



MESSIAH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

We seek to answer God's call to love

Senior Pastor: Andrew Plocher
Associate Pastor: Molly Hunter

Parish Administrator: Jennifer Dodge
Director of Music: Sara Parks

January 26, 2026

Dear People of Messiah,

Romans 8:28 says, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose." This verse reminds me that life continually reveals how God works in unexpected and miraculous ways, calling us to place our trust in Him so that good can happen. When Bishop Katherine Finnegan called me in 2019 to tell me I had been assigned to the Northern Great Lakes Synod, I was stunned. That shock quickly turned into confusion—surely that meant Green Bay? But then came disappointment when I looked at a map and realized it was somewhere I had never even considered before: Michigan's Upper Peninsula. What was this hinterland? And how could God possibly be sending me there? But that's God and the Holy Spirit for you. I could never have foreseen in that moment how much love, belonging, and joy I would experience in this place and among you, God's faithful people. For the past six and a half years, you have allowed me to be a part of your lives, through a pandemic, joys and sorrows, birth and death. For those years you have supported me and celebrated alongside me through my marriage and the arrival of a new baby. For all of this, I will be forever grateful. It is with a heavy heart, however, that I now share that the time has come for me to resign and accept a new call.

After Marigold was born, I felt a growing desire for her to grow up closer to her aunt—my sister—along with her uncle and cousins. At the same time, my own heart has felt a strong call to be nearer to family. Through prayer and reflection over the past year, it also became clear that I have been growing beyond my role as associate pastor and have needed to seek a call that will allow a greater leadership role within a congregation.

When I began to explore the possibility of a new call last fall, I did not expect the process to move quickly. Yet, when I interviewed with Christ Lutheran in Belvidere, the warmth of the people and their deep love for their church reminded me of so many of the things I cherish about Messiah. In that encounter, I felt both a clear sense of call and a growing excitement to serve them. After much deliberation, the people of Christ voted on January 25th to extend the call as their head pastor and I have accepted. In consultation with Messiah's church council, February 15th will be my last Sunday at Messiah, and I will be on leave until my official last day on March 15th.

It has been a privilege to be your pastor. Lots of programs and activities have taken place over the past years, but what has meant the most to me is you. You have shared your lives with me and allowed me to love you. And I do love you all very much. Through funerals, baptisms, weddings, celebrations and sorrows, the relationships



I have built here have meant so much to me. This church, its people, and this place—which is, of course, beautiful the summer ☺ — will always hold a deep and lasting place in my heart, and I will continue to hold you all in my prayers.

While my family is excited to be closer together, this transition comes with real grief, as leaving people we love is never easy. I expect that it will be a challenging transition for many of you as well. When a pastor leaves a congregation, they are no longer available for pastoral care or pastoral duties. Yet, a pastor is not the church and even when pastors leave, the church remains. I trust that with the many faithful and gifted people who make up Messiah, God will continue to provide and open new paths for ministry. The Holy Spirit will move in unexpected and miraculous ways, and because you are a people who love and serve God, something new and life-giving will surely emerge.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Molly Hunter". The ink is black and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Pastor Molly Hunter