

27 Years. Thank You, Patty.

Dear Christ Lutheran Family,

Normally, Pastor Sean writes our first-of-the-month letter. But this month, I have the honor of writing it—and I can't think of a more meaningful reason.

As many of you know, this past August I celebrated 15 years on staff here at Christ Lutheran Church. Fifteen years feels like a long time. But someone on our staff makes my 15 years look pretty small.

At the end of October, Patty Endres will retire after 27 years as our full-time Office Manager.

Patty's retirement also means something a little strange for me: when she leaves, I'll become CLC's longest-tenured employee.

I'm still trying to figure out how that happened.

When I started here in 2011, Patty had already been serving CLC for 12 years. For my entire ministry here, through all the changes, celebrations, challenges, and everyday moments, Patty has simply always been here.

And when you really stop and think about it, 27 years is an incredible amount of time.

So, just for fun, let's put 27 years into perspective.

Patty officially started at Christ Lutheran Church on August 9, 1999.

Google had barely been around for a year. *SpongeBob SquarePants* had just premiered. Napster launched and completely changed how people listened to music. Most of us didn't have cell phones in our pockets, and those who did certainly weren't using them to take pictures, scroll through social media, or watch church online.

A gallon of gas averaged about \$1.14, and a gallon of whole milk averaged about \$2.84. *The Sixth Sense*, *Toy Story 2*, and *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* were among the year's biggest movies. As 1999 came to an end, everyone was talking about Y2K and wondering what would happen when the clock struck midnight on January 1, 2000.

That's how long Patty has been here.

During those 27 years, she has watched the world—and our church—change over and over again.

She was here on September 11, 2001, when our country experienced one of its darkest days. She was here in the days and weeks that followed, when people gathered in churches and communities across the country looking for comfort, hope, and one another.

Fifteen years ago, in 2011, the final *Harry Potter* movie hit theaters. Adele's *21* was everywhere, and Prince William married Kate Middleton. It was also a year marked by enormous events around the world, including the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan and the death of Osama bin Laden nearly a decade after 9/11.

That was also the year a much younger version of me was figuring out life and ministry at CLC.

And Patty was here.

Ten years ago, in 2016, Pokémon GO had people wandering around town staring at their phones. The Chicago Cubs finally won the World Series after a 108-year drought. *Finding Dory* was the biggest movie at the domestic box office, and the Summer Olympics were held in Rio.

The world looked very different from what it had been when Patty started 17 years earlier.

And Patty was here.

Then came 2020.

The world shut down.

COVID-19 changed almost everything about our lives—and it created one of the most difficult and uncertain seasons Christ Lutheran Church had ever faced.

Suddenly, we couldn't gather for worship the way we always had. Our sanctuary was empty. We had to record worship services and upload them online. Meetings moved to Zoom. The church office had to communicate with people in completely different ways. Ministries had to figure out how to stay connected when we couldn't be together in person. Funerals, weddings, holidays, youth ministry, Sunday School—almost everything we did had to be reimaged.

There wasn't a handbook for any of it. We were figuring things out as we went.

And in the middle of all that uncertainty, the work of the church didn't stop. Phones still needed to be answered. Emails needed to be sent. Communications needed to go out. People needed information, reassurance, and connection.

And Patty was here.

She adapted right alongside the rest of us, helping CLC navigate a season none of us could have imagined when she first started in 1999.

Looking back, I think 2020 is one of the best examples of what Patty's 27 years have meant to this congregation. When things changed—sometimes overnight—Patty kept showing up and helping us figure out what came next.

Then came 2023, and another major chapter of change at Christ Lutheran Church.

After 35 years of ministry, Pastor Brian retired.

For a congregation, a transition like that is enormous. Someone who had helped lead CLC for decades was stepping away, and our church was preparing for an uncertain but exciting new chapter.

We said goodbye to Pastor Brian. We welcomed an interim pastor. We went through the call process. And eventually, we welcomed Pastor Sean and began a new chapter in the life of CLC.

Through it all—the emotions of saying goodbye, the uncertainty of an interim period, and the excitement of welcoming new leadership—a familiar face was in the church office.

Patty was here.

She knew our people. She knew our history. She knew how things worked. During one of the biggest leadership transitions our congregation had experienced in decades, Patty provided something incredibly important: continuity.

And really, that has been Patty's story for 27 years.

The world changed. Our church changed. Leadership changed. Staff changed. Ministries changed.

But Patty was here.

And just how much staff change has Patty seen?

During her 27 years at CLC, Patty has served alongside **five pastors, three music directors, seven youth pastors, five children's ministers, six administrators, five finance directors, three preschool directors, and countless other employees** who have been part of the CLC staff.

And here might be the most Patty part of this entire letter:

I had to go ask Patty for those numbers.

I'm writing a letter about how valuable Patty has been to Christ Lutheran Church for 27 years, and when I needed to know our staff's history, who did I have to ask?

Patty.

I think that tells you just about everything you need to know.

For 27 years, Patty has been one of those people who simply knows. She knows our history. She knows our people. She knows where things are. She knows why we do certain things the way we do them. She remembers people and moments that the rest of us have forgotten. And when someone on staff has a question, and nobody knows the answer, there's a pretty good chance someone eventually says, "Ask Patty."

That kind of institutional knowledge is impossible to replace.

People came. People moved on. Ministries changed. Job titles changed. New ideas were tried. New chapters began.

And Patty was here.

But what I appreciate most isn't simply that Patty stayed through all of that change. It's the way she welcomed and supported the people who came through our doors. Whether someone worked alongside her for a few months or many years, Patty was a blessing to them.

Anyone who has worked with Patty knows she also brought plenty of personality to the office.

There has been laughter. There have been stories. And yes, there has been a healthy amount of Patty's signature snark along the way.

She has never been afraid to tell us what she thinks, give us a hard time, or deliver the perfectly timed comment from across the office. It's part of what has made working with Patty so much fun—and it is absolutely something we're going to miss.

I can certainly say that for myself.

For the past 15 years, I've had the privilege of seeing all of that up close. Patty has been a coworker, a resource, a source of laughter, and someone I knew I could count on.

She's answered countless phone calls, helped people who walked through our doors, put together bulletins, sent emails, kept track of details the rest of us forgot, answered questions, solved problems, and done a thousand other things most people will never see.

And I don't think you can measure Patty's impact on Christ Lutheran Church by counting bulletins, emails, phone calls, or even years.

You measure it in people.

You measure it in relationships. In conversations. In laughter. In memories. In the people who have walked into our office over the past 27 years and found a familiar face waiting for them.

That's why I hope you'll join us in celebrating her.

On Sunday, October 18, we will honor Patty and her incredible 27 years of service to Christ Lutheran Church. We'll worship together at 8:00 and 9:30 a.m., and immediately after the **9:30 service**, we'll gather for Patty's retirement celebration with sandwiches, tacos, and desserts.

Most importantly, we want this to be an opportunity for our congregation to say thank you.

We will have baskets available that morning for cards. If Patty has helped you or your family somewhere along the way—or if you simply want to wish her well in retirement—I encourage you to bring a card, write down a favorite memory, or share a few words about what Patty has meant to you.

Twenty-seven years ago, on August 9, 1999, Patty walked through the doors of Christ Lutheran Church as our Office Manager.

The world has changed quite a bit since then.

Our church has changed.

Our community has changed.

Technology has definitely changed.

And now CLC is preparing for another change.

Personally, it's strange to think that after Patty retires, I'll be the longest-tenured employee. It's an honor, but it also gives me an even greater appreciation for what 27 years of showing up, serving, and caring for people really means.

For my entire 15 years at Christ Lutheran Church, I've always known one thing:

Patty was here.

On October 18, it's our turn to be here for her.

I hope you'll join us as we say thank you, celebrate 27 incredible years, and send Patty into retirement surrounded by a church family that is incredibly grateful for everything she has given us.

Thank you, Patty.

Grace and peace,

Noel Thompson

Director of Student Ministries
Christ Lutheran Church