What is Expansive Church 2026!

Expansive Church 2026! is an outreach initiative of Bethlehem Lutheran Church (BLC), St. Charles, IL. This program is an incubator or an accelerator for entrepreneurs and nonprofits with innovative ideas to address social issues.

How does Expansive Church 2026! work?

This initiative seeks grant applications from entrepreneurs and nonprofits with business models that address social issues and/or community needs. A selection process defined by a team of Bethlehem disciples will determine eligibility and grant awards in December of the current calendar year.

Are there certain focus areas?

Expansive Church 2026! awards grants to organizations building solutions to address homelessness, attainable housing, refugee resettlement, criminal justice reform, racial equity, poverty, **human dignity**, employment, health care, community development, and education. NOTE: Other programs and initiatives may be considered based on their individual merits.

Are there geographic limitations?

We are focused on solutions that address the challenges of those living in the Fox River Valley, Elgin, to Aurora, Illinois. We welcome ideas that demonstrate potential for replication and scaling beyond the local community.

What is the timeline for 2026?

September	**October**	**November**	**December**
September 1 is launch of open applications	BLC Expansive Church Team will begin to review submissions	Deadline for applications is November 1; team will continue to review submissions	Grant recipients announced by December 31

Eligibility & Guidelines

-Expansive Church 2026! Qualifying projects should represent the following major characteristics:

- Holistic in conception and design
- Meaningful in approach and execution
- Lasting in effect and outcomes
- Empathetic in context and character

-Nonprofit applicants need not be faith-based to be considered for an award.

-Expansive Church 2026! is faith-based and our **core ELCA values** will inform and be applied to the screening and determination process.

-Applicants in all stages of their project, from the idea stage to fully established, are welcome. Expansive Church 2026! is not risk-averse and welcomes idea stage ventures.

-Prior grant recipients may apply again.

-Prior applicants who did not receive funding are welcome to apply again.

-Grant awards will be up to $5,000 each. We perceive our grant awards being leveraged with other grant awards a nonprofit may receive.

-Disciples of Bethlehem Lutheran Church may not directly apply.

What are we looking for?

-How the model has the ability to create a clear social impact.

-A thorough understanding of the problem being tackled as well as the landscape of others working on the same issues.

Technical Criteria Categories:

The grant review team will use the following criteria to evaluate proposals:

- Degree of overall social impact and innovation; does the submission make a direct positive impact to those being served?
- Personal capacity of individual and/or team
- Clear articulation of obstacles and risks
- Funding model and sustainability plan
- Degree of personal commitment
- Though important for nonprofits and capacity building, submissions that request funds for training will be ranked lower than submissions that seek to make a measurable and reportable direct impact.

What You Will Get:
-A chance at receiving a grant award.

-Access to mentorship and repository of business knowledge and acumen from disciples of Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

-Prayer support.

-Community and networking opportunities with other like-minded awardees.

Expectations:
-Agree to use the award within 12 months of receipt.

-Agree to come to Bethlehem within a 5 month (Jan - May) period to share how the grant award was used and the impact it made.

Who Decides on the Awarding of Funding?
A Bethlehem lay-led review team will determine grant recipients. This lay-led team will serve in two-year cycles.

How soon will I hear the decision on my application?
You will hear from the team with news on whether your application is selected by December 21, 2026.

If I have questions about the application process, who do I contact?
We invite you to reach out to our grant liaison during the submission period for any questions or clarification. Please contact Judy Hanson at juyo46@gmail.com.

What happens if the grant is not used for its intended purpose?
You will not be eligible to reapply.

What are the intellectual property terms of Expansive Church 2026!?
You will own your intellectual property. Applications/ideas will be held in confidence and will not be shared outside the Expansive Church 2026! team.

What types of applications don't you accept?
While we accept many types of applications, we do not look for academic projects, or research initiatives.

Is there anything that Expansive Church 2026! cannot fund?
Expansive Church 2026! will support all selected projects excluding activities prohibited by law.

Expansive Church 2026! Grant Application

DATE SUBMITTED:	GRANT NAME:
CONTACT INFO: **(Provide phone, address, and email)**	**Executive of Organization:** **Grant Writer (if different the the above):**

SUBMITTED BY:	ADDRESS OF SUBMITTING PARTY:	PHONE:	EMAIL:

I. PROJECT ABSTRACT

II. STATEMENT OF NEED

III. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

IV. GOALS & OBJECTIVES

V. TIMELINE

ACTIVITY	PROJECTED DATE

VI. BUDGET

BUDGET OVERVIEW (Please attach programs most recent financials)

ITEM DESCRIPTION	PRICE	QUANTITY	TOTAL
		TOTAL	

VII. EVALUATION

VIII. STAFF & ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION

NAME & TITLE	QUALIFICATIONS	CERTIFICATIONS	SKILLS

IX. APPENDIX (attach additional files here)

FILE NAME	DESCRIPTION	LOCATION attachment / link

Please mail completed application to:

Bethlehem Lutheran Church % Deacon Heather Feltman
PO Box 3850
1145 N. 5th Ave.
St. Charles, IL 60174