not a place we want to be,” Ralph shared.

“WHAT IS AMAZING ABOUT ABIDING PRESENCE IS THAT IT SEEMS LIKE EVERYONE COMES AS THEY ARE AND WHO THEY ARE, NOT AS SOMEBODY ELSE WISHES THEM TO BE.”

smile on their face, and that means a lot to me,” he shared. Ralph also cherishes time spent on the annual Iron Men retreat at Caroline Furnace. “I get absorbed and lost in the Word [scripture], throw out my job and stressors, and have intentional time connecting with other guys in a similar boat as me.”

“Chris and I didn’t have a faith journey together before coming to Abiding Presence, but we do now,” Ralph expressed. “To be able to do stuff together is so much better than doing it alone and has made us grow together as we found out we had a whole lot more in common in shared faith beliefs than we thought.” Abiding Presence has given Ralph so much enjoyment and enrichment over the past seven years and serves as a comfortable, contemplative place in an ever-changing world. “We feel invested, and we can’t wait to see what the next seven years and beyond are going to be like. We want to be a part of giving back all the good feelings we get out of being members here.”



RALPH (LEFT) ON PARKING DUTY AT THE FOOD PANTRY

Being part of the usher team allows Ralph to extend the welcome he experienced to others who come to worship. His involvement in the Food Ministry and the ability to provide food when the need is so great has made a significant impact on him. Time spent serving dinner at the Carpenter’s Shelter several times a year enables him to bring some joy to shelter guests.

“Maybe for half an hour, they have a

WHERE WE'VE BEEN IN 2023

Being the Church for the Sake of the World



Abiding Presence Food Ministry

- Celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Food Pantry, feeding 4,081 households this year (as of 10/18)
- Provided and served 5 meals to the Carpenter's Shelter
- Concluded our Mobile Pantry with Food for Others
- Served as a Capital Area Food Bank Produce Hub for 3 area churches

Abiding Presence Mental Health

- Provided mental health counseling through our Therapist-in-Residence to 34 individuals at over 300 appointments. The vast majority of appointments were financially subsidized by the church in order to make them accessible.

We were ready for God's next big thing, turning the church's house into a home for an Afghan family as we worked to resettle and welcome them in our community. This looked like:

- Furnishing an entire four bedroom house for a family of seven
- Donating over 230 new items from an Amazon Wishlist
- Stocking the pantry, refrigerator and freezer with culturally appropriate food and providing groceries to the family for their first month.
- Reducing the rent of the parsonage to make it affordable for a 15-month lease
- Gifting all utilities for the first 6 months and internet, trash and water for the entire 15-months of the lease
- Providing driving volunteers for medical, dental, shopping and school appointments

I DEEPLY APPRECIATE
THE SUBSIDY
ABIDING PRESENCE
IS PROVIDING FOR
MY THERAPY...I
WOULDN'T BE ABLE
TO GET THERAPY FOR
MYSELF WITHOUT
ACCESS VIA
ABIDING PRESENCE.
- ABIDING PRESENCE
MEMBER





CHANGE IS GOOD: JEN'S ABIDING STORY

Jen's family was looking for a new church home with family activities, events for kids, opportunities for music involvement, and Jen wanted to get to know other moms and women. Their family was searching for a church community intent on change and the ability to pivot, supporting innovation and a willingness to adapt. After driving by Abiding Presence on her daily commute, Jen visited the church website and watched a service online before attending in person.

"We love Ms. Michaela and all the children's programs offered at Abiding Presence," Jen shared. "As a parent I love that there is always a place for my kids and we found our children are seen and valued in worship and in the whole community," Jen said. Her son, Caleb, is often in church and may seem less engaged but no one is judgmental about his behavior, rather

everyone makes it easy for him to be happy here. Jen found the support of the Neurodiversity group to be a place where other parents understand the joys and challenges of supporting neurodiverse children. "During summer camp, Ms. Michaela and the Abiding Fellows were able to meet Caleb where he is and help him participate in Lego activities that he loves," Jen shared.

"FELLOWSHIP CAN LOOK LIKE A LOT OF DIFFERENT THINGS AND THIS CHURCH HAS A HISTORY OF PIVOTING AND CHANGING TO SUPPORT YOUTH, NEURODIVERSITY, AND MORE."

"Our daughter Clara loves the Preschool Sunday School class and looks forward to it every week," Jen said. At home, Clara enjoys reading her Spark bible and always wants to re-read that week's story at night before bed. She also enjoys sharing with her parents and brother the craft they did. Caleb shares his sister's love of reading and they both listened to Mom and Dad read the summer book club stories with

Caleb often predicting the outcome of the story. "He has developed a good understanding of what he hears and learns at church and is able to predict the good news of each story," Jen shared.

Since joining Abiding Presence, Jen has seen the start of an additional option during Adult Education of board games for her husband, Thomas, and a young mom's support group for her. Thomas lends his voice and musical talents to Sunday worship services. Jen also joined a women's small group and enjoys keeping in touch throughout the week via text. "Fellowship can look like a lot of different things and this church has a history of pivoting and changing to support youth, neurodiversity, and more," she shared. "I've seen how we can be a blessing right now for those needs and not worry so much about how this was done in the past or can we sustain this into the future," Jen recalled. "The pastors and staff notice a need and make plans to engage people and meet them right where they are," Jen shared.

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OUR VISION FOR 2028

ABIDING PRESENCE'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR

Our Legacy to Abiding Presence's Next Generation Will Be

- **People** who have a personal relationship with the Triune God, know scripture, can articulate their faith and are willing to offer an invitation to others to “come and see;”
- **Culture** that embraces our Lutheran history of being a church that is always reforming and being made new;
- **Vision** for God's church beyond where we are in the moment (and maybe even beyond where current circumstances suggest we can be in the future);
- **Capacity** of finances, facility and staff to respond to God's next big thing or our community's next urgent need;
- **Endowment** to cover all capital improvements and general maintenance expenses of the church and parsonage; and
- **Healthy Finances** that are free from debt and ready to fund new ministry ideas.

To Accomplish Our Vision, We Will Be

- Clear in our proclamation that **all are welcome**;
- Intentional in the work of **making disciples**; and
- Bold in our commitment to **feeding, providing mental health care and caring for our neighbors**.

Our Vision Matters Because

- Our lives have been **changed and transformed by the good news of Jesus** and the ministry that has happened these past 50 years at Abiding Presence;
- We are passionate about **passing down this good news** to the next generation and beyond;
- We live in a hurting and broken **world that needs to hear the good news of Jesus**; and
- Jesus is coming back, and that **good news changes everything**.



COMING HOME: DAN'S ABIDING STORY

Having grown up in the Lutheran faith, Dan felt most at home attending his local Lutheran Church. One Christmas Eve he noticed Abiding Presence when driving by and how close it was to his house. He and his wife, along with their toddler, attended worship that evening and felt an immediate connection. "People were so accepting and welcoming of us and our 2 year old son and so patient with us as a young family," Dan recalled. "Pastor Bailey had a warm, welcoming, and humble presence and we started attending weekly worship services," he shared. When their daughter was born in 2000 they had her baptized and became members.

Dan and his family got to know people through Wednesday night gatherings. "We were both working," Dan shared, "so we weren't involved in a lot of activities but we always made an effort to bring the kids on Wednesday nights." Recalling his father working in the restaurant business, Dan would volunteer in the kitchen cleanup crew alongside other members.

The next stage of parenthood saw their children growing up, and Dan and his wife found more time to come to church. "When the pandemic hit I thought the seamless way Abiding Presence transitioned to online church was done well," Dan shared. He said, "It gave us an anchor during the early part of the pandemic and our family really looked forward to weekly worship together." Dan especially connected with the meditative music devotions shared online and what a sense of normalcy they provided when everything else seemed uncertain.

**"[ABIDING PRESENCE] IS
THE ONE PLACE I CAN
ALWAYS COME AND FEEL
COMFORTABLE..."**

tailgate of their parents' car looking so happy and it reminded me of that simple joy from my youth," Dan recalled.

When we welcomed an Afghan family into the parsonage in March 2023, Dan felt called to support them with his time and expertise. "Initially I was a friendly face and helped them learn how to walk to the library, locate stores, and rode with them on the bus teaching them which routes to take," Dan shared. He was also instrumental in preparing resumes, practicing interview questions, and driving them to interviews.

Dan has transitioned through various phases of life at Abiding Presence but always found a part of the ministry relevant to him where he could get involved. "This is the one place I can always come and feel comfortable and I appreciate how Abiding Presence continues to be a welcoming place of continuity for everyone regardless of challenges at home, in school, or at work," Dan shared. "I think the pastors' focus on service and servanthood is a continuous theme that we all can be God's hands, arms, and feet in the world," Dan said.



DAN STOCKING SHELVES AT THE FOOD PANTRY

STEPS IN 2024 TOWARD OUR 50TH ANNIVERSARY VISION

Working toward our 50th anniversary vision, we will take these steps next year:

- **Engage** in exceptional worship.
Everything we do as a church flows out of our worship life. When we come before God in worship, we want to give our best so that worship is vibrant, Spirit-filled and intentionally intergenerational.
- **Grow** the vibrant “next generation” ministry we offer to babies, toddlers, kids, teens and college-age young adults.
“Next generation” ministry is thriving at Abiding Presence. Having grown this ministry in huge ways, we now need to fully fund it.
- **Inspire** adults to live as disciples throughout the week by equipping them to pray, read scripture and understand their work as vocation.
Having learned a lot about faith formation and discipleship-making from our “next generation” ministries, we want to now put those learnings into practice for adults, too. This will look like teaching adults the disciplines of regular prayer and scripture reading. We will also weave conversations about vocation into all aspects of ministry.
- **Create** a “Hunger Ministry Team” to explore root causes of hunger in our community and partnership possibilities to address them.
Having celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Food Pantry, we hear God’s call to expand our ministry from simply giving people food to thinking about the stumbling blocks to them obtaining that food on their own. This new ministry team will identify at least one root cause of hunger on which we can focus.
- **Maintain** excellence in ministry by caring for our staff.
We believe our clergy and staff are the best that are out there. By caring for them, we allow them to care for us. We do that by offering competitive compensation packages.
- **Launch** a facility endowment with at least four commitments of planned giving.
Thinking about the kind of faith legacy we want to leave, we will offer at least one planned giving workshop to educate the congregation about the possibilities of legacy giving. Endowing our facility will equip future generations to focus on vibrant ministry instead of capital improvements and building repairs.



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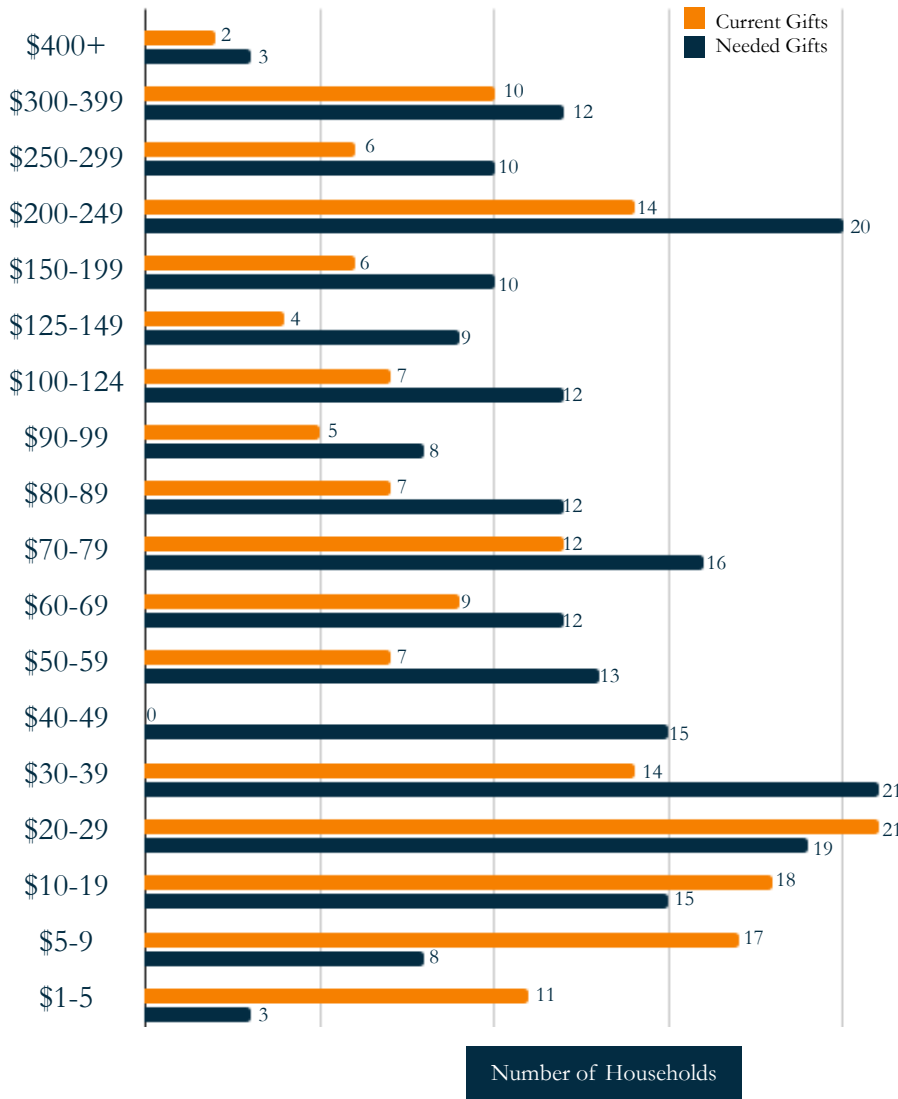


ANNUAL FUND STEWARDSHIP APPEAL 2023-2024



Scan Above to
Submit Your
Statement of
Intent Online

Current Weekly Offering



Your Joyful Participation
Enables Our Response

Review this chart
and consider
these questions:

*How does my
giving level compare
with other ways I
use my money?*

*How adequately
does my giving
reflect my gratitude
to God for all the
blessings I have
received?*

*Where would I be
if I doubled my
offering?*

*How much more
could I give if I
really wanted to do
so?*

Abiding Presence Lutheran Church