

First English Lutheran Church Council Minutes
27 April 2026

Council members present at FELC.

Betsy Appleton, Paul Barlow, Margaret Bruesch, Charlie Boas, Larry Collmann, Erin McCracken, Leigh Northcutt-Benson, Mari Ward, Anne Wiebe

Council members present via Zoom.

Michele Hockett-Cooper

Council members absent.

Elijah Aguirre, Lillian Martinez Rodriguez

Staff present.

Pastor Katie Rode, Cantor Bryan Rust

Call to Order.

President Leigh Northcutt-Benson called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

Devotions.

Pastor Katie offered an opening prayer in place of the usual devotion.

Consent Agenda.

The consent agenda is a way to contain reports without taking up valuable meeting time.

- *Any report with action items is removed from the consent agenda.*
- *Reports that remain on the consent agenda are approved as a block.*
- *Reports without action items may also be removed from the consent agenda upon request.*

This meeting's consent agenda includes the following documents, which may be found in the meeting package:

- Council minutes from March 23 2026
- Pastor's report (minus Sabbath-related attachments)
- Communications and Documentation Task Force report
- Property Committee report
- Stewardship Committee report
- Treasurer's report
- Space Use Work Plan (aka All Saints Episcopal Day School Task Force report)
- Administrative Committee report

The following were removed from the consent agenda for further discussion:

- Attachments to the Pastor's report:
 - DRAFT 8 week Pause for beginning Sabbath practice as a congregation
 - DRAFT for April Council Meeting - Definition of Sabbath for FELC work in 2026
- Cantor's report

Motion to approve consent agenda made by Pastor Katie, seconded by Betsy, affirmed by vote. Discussion of removed items deferred to New Business.

Cantor's Presentation.

While this falls under New Business, Bryan's other duties necessitated him giving his presentation earlier in the meeting, after which Leigh dismissed him. His presentation is summarized under New Business, below.

Old Business.

1. Revisting the Council Covenant.

Council revisited Council Covenant requiring unified public messaging. Pastor Katie emphasized that whatever decision is made, Council must own it publicly and keep dissension internal, using leadership as sounding boards. Previous Sabbath discussions leaked to congregation before official decision, causing confusion.

New Business.

Organ Project — Cantor's Report Highlights.

- Current funding: approximately \$250K - \$300K estimated cost; significant funds already raised from large donors who also increased operating fund giving. Cantor Bryan cannot proceed with formal contract until full funding secured, as Joe Cain advised against paying invoices without available funds.
- Project Scope: Level 1 evaluation completed; formal Level 2 evaluation costs ~\$5K and triggers 90-day timeline. Work includes pipe cleaning/repair, electrical upgrades, rodent mitigation, possible HVAC installation in organ chamber, and temporary removal of altar cross.

Organ Project — Council Discussion Highlights.

- We need a strong statement of our commitment to revamp the organ at a later date.
- The whole FELC community needs to be able to take part, and that can't happen now.
- Waiting also means that the organ's condition will deteriorate further.
- Pastor Katie proposed the following phased approach:
 - Phase 1 (through July 25): Task Force participates in ministry pause
 - Phase 2 (July 26 - November): Private fundraising permitted but not broadcast to congregation
 - Phase 3 (Advent forward): Community capital campaign may begin in coordination with stewardship

- Target Start: Day after Easter 2027
- Motion to instruct Bryan to proceed with this phased approach made by Leigh, seconded by Betsy, affirmed by vote.

Sabbath Reset Pause Discussion.

Sabbath Pause Framework.

- 8-week Pause Structure (May 31-July 25)
 - Weeks 1-4: Individual reflection using weekly scripture prompts and journal workbook distributed to all members
 - Weeks 5-8: Optional small group discussions; members invited to form informal reflection groups after worship
 - Communication Plan: Lunch and Learn on May 17 to introduce concept; weekly emails with reflection questions only; clear messaging that worship continues.
- Extended Sabbath (through November): Ministries without robust leadership/ participation remain paused while Council processes assessment data and plans renewal beginning Advent.
- Ministries Continuing: Worship (in-person and livestream), pastoral care/ emergencies, property maintenance, bill payment, benevolence partnerships (after individual assessment of critical needs). Also, we will observe FELC's 90th anniversary with a casual ice cream social/potluck.
- Ministries Pausing: Non-essential programs including Game Night (one June gathering to be replaced with discernment discussion with participants), prayer chain (as organized ministry, though private prayer encouraged), committees without active leadership.

Rationale for Sabbath Approach.

- Core Non-functional Ministries: CDC, Vicar program, Racial Justice Task Force, faith formation at all levels, invitation ministry, strategic outreach, stewardship ministry, Reconciling in Christ committee, and 90th Anniversary committee — all listed as core values in Ministry Site Profile but currently non-functional.
- Spiritual Discernment Focus: This is intentional spiritual work requiring community to assess viability of ministries, understand resource allocation, and determine which core values are truly foundational versus nostalgic. Pause creates space to “shuffle the deck and see what cards we’re working with” as current congregation, not who they were 5-10 years ago.

Concerns Addressed.

- Game Night Ministry: Charlie expressed concerns about pausing June game night during Pride Month for LGBTQ+ community that has experienced past “capricious directives”. Pastor Katie committed to attending May game night to introduce pause concept and facilitate discernment discussion in June instead

of games, emphasizing that this is not targeted at the group and their feedback is valuable.

- Unintended Consequences: Multiple Council members raised concerns about hurting people or losing momentum. Response: doing nothing also has consequences; if 8 weeks breaks a ministry it was already broken.

Approval.

Motion to approve the Sabbath plan made by Pastor Katie, seconded by Leigh, affirmed by vote.

Meeting Action Points.

- Leigh: notify Cantor Bryan of the approved phased approach for organ project.
- Pastor Katie: Draft summary Sabbath statement for congregation by tomorrow afternoon; develop ministry-by-ministry pause guidelines; finalize reflection workbook with scriptures and questions.

Next Council Meeting Date/Time.

Next meeting will be May 18, 2026.

Closing Prayer

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made at 9:06 by Pastor Katie, seconded by Leigh, affirmed by vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Bruesch
FELC Council Secretary

