



First Witness
CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

Circle of Hope



Spring 2026 Newsletter

Dear Friends,

Thank you for your generous support of First Witness. Your commitment has strengthened our programs, expanded our reach, and helped ensure that children and families in our community receive compassionate, trauma-informed care when they need it most.

As First Witness continues to expand in response to growing community needs, we are focused on sustaining our work for the long term. We invite our supporters to consider ways to build a lasting legacy through our Circle of Hope giving program by making a planned or lifetime gift to our Building Fund or Sustainability Fund.

Every day, we meet children facing some of the most difficult moments of their lives. We witness their courage, the love of caregivers determined to protect them, and the healing that begins when a child is truly heard. This healing doesn't happen by chance; it happens because First Witness is here, with trained staff, safe spaces, and unwavering support made possible by people like you.

Thank you for believing in this mission; your continued commitment ensures that every child, now and in the future, has the opportunity to feel safe, supported, and cared for.

For more information about the Circle of Hope Giving Program, please contact me at 218-727-8353 or tclanaugh@firstwitness.org



With heartfelt gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tracie Clanaugh".

Tracie Clanaugh
Executive Director





2025 Growth and Highlights

Our Restoring Hope Capital Campaign was built on a vision to end child abuse. Our work towards that vision was built on a commitment to grow and strengthen our services. The year 2025 marked a year of significant expansion and meaningful milestones.

- » Launched a **new 3-year strategic plan** to guide growth, sustainability, and long-term impact.
- » Increased the **offerings and reach of our Forensic Interview and Multidisciplinary Team.**
- » **Facilitated training programs** across Minnesota, the region, and nationwide, providing contracted trainings to child maltreatment professionals.
- » **Expanded Advocacy and Prevention Trainings** to contracts serving seven states with our 3-day nationally recognized Advocacy Training.
- » Developed **eight new advanced topic webinars** on Forensics, Advocacy and Prevention. Hosted over 150 trainees from around the region, state and country.
- » Developed **Faith in Action training**, focused on how churches can respond to and help prevent child abuse.
- » Launched the **Cultural and Spiritual Center** at First Witness, with **Rev. Kathryn Nelson** serving as spiritual provider.
- » Conducted a **multi-agency child abuse response and prevention community needs assessment** on the North Shore in Lake and Cook Counties.
- » Secured funding and developed a partnership program to **launch on-site mental health services in 2026**, in partnership with **Brightwater Health**.
- » Carlton County MDT was chosen to be **one of three MDTs in the State of MN** to be featured as a model at statewide training hosted by MN Child Welfare Training Academy.
- » Celebrated the **retirement of Carlton County Attorney Lauri Ketola**, honoring her leadership, collaboration, and years of service.
- » Hosted our **annual Spring Splash fundraiser**, achieving the **largest attendance and highest funds raised** in the event's history.

Dr. Tim Zager:

Coordinated Care—Lasting Impact

For nearly four decades, Dr. Tim Zager served the Northland as a dedicated pediatrician, beginning his career in 1982. Across 38 years of practice, he witnessed not only the joys of watching children grow and thrive but also the devastating impact of child abuse. He observed how fragmented responses failed the most vulnerable children and their families. He believed that protecting children would require a more coordinated approach. That conviction brought him to First Witness Child Advocacy Center.

Dr. Zager first connected with First Witness years ago when the organization opened its Lake Avenue building. He toured the building more than once, recognizing how essential a dedicated child advocacy model would be. Later, while teaching family medicine residents, he partnered with First Witness leadership to help identify physicians willing to pursue specialized training and support children through medical evaluations. By 2019, his deepening involvement led him to join the First Witness Board of Directors, cementing a partnership that had grown from initial interest to commitment.

He describes First Witness as a community “nodal point,” a hub that coordinates a larger regional response through its Multidisciplinary Team (MDT). The model is familiar to him from healthcare, where outcomes improve when specialized professionals work together under shared protocols. Without that coordination, children and families can face unnecessary gaps. “If you don’t have a navigator...then there are all kinds of holes for the person to fall through,” he said, emphasizing that First Witness helps ensure that no child or family is left to face the aftermath of abuse alone.

Dr. Zager views First Witness’s independence as one of its most critical assets. Unlike a government agency, First Witness can maintain trust with families who may be hesitant to engage with formal systems. Dr. Zager specifically noted the importance of First Witness’s efforts to honor and strengthen relationships with tribal governments and communities, where trust must be earned through consistency, respect, and collaboration. For children in these communities, that trusted bridge can mean the difference between safety and silence.

In addition to direct services, Dr. Zager points to First Witness’s growing national training program. By educating forensic interviewers, advocates, and other professionals across the country, the organization extends its mission far past Duluth. He draws a parallel to medical education: “Caring for one patient matters, but training others multiplies that impact, strengthening systems and evidence-based practices well beyond our own region.” It means more children, in more communities, are met with the same standard of care.

As First Witness launches the Circle of Hope planned giving program, Dr. Zager, a committed donor himself, emphasizes the critical need for sustainable support. “Without reliable funding, First Witness cannot maintain the coordinated response these children deserve,” he notes. The program aims to build enduring financial stability, ensuring children are protected, families are supported, and the community’s fight against abuse continues undiminished for generations to come.

2025 Impact

Served 200 children, adolescents, and vulnerable adults

through neutral, fact-finding forensic interviews in a safe, age-appropriate setting.

Supported 413 children and caregivers

through advocacy services, including caregiver support, medical and court advocacy, safety planning, and crisis intervention.

Equipped 4,309 students, caregivers, educators, and community members through 209 Safe and Strong Child[®] sessions

to prevent, recognize, and respond to child abuse.

Engaged 495 individuals through 27 presentations to civic groups, churches, and college classrooms to raise awareness and mobilize community action.

Prepared 802 child maltreatment professionals

in foundational and advanced ChildFirst[®] forensic interviewing skills, multidisciplinary team (MDT) development, and other specialized topics.

Trained 508 advocates and professionals

through our nationally accredited CAC foundational advocacy and prevention training, and advanced courses, expanding best practices nationwide.





Ways to Give

There are many meaningful ways to give, and each one helps build a future where children are safe, heard, and supported. Through our *Circle of Hope* planned and lifetime giving program, your generosity creates a lasting impact for children and families. The opportunities below offer ways to shape a legacy of hope.

Planned Giving

Qualified Retirement Assets

Retirement assets can be a tax-wise way to support First Witness. You can name First Witness as a beneficiary of your qualified retirement plan.

Life Insurance

Life insurance allows you to create a significant legacy gift through relatively modest annual premiums.

Bequest

You may name First Witness to receive a specific amount or a percentage of your assets or estate, including as a contingent beneficiary.

Real Estate

Appreciated real estate may be donated to First Witness, subject to our gift acceptance policy. Donating property directly can help avoid capital gains tax and may qualify for a charitable deduction based on fair market value.

Lifetime Giving

Qualified Retirement Assets

Retirement assets offer a tax-wise way to support First Witness. If you are age 73 or older, you may also make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) from your IRA, up to \$108,000 annually, which can count toward your RMD and be excluded from taxable income.

\$5,000 or more as a One-Time Gift or Pledged Over Time

Monetary donations may be tax-deductible if you itemize. If your gift exceeds deduction limits, you may be able to carry forward the unused portion to future tax years.

Publicly Traded Stocks

If you have held the stock for more than one year and it has appreciated, you can make a gift of publicly traded stock to First Witness and avoid paying capital gains tax on the transaction.

We encourage you to consult with your financial advisor, tax professional, or estate planning attorney to discuss how these giving options impact your financial situation and help you achieve your philanthropic goals.

New

Federal Tax Incentives for Charitable Giving in 2026

Cash Donations

Starting in 2026, the law creates a new above-the-line deduction for charitable cash contributions for taxpayers who do not itemize:

- » Up to \$1,000 for single filers and
- » Up to \$2,000 for joint filers.

This change will benefit a large share of taxpayers who claim the standard deduction.

Planned Giving

The law prevents the scheduled reduction of the estate and gift tax exemption, which was set to take effect at the end of 2025, locking in a \$15 million per person (about \$30 million per couple) exemption beginning in 2026 and indexing it for inflation going forward.



First Witness
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“
**The true meaning of life is
to plant trees, under whose
shade you do not expect to sit.**

— Nelson Henderson



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