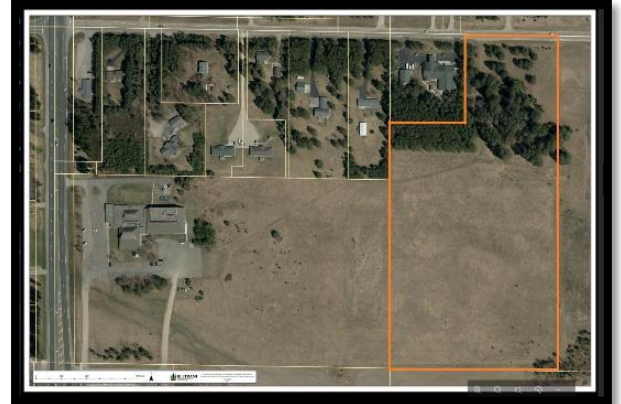


# The Process of the Stewardship of Land Task Force

This process got started in the Spring of 2024 when a curious question was brought before the church council wondering if Calvary would ever consider selling a part of the back property. We have received various questions like this over the years, and we realized that before we could seriously consider any question like that, we first needed to enter a process of discernment, exploring history, dreams, and imaginations for the land. We also needed to answer the questions of where God is leading us into the future and how the land supports and fits into that vision. With this in mind, the council formed a Stewardship of Land Task Force in the Spring of 2025. This team was empowered specifically to explore the question of how God is leading us through our stewardship of land to be a beacon of light for Bemidji and beyond. It was a great question embedded deep within our church values, God's mission for Calvary, and the creative imagination of where the Spirit is leading us next. As of the Annual Meeting in August of 2025, this team had begun their work of discernment.

While there were a lot of ways we could explore this, the chosen approach for our team and our congregation was one of **Learning, Listening, Discerning,** and **Sharing**. First, when we say 'stewardship of land' what are we referring to? Calvary sits on about 40 acres of land. What you generally see on the top of the hill where the building and parking lot reside is about 10 acres and as you look down the hill to the grove of trees to the east, we see about another 30 acres. The land we are exploring in this process is what resides down the hill from Calvary's building and parking lot.



**Learning:** Before imagining the future of our land resources, we needed to first reflect on the story that led us here. The team spent their first few months visiting with groups of folks who are tied directly to the history of Calvary's land, and researching the church records, titles, and other pertinent information. The goal of this learning process was to discover the story that led us here and ultimately create a Land Narrative that would be shared with the congregation.

**Listening:** When the Land Narrative was complete, we sought out to engage our congregation in a series of listening forums. Each of these forums began with prayer, the sharing of the Land Narrative, and focused discussion around three guided questions.

- 1) *When you think of Calvary Lutheran Church, what values are important to you as they guide our church's mission?*
- 2) *Where do you sense God is leading Calvary into the future to be a beacon of light and love?*
- 3) *How do you see our resources of land supporting these values and living into God's mission for our church family and community?*

We also explored these questions with various ministry teams and groups. Our goal during all these conversations was to listen and learn about your dreams, imaginations, and where you see God guiding us.

**Discerning:** Following the forums we entered a time of discernment hoping to focus on one idea or a collection of ideas that align with our values and mission. In February we invited you to fill out a survey exploring the question of selling part of the property or not, and what we should focus on in either case. From the clarity of this survey, we were able to focus our discernment and enter the final part of this process.

**Sharing:** In May of 2026, by unanimous consent, we presented our recommendations to the council. We recommended bringing to the congregation a motion to sell the discussed property, and recommendations on how the funds should be used should the congregation decide to sell. These recommendations were based entirely out of what was shared by the congregation and learned by the task force throughout this process. The council received them with a unanimous vote of approval, and they have scheduled a special congregational meeting on June 14, 2026, at 10:15am to bring this motion to the congregation for consideration. The following set of pages are summaries of the information that has been shared throughout this process. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our team. Our names are included on the last sheet. Thank you all for your love, prayer, and support of our church family. What a joy it is to be church together!

# Narrative of Land – Calvary Lutheran Church

*Developed in September of 2025 by our Stewardship of Land Task Force*

The story of Calvary's land begins embedded deep within the roots of a family. Leo and Ruth Fenske purchased this land in 1946 to be a family farm adjacent to the pioneer farm of Leo's father. For many years this land served as a family farm, growing crops and supporting dairy production, as well as other things. Part of it even supported a deeper purpose as Leo worked to help train and equip veterans as they returned from WW2 to care for their families. The land was beautiful, meaningful, and it helped shape lives.

This continued for many years until Leo began to see a vision for the legacy of what the land might become. It was in the late 70s when conversations began to turn a portion of the family farm into space for the growth of a church community. As conversations unfolded and dreams emerged, Calvary found itself in a unique situation. It had resided in the Nymore neighborhood; a beautiful space where the ministry was flourishing. Unfortunately, the church had no room to expand, leading Calvary to dream of where God might lead them next. Where those dreams took the church was to the start of a journey with the Fenske family. On August 7, 1979, Calvary signed a contract for deed to purchase 40 acres of this beautiful farm for \$72,820. This contract was fulfilled in two segments: the 20 acres where the building currently sits in 1981 and the remaining 20 acres down the hill in 1983.

With this purchase came hope, excitement, and a leap of faith found in big dreams. Calvary was seeking how God was calling us to be a beacon of light for Bemidji and beyond. The wish list of dreams included building a space with more Sunday school rooms, a larger kitchen, an expansive fellowship hall for community dinners, and a beautiful space for the church family to worship. Fieldstone was used to adorn the space symbolizing a connection to the beauty of this land. While it came later, the dreams even included the building of a gymnasium (which was a progressive idea at the time) and additional classrooms and meeting spaces to meet the growing needs of the church and the Bemidji community. The church was designed with energy conservation in mind with the hope of expanding that vision into the future, all in an effort to be faithful stewards of what we have.

Over the last 40 years we have seen these daring dreams come to life and shape lives of love. Preschool ministry grew. A food shelf, adult care services, multiple expressions of worship including an outdoor worship space, and intergenerational ministries were all connected to those dreams. We have even seen some of those ministries, like Adult Day Services, grow beyond these walls. To support them, Calvary was able to gift them a couple acres of our land at a minimal price so they could place their own footprint in service to our greater community.

God has and continues to shine through Calvary Lutheran Church. While many dreams have shaped our path along the way, we continue to seek how God is calling us to be a beacon of light, not just for today, but for many years to come. We are all part of this journey together. Let's run the race before us!

*A special thanks to Billie and Bob Edwards, Dallas and Joyce Way, Gary Sorenson, Ron Gladen, Pr. Keith Zeh, and the Stewardship of Land Task Force for your wisdom, insights, and research to develop this narrative of our land.*

# Values, Mission, Vision Summary

*Stewardship of Land Forums – October and November 2025*

**Introduction:** In the fall of 2025 we gathered for a series of church family forums to explore questions around our values, sense of mission, and vision for ministry. We hosted one of these forums at a Tuesday lunch and learn, another one on a Wednesday night after worship, and the last one on a Sunday morning after worship. Our goal was to engage as many people of different ages as possible who could represent a solid cross section of our congregation. We had over 250 people engage with this process with great questions, hopes for the future, and joy shared in our life together. From those forums and the poster boards created at them, our Stewardship of Land Task Force has created these summaries of what was shared/learned.

**Values:** *When you think of Calvary Lutheran Church, what values are important to you as they guide our church's mission?*

1. **Calvary seeks to be a loving community where all people can experience belonging.** It is important to be open, welcoming, and affirming to all people. Worship, fellowship, and programs should be inclusive, inviting, accessible, relevant, safe, and embrace people in their stages of life. Offering a variety of high-quality musical expressions engaging people in worship and faith is of core importance. Ultimately, we seek to create a space where all voices are valued, diversity is celebrated, and all are met with love and grace.
2. **Calvary seeks to be a connected community of joy and love formed in the grace of God.** It is important for us to live the values of love as authentically as the clothes we wear. Kindness, compassion, joy, respect, faithfulness, and general goodness are to reflect the love and grace of our savior. We are not afraid to be honest about challenges before us and seek to call leaders who walk alongside our church family living a life of faith and encouraging us to do the same. We are empowered by a culture of support who share joy with each other and offer care in times of sorrow; one people who live as a family of faith.
3. **Calvary seeks to be a faithful community of learning and growing that empowers us all to live as love.** We believe in building up the foundation of our community through engaging and interactive learning environments for children, youth, and families, as well as opportunities for adults and seniors to share their gifts and grow in their faith. We seek to be a community of learners that interact between the generations working toward stability, healthy stewardship practices, and the empowerment of faith in action opportunities that engages the life of the church and the greater community with our neighbors.



**Mission:** *Where do you sense God is leading Calvary into the future to be a beacon of light and love?*

- ❖ **Worship Ministry:** God is calling us into authentic worship that inspires hope and connection formed in the love of God; relevant worship that engages people in their stages of life through different styles of music, liturgy, sacraments, preaching, teaching, and prayer.



- ❖ **Youth Ministry:** God is calling us to invest in the building up of our youth through opportunities to learn, grow, serve, and connect as families, as friends, and throughout the generations of our faith community.
- ❖ **Community Ministry:** God is calling us into authentic relationships formed in the love of God; relationships that are adaptable and are grounded in connection through opportunities to gather, share meals, have fun, and support each other in both the joys of life and the sorrows we experience.
- ❖ **Environment and Sustainability Ministry:** God is calling us to care for creation and to seek ways to sustain our life together and the blessings we share as a church family.
- ❖ **Open Arms Ministry:** God is calling us to have open arms of welcome that shine as a light that loves and cares for all people; light that uplifts diversity and embraces inclusion of all ages, genders, ethnicities, and expressions of the self.
- ❖ **Faith in Action Ministry:** God is calling us to live as love which models Christ's love and care for the hungry, poor, lost and forsaken; love that engages opportunities for all ages to put their faith into action serving our neighbors and supporting our ministry partners, who too seek to share God's love and care.

**Vision:** *How do you see our resources of land supporting these values and living into God's mission for our church family and community?* While there were many ideas shared that cross a whole spectrum of passions, we were able to reduce them down to a few core ideas connected to either selling a portion of the property and using the money to enact ideas or keeping the property and developing on it. It should be noted that exploring leasing options could be helpful too.



- ❖ **Keeping the whole property ideas:** Cultivating the land into a community garden for the food shelf or subletting it to a local farmer for a revenue source; building an animal shelter, wood working shop, senior housing, affordable housing, housing for the homeless, or expanded child care center to include a special needs program and drop out program; developing it into a solar garden or a community park; or simply leaving it as an intentional green space.
- ❖ **Selling a portion of the property ideas:** Using the funds to update the existing playground for the preschool; building a new outdoor worship space that could also be used for weddings as an additional revenue source; reducing all or part of our debt; building a residential treatment center connected to our existing building; investing in solar panels for our existing building; updating our existing building and grounds such as resurfacing the roof and parking lot, remodeling the kitchen, replacing the lights in the sanctuary and fellowship hall, as well as other building updates as needed; investing the funds into an endowment.



# Land Option Survey Summary

*Stewardship of Land Task Force – February 2026*

As we write this summary, we are finding ourselves full of gratitude. Over 250 people engaged in the forums last fall, 55 households/individuals spanning all ages submitted surveys, and we have had half a dozen small group conversations as well as many individual conversations. We are so thankful for all who have shared their voice as these conversations have been faithful, meaningful, and share a deep dedication and love of our church family.

We were amazed by the clarity that came through this survey. Of the 55 completed surveys, 52 encouraged us to continue exploring this option of selling a portion of our land. The other 3 gave positive feedback and constructive thoughts about the stewardship of our land and the value of holding it. There were 3 primary themes we found:

1. **Mortgage Debt Reduction:** There were many ways suggested to engage the question of debt reduction, but overwhelmingly, reducing the debt (in all or in part) was the most dominant theme.
2. **Ministry Enhancement and Vision:** A second primary theme encouraged us to use the proceeds of the sale to enhance and grow our vision and ministry. A few prevailing ideas that were shared include: Recreating the outdoor worship space as a fully accessible space at the top of the hill, building a labyrinth, a creation care space, a community garden, as well as solar paneling the building. *A special note: the outdoor worship space could be used as an additional revenue source for wedding rentals and concerts.*
3. **Building Maintenance:** A third primary theme encouraged us to use the proceeds of the sale to focus on addressing the needs of our current church building. A few prevailing ideas that were shared include: repairing the roof, updating sanctuary and fellowship hall lighting, and a major update of the kitchen.

*Special Note on Other Themes: While not a primary theme, one other notable point shared by a few people discussed investing the proceeds of the sale and using the yearly returns to enhance future ministry goals.*

*Special Notes on Land Valuation: According to Beltrami County the current estimated land value for Calvary's entire 38.75 acres is \$227,900. After visiting with a real estate agent, he valued the back 20 acres of the property around \$250,000-\$300,000. The current offer on 17.5 acres of the back property is just above \$1,000,000.*

We know there are a few major challenges before us as a congregation. Deferred maintenance of our building and property, our mortgage debt, and the needs of a growing ministry are to name a few. These major challenges align clearly with the three primary themes shared by our congregation. We remain humbled by the conversations and discussion around this opportunity for our congregation and are encouraged to move forward into the mission that God has instore for Calvary. What a joy it is to share life together!

**Calvary's Stewardship of Land Task Force:** Randy Frisk, Sue Supalla, Tom Hatfield, Wayne Coombs, Evan Gack, Nicholle Bieberdorf, Garrett Fultz, and Pr. Chris Leach.

