



FEBRUARY 2026 Mission Support Memo

STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

THE WORLD GOES ON

A story from the [Southeastern Synod](#)

As you read this story, what inspires you?

How is your congregation welcoming the community?

Have you ever driven by that one church that everyone thinks is such a quaint historic stone building, but they do not enter for worship? They might wish to get married there or come for the food pantry. A film crew might want to use it. Or neighbors enjoy the garden and ride bikes around the parking lot. But they do not enter for worship. That is Memorial Lutheran Church of Nashville, Tenn., a church that has been serving its community for over 90 years, but over the last five years has fewer than 10 people each week in worship.



The Southeastern Synod had hope for this place and in 2022, with the support of a three-year redevelopment grant, nine faithful members called the Rev. Liza Hawkins as their mission developer. Two years in they were partnering in the community and considering a new name when it became clear that creating a new church might be the best path forward for this Riverside neighborhood.

On Sunday, Oct. 31, 2025, members of Memorial held a closing service in the beloved sanctuary to look around and remember the past joys, tears and connections, to give thanks and to say goodbye. But that is not where this service ended. As the congregation officially sang “A Mighty Fortress” one final time, they processed out into the garden to make a toast and bless a new mural. This congregation’s story is not one of death but of resurrection and new life as a synod-authorized worshipping community: [Riverside Commons](#).



Riverside Commons will be a “neighborhood space for the sake of the world,” aiming to serve as a spiritual, artistic and social hub for East Nashville. This is more than a simple redesign of a traditional worship service but a fuller vision of what it can look like for a community to center connection and spirituality in a new way. The ministry’s vision is to be a sanctuary of creativity and care where artists, activists, seekers and neighbors gather to make music, share food, organize mutual aid and encounter the sacred in unexpected ways.

Grounded in Lutheran theology and radical welcome, the church space is being transformed for collective liberation. In the meantime, Riverside Commons is open to the community. The chapel hosts meditation groups and music lessons; the fellowship hall has a dance class; and the basement is becoming a community art studio.



Signs of life are all over the place. The garden is a central place to gather and wonder at the wildflowers; neighborhood kids ride their bikes in the parking lot. New life can be seen especially in the outdoor mural that began it all. Painted by the Rev. Robin Lovett-Owen, the mural is titled “The Family of Things,” a reference to Mary Oliver’s “Wild Geese” poem, where native plants are on display and the animals have glowing halos.

Members are in building project mode, adding keypad locks for more adaptable access and, most importantly, creating shared common values for all site users that focus on inclusion, safe space, connection and imagination. Hawkins said, “Riverside Commons is shaping up to be an exciting adventure, and the surrounding area is already noticing new life emerging here! With God’s help, our work toward community engagement through arts and mutual aid is beginning to take shape, and that’s exactly our hope: to be a neighborhood space for the sake of the world.”

ENGAGE WITH US

ELCA Town Halls:

“Introducing the Church Property Resource Hub”

Join us for one of the ELCA-wide town halls to learn more about the new [Church Property Resource Hub](#) and how it can help congregation leaders steward their property in faithful and practical ways. This will be an opportunity for congregations and all people connected to the management of church property. Please share widely!

**Tuesday, March 17,
1 p.m. Central time**
[Register today.](#)

**Thursday, March 19,
4 p.m. Central time**
[Register today.](#)

**Tuesday, March 24,
1 p.m. Central time**
[Register today.](#)

GRATEFUL

We are grateful for the many mission developers across our church — the pastors, deacons, lay developers who work alongside our communities. They work tirelessly with our ethnic-specific ministries, feeding and housing programs, communities on the margins — working toward justice, service and love. We send our prayers to you and those you serve.

In gratitude,

Victoria Flood, Senior Director for Congregation and Synod Support
Nick Kiger, Director for Mission Support
Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement

