



FOCUS

September 2026

Daleheightschurch.org

Dale Heights Staff

Pastor:
Pulpit Supply

Treasurer:
Wendy Weber

Music Director
Dr. Alissa Freeman

Accounts Manager:
Dawn Westhoff

Office Manager:
Deb Hughes

Custodians:
Felipe Ruiz
& Lily Fabella

Session Members

Acting Moderator:
Rev. Kathleen Owens

Clerk:
Gale Oakes

Edi Chan (2026)
Gale Oakes (2026)
Wendy Weber (2027)
June Zeeh (2027)
Gerry Klump (2028)
Melanie Klump (2028)

Following

The youth group were traveling in a caravan. Those following thought that the people in the first car knew their destination. Then, after they circled around several times, one of the youth called someone in the first car to ask if they knew where they were going. The people in the first car answered that they didn't, but because everyone was following, they thought that they must be headed in the right direction!

We tend to think that if many people are following someone, that person must be the right person to follow. We don't always check to see whether that person will lead us in the right direction.

But we can be sure in following our LORD Jesus Christ. He told Simon Peter, James, and John to follow. "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

Only Jesus can lead us to the destination that gives us life.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

- John 8:12 (NIV)

Adapted from an essay by Tracy Jensen for the Upper Room

September

Breakfast

The Dale Heights monthly breakfast will be held on:

**Saturday
September 12, 2026.**

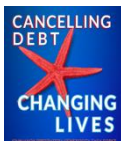
Serving will begin at 8:30 am.

The suggested donation is \$5.

RSVP to Roy if you have not already done so.

What is the Starfish Campaign?

**CANCELLING DEBT.
CHANGING LIVES.**



The Starfish Campaign is a ministry of **John Knox Presbytery** that abolishes medical debt for families in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. We partner with Undue Medical Debt, whose expertise means every dollar we raise wipes out at least \$100 of debt. In four years, our churches turned \$131,509 in contributions into over \$15.9 million in relief for 14,530 families.

Click here to [Give Now](#)



September Birthdays

6	Dawn Westoff
9	Alicia Shumate
17	Carey Fleischmann
18	Jack Rose
20	Sandy Weigt
25	Roy Lembcke
28	Mary Becker

September Anniversaries

24	Jamie & Matt Engebregtsen
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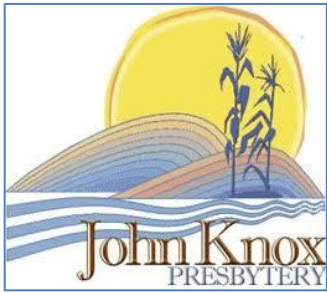


Church Office Hours:

9:30-1:30: Tuesday & Thursday
10:30-2:30: Wednesday

**Note: The office will be closed
September 8-10 for vacation**

One Sensational Gathering



Teaching and ruling elders from around John Knox Presbytery gathered at Bread of Life Presbyterian Church in Dubuque for the third presbytery meeting of 2026. Our theme this time was worship and the agenda was prepared in worship segments. The hospitality of our host church was on full display from beginning to end, most notably with the longest charcuterie table in the history of the world. Devon Reynolds began the meeting with a centering exercise, then set the tone for our time

together by mandating we wiggle as we walked past a certain section of the sanctuary. Wiggling at presbytery meetings...just one more reason getting together four times a year is special!

A panel, including Pastor Stephanie and four congregation members, shared the journey two congregations, First Pres and Westminster Pres, made to become a single community of faith. One word that may describe the result is “confluence”, like different rivers coming together. (*Think Pittsburgh. Can you name all three rivers?*) Each congregation has its own history. From now on, their future will be experienced together.

We heard more about the exciting changes taking place at **Dale Heights Presbyterian Church** in Madison. They are working with Threshold Sacred Development to build over 100 units of affordable housing on their current property. A new and wonderful thing is happening!

There were reports from our General Assembly commissioners, each describing a bit about the different committees they worked with. Common threads appeared as well. They expressed deep gratitude for the meaningful time they spent there as well as an invitation for all to attend a future General Assembly gathering. Our per capita dollars were not only used to make our presbytery meeting possible, they were most certainly doing good work when the General Assembly came to Milwaukee.



**Every per capita dollar makes a difference.
THANK YOU for your faithful contributions to per capita!**

All women of the church are cordially invited to the
John Knox Presbyterian Women 2026 Fall Gathering

9:30 a.m. - Saturday, September 19, 2026

Hosted by Grace Presbyterian Church
222 E Broadway St., Winona, MN



A Stitch in Time

Ecclesiastes 3:7- "A time to tear and a time to mend."

Our speaker will be Sharon Falck from Grinnell, Iowa, who runs a program that provides sewing machines, materials and training to the native American reservations in South Dakota. Sharon currently serves as moderator of Presbyterian Women in Des Moines Presbytery.

We will collect **donations of fabric, thread, sewing notions, and refurbish-able sewing machines** to send with Sharon. Our day will also include Dedication of the Thank Offering.

The host church is fully accessible for visitors with mobility needs.

Lunch cost will be \$8. To assist with planning, **please RSVP by Wednesday, September 9** (call or text 563-419-7371 or email ripleyjb56@gmail.com). Indicate if you have any dietary restrictions, or if you have any questions.



Excited to spend the day with you in Winona!

Madison churches are becoming housing, community spaces as religion shifts

By Will Briggs for the *Cap Times* – August 26, 2026

The Rev. Staci Marrese-Wheeler can pinpoint the moment she heard a conversation that crystalized the need for Madison's churches to rethink their model. Two young student teachers were talking on their way to a monthly gathering, hosted in the former Lakeview Moravian Church building.

"They'd always come past my office and say, 'Hi,'" recalled Marrese-Wheeler, pastor of [Common Grace](#) and co-director of the nonprofit Eastmorland Community Center. "One day I hear (them) as they're walking downstairs, and one of them says, 'What does this building smell like? It kind of smells like my grandparents' house to me.' And the other one says, 'Nostalgia. It smells like nostalgia.'"

In the years since, Marrese-Wheeler has seen the congregation on Madison's east side try to move beyond its past and set a new course for its future. A major milestone came with the official unification of Lakeview Moravian and Zion Lutheran churches in 2021, creating Common Grace. After selling the former Lutheran church site for a housing development, the combined congregation embarked on what is becoming an increasingly common journey for Madison-area churches: a full-scale redevelopment of its sanctuary into housing and nondenominational community space.

"These congregations were both ready to do something very different and had both sort of hit a brick wall independently," Marrese-Wheeler said. "Then the conversation we started during the pandemic was really, 'Could we do this together?'"

In October, Common Grace is set to celebrate another milestone: the opening of 26 units of workforce housing and the new 6,800-square-

foot [Eastmorland Community Center](#), with a multiuse space designed to hold around 90 people for larger gatherings — Sunday worship or otherwise — as well as a community kitchen, food pantry and smaller rooms for art classes, after-school programs or remote workers who need somewhere to take a meeting.

Common Grace was among the first congregations in what is now a larger ecosystem of religious space redevelopment in the Madison area, now home to two developers who specialize in revamping sacred spaces amid a changing religious landscape, with a combined four projects in various stages of development. Once completed, they would add an estimated 300 rent- or age-restricted units to Madison's housing stock, on top of 30 completed apartments at the former Zion Lutheran site and projects by other developers.

"The traditional expressions of Sunday morning worship and Bible study and Sunday School class is going to continue in some form, but not in the scale and its size and in the numbers that we have spaces," said Mark Elsdon, principal of Madison's [Threshold Sacred Development](#) and a former leader of [Pres House](#) Campus Ministry and apartments around the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"We have 300,000 church buildings in the United States, roughly. They're built for an era where that was the expression. If today's expression of church is more about food pantry ministries and social entrepreneurship and residential-based programming, then the spaces themselves no longer fit the way people are engaging their faith."

Fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic amid a decades-long decline in membership, churches

are rethinking their buildings and how to engage their communities, turning toward redevelopment as demand for housing and services grows in Madison.

‘It’s the people’

[St. John’s Lutheran Church](#) has more experience with development and redevelopment than most congregations in Madison, but its current project might be the most complicated of the bunch.

Founded in the city’s early days, the congregation [built](#) its first sanctuary on Main Street, only to relocate to East Washington Avenue several years later upon realizing “Main Street” was a misleading term.

St. John’s poured much of its energy into housing ministries in the ensuing decades. In response to growing numbers of elderly residents without kids at home during the 1940s, the church spearheaded the construction of Oakwood Lutheran Homes — now called Oakwood Village — on the city’s west side.

The congregation later helped launch and run a drop-in space serving mainly unhoused residents with diagnosed mental health conditions, now administered by Lutheran Social Services. Its current pastor, the Rev. Peter Beeson, said St. John’s started providing [overflow space](#) for Porchlight’s homeless shelter as the congregation was reckoning with a decline in membership and cut its sanctuary in half to increase its fellowship hall space around the turn of the century.

The church’s latest [redevelopment](#) effort is its most ambitious in dollar figures. Now counting around 110 households among its membership, St. John’s faced a “come to Jesus” moment about its financial future in 2018 following decades of slowly declining attendance, Beeson said. After some hard conversations, the church again decided on a new housing strategy, this time by

tearing down its sanctuary in favor of a [10-story](#) affordable housing building with a community space on the ground floor, which the church would use for Sunday worship.

Originally, the redevelopment was slated to cost \$30 million for over 100 units **for households earning 30-60% of the area median income**. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Projected costs ballooned to \$58 million. Still, the congregation was \$500,000 away from securing enough financing before interest rates shot up, forcing the congregation into more soul-searching.

“That marked a fairly despairing period of time for us,” Beeson said. “We had already moved. We had left (the sanctuary) with a big celebration in the fall of 2023, and we’d rented space on the university campus because the thought was that in two months we will break ground.”

But good news came after bad when the director of the neighboring Hancock Center told St. John’s it was closing and asked whether the church was interested in purchasing the property. Doing so allowed the church to make its housing project shorter and wider, going down to roughly five stories, saving on construction costs for about the same number of units.

The only downside, Beeson said, is that so much time elapsed that the church is no longer located in an area eligible for certain federal tax credits to enable the construction of lower-income housing. New plans call for **“workforce housing” units to serve households making 60-80% of area median income** initially.

In Dane County, that means apartments for households earning roughly \$55,000-\$73,000 per year, but the church plans to lower rents over time to reach further down the wage scale once legally allowed.

The COVID-19 pandemic, Beeson said, contained a blessing amid its numerous calamities. It fueled the congregation's sense of call to a new direction as members checked in with one another over virtual Communion of coffee and doughnuts rather than in-person worship.

"It was that final nail," Beeson said. "The building isn't actually what's important. It's the people."

St. John's recently got encouraging news about potential federal loans for the revamped project but won't receive a final decision until next year. If its financing is approved, St. John's would start the city approval process — again — in 2027.

'Faith has changed'

Signs of a changing religious landscape are evident locally and nationwide. Religious self-identification and regular service attendance decrease with age across most survey data. Roughly 50% of Americans born in the 1940s or earlier attend religious services at least monthly, compared with 25% of adults born in the 2000s, a Pew Research Center [survey](#) found last year.

About 80% of the country's oldest cohort identify as Christians, with just 13% religiously unaffiliated. Among young adults, 46% identify as Christians and 43% are religiously unaffiliated.

The Madison area is less religious than the nation overall, as well as other major urban areas in the Midwest. The 2020 [U.S. Religion Census](#) — a survey of formal denominations and religious groups where researchers gather institutional attendance and membership data — found roughly 37% of local residents are "religious adherents," below a national average of 49%. In Chicago and the Twin Cities, the rate was 52% and 48%, respectively.

The survey counted over 350 congregations in the Madison area, with around 35 from the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Baha'i

faiths. The majority of congregations are of various Christian denominations, even as pastors interviewed by the *Cap Times* called the Madison area "post-Christian."

As church membership declines, many congregations are facing difficult questions about their future. "When the church was booming institutionally, attending things that the church put on for people was sort of the primary expression of American Christianity, and it still is in some contexts," said Elsdon, from Threshold Sacred Development. "But the way people are engaging in their life of faith has changed quite dramatically and, broadly speaking, that isn't the way people are showing up in the numbers that they used to be."

More churches are now reckoning with deferred maintenance and older buildings constructed in an era when Christianity was a more dominant social force and church membership was higher.

"Many of these buildings are aging to a point of needing significant work at the very moment that there's the least ability to pay for that," Elsdon said. "It's just a pure kind of economic problem that has to be solved. ... There's a lot of energy spent on physical plant stuff that some of them are tired of. They've been mowing the grass, shoveling the snow, doing small repairs for decades. And as the problems get bigger, that job gets harder. As a congregation ages, which many of them are, that all gets harder."

Some churches have closed, as Bashford United Methodist Church in the Eken Park neighborhood did in [2023](#). After closing, church properties like the Bashford site often remain in the hands of a denomination, which then must figure out next steps.

Larger church organizations are starting to experiment with broader measures. The

Wisconsin branch of the United Methodist Church and the Wisconsin United Methodist Foundation started a faith-based nonprofit redeveloper, [Revive Community Development](#), in 2024 to help churches transform properties or find partners like daycares that can share existing space.

So far, the Sun Prairie-based Revive has consulted with over 30 churches across the state, president and CEO Matt Kautzky said. Its first major project is redeveloping the former Bashford site on North Street, with a similar affordable housing model like St. John's and Common Grace.

The developer would demolish the existing 1950s building and construct over 60 rental units, the "vast majority" of which would be for households making 30-60% of area median income. One-fifth of the units would be reserved for people recently released from incarceration. The developer plans to partner with Lutheran Social Services and Road Home to assist residents on site.

"There's an opportunity to change how we in this country view rehabilitation," Kautzky said. "Because when (the formerly incarcerated) have done their time and their service, they're left with a mark and a scar that is hard to get over, both with entering the employment market and entering the housing market."

The redevelopment would include a community space that could open the doors for a congregation to return to the site as one of multiple tenants, as well as a 2,000-square-foot food pantry and a commercial kitchen. Revive is applying for state and federal tax credits for the roughly \$20 million project this fall and plans to start the city approval process this winter.

Building for community needs first is a return to a different model of church, one that congregations in other parts of the globe routinely follow by constructing housing,

educational spaces, clinics or community centers before their sanctuary, Kautzky said.

"I think we may have misdirected in saying we always need these buildings," he said. "Buildings aren't bad. They're a tool to fulfill a mission. How do we make sure that the tool is appropriate?"

'Fill the gap'

The changing landscape means even growing churches must adapt. In a crowded, un-airconditioned 1960s building on a rainy August day, [Mt. Zion Baptist Church](#) celebrated the groundbreaking of a new 20,000-square-foot building aimed at caring for, in the Rev. Marcus Allen's words, "the least, the lost, the left out, the left behind, those who don't have a voice to speak for themselves or cannot articulate how they're feeling and what they're going through." The south side church broke ground on its planned \$8.9 million [Family Life Center](#) to help handle the increasing number of people involved in or helped by its programs and partners. Construction is expected to last about a year.

Allen estimates Mt. Zion's food pantry serves seven to 10 new families a month. The church partners with a behavioral health provider for drop-in services on site, with over 300 unique visitors every year. The church also hosts after-school programming to help students of color close the [achievement gap](#) in Madison schools, children and foster family programs, outreach for youth in the juvenile justice system, and a "computer jitters" class to help seniors with technology. About 80% of all program participants are unaffiliated with Mt. Zion.

The need for services has grown since the pandemic, prompting the church to start a separate nonprofit, the MTZ Charitable Organization, to secure more funding. But with a flood-prone basement and only four electrical outlets in its former sanctuary, built in the '60s,

that now operates as a community space, the church needed to grapple with its aging facilities and limited room.

"COVID did not create the disparities in our community. It exposed them," Allen said at the groundbreaking. "COVID also forced us to look at ourselves. We were doing important work, but our facility was no longer adequate for the people which we were serving."

The Family Life Center is meant to alleviate space issues, with dedicated classroom spaces for kids and older adults, a suite for Anesis Therapy's behavioral health clinic, a library, an expanded food pantry and commercial kitchen and more space for the neighborhood police officer.

Even the planned high school-size gym, he said, could help the kids he sees playing basketball across the street at Penn Park in the middle of winter. "I was one of those kids growing up," Allen said. "We used to shovel the basketball court just to be able to play basketball outside because we never had a gym membership where we could go and play indoor ball."

The project is meant to elevate communities in Madison's most diverse neighborhoods that Allen said have long been overlooked. "With diversity comes disparities," he said. "Our intention is to fill the gap that governments — city, county, state — haven't been able to fill."

At the groundbreaking, Allen shared one example of gaps left by historic neglect. A few summers ago, the church received a grant from the city to provide summer youth programming, receiving over 50 applications. "Because of our space limitations, we could only serve 19," Allen told the gathered crowd. "Ten of the 19 were involved in the juvenile justice system, and of those 10, only one returned back to the system. The problem wasn't a lack of young people who wanted an

opportunity. The problem was capacity, and this building will change that."

'Communion'

As the nonprofit Eastmorland Community Center and its neighboring 26 apartments near an anticipated October opening, Marrese-Wheeler said the \$8.5 million project is the continuation of a process the church has embarked on for nearly two decades.

When she accepted her call to Lakeview Moravian in 2009, "the same five people" would come in and check on the otherwise quiet building outside of Sunday services. By the time the church started thinking about building a community center, 250 people were using the old building on a weekly basis for daycare, theater practice, after-school programs and more.

"It started becoming more of a community building," Marrese-Wheeler said. "There were times where I would walk in the building and very few people knew who I was. They'd just be doing their thing."

Last year, a third church — Lake Edge UCC — joined Common Grace after its own period of grappling with aging facilities and decreasing attendance, with 25-30 new members growing the combined congregation's rolls to over 100. Expanding the church's circle on Sundays and throughout the week has prompted the congregation to reflect on the faithful's most basic practices in one of the country's more skeptical cities.

"It takes a pretty big step of faith for somebody who's not Christian to be involved with a Christian church in their community, and yet I've seen it happen," Marrese-Wheeler said. "Our sacrament is called Communion. It's about sharing common elements. It's about unity. For me, that's a piece of a church looking like the larger community."

Wherever community is coming together around a common purpose in life-giving ways — what can we do to make that happen?"

For Beeson at St. John's, having a local ecosystem dedicated to thinking about the future of housing and faith communities has been crucial in helping individual congregations navigate potential redevelopment. Still, conversation about the broader church's role remains.

"To me, there's this element of reparations. Individual congregations have done a lot of good in their communities," Beeson said. "Churches have also done a lot of harm. As a gay man who was ready to leave organized religion and who gets the harm piece, there is something very, very rewarding about saying we are tearing down our building and doing something objectively good with it. We are building housing.

I think my challenge to progressive churches is that we can perhaps be more progressive in making space for our homeless neighbors or lower-income neighbors."

More church redevelopment [projects](#) could be on the way, with Northside Christian Assembly and **Dale Heights Presbyterian Church** in different stages of housing projects with Threshold Sacred Development.

Elsdon cautioned that church redevelopments alone cannot solve Madison's challenges with housing supply and affordability, and a rash of church closures could further constrain the area's supply of so-called "third spaces" for voting, educational programs, social activities and recovery groups. But churches and other faith-based institutions can be a part of navigating change in the housing market and beyond, along with government and the private sector, Elsdon said.

"The way it is today in Madison is going to be really different in 20 years. So the question isn't, 'Is it going to happen?' The question is, 'What are we all going to do for that to happen in a way that leaves us with what we want?'" Elsdon said. "We can just sit here and watch it unfold, or we can try to get together and figure out how to encourage it to unfold in a way that is beneficial to everyone."

THE CAP TIMES

<https://captimes.com/news/community/madison-churches-becoming-housing-community-spaces-as-religion-shifts/article f8fdd333-d898-4fd1-9b45-b0cff4546ff2.html>

[Will Briggs](#) is the housing and transportation reporter for the Cap Times.

DALE HEIGHTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

5501 University Ave.

Madison, Wisconsin 53705

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

06 Worship-K. Owens-*Communion*
07 LABOR DAY
08 Property & Finance 7p
08-10 Office **closed** for vacation
12 Church Breakfast 8:30a
13 Worship – M. Krichko
20 Worship – M. Schmidt
27 Worship – B. Moten

Liturgists

September 6: Wendy Weber
September 13: Edi Chan
September 20: Barb Fleishman
September 27: Roy Lembcke

