



THE DEACON'S SPIRIT

DATE: DECEMBER 2025

Volume 250 • Issue 250

The newsletter of St. Stephen Lutheran Church

*Good news from heaven the angels bring,
Glad tidings to the earth they sing:
To us this day a child is given,
To crown us with the joy of heaven.*
- Martin Luther

Have a blessed
CHRISTMAS

**512 McClellan Street
Wausau, WI 54403-4882**

Phone: 715-845-7858

Website: www.sslcwausau.com

Email address:
information@sslcwausau.com

Office Hours:
Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays
from 8am—3pm

Office Closed:
Wednesday, December 24th and
Thursday, December 25th for
Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

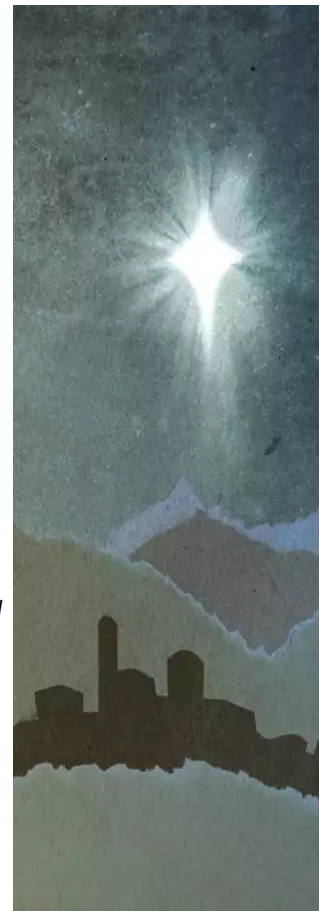
Deadlines:
Bulletin: Wednesday by 8:00 a.m.
Newsletter: 3rd Thursday of the month.

Facebook:
Join us to watch a livestream service
every Sunday at 9am at
<https://www.facebook.com/wausausslc>

Worship Telecast:
Our Worship Services are telecast on
Spectrum channel 980/TDS channel 14
on Sundays at 12pm (this is the previous
Sundays' service), Mondays at 3pm, and
Tuesdays at 10am and 10:30pm.



Now there were
in the same country
shepherds living
out in the fields,
keeping watch over
their flock by night.
And behold,
an angel of the Lord
stood before them,
and the glory of the Lord
shone around them, and
they were greatly afraid.
Then the angel
said to them,
“Do not be afraid,
for behold, I bring you
good tidings of great joy
which will be to all people.
For there is born to you
this day in the city of David
a Savior, who
is Christ the Lord.
And this will be
the sign to you:
You will find a Babe
wrapped in
swaddling cloths,
lying in a manger.”
Luke 2:8-12



Pastor Karoline Schwantes/Phone: 715-370-5514/**Email:** prka-

Advent Midweek: 5:30pm at Good Shepherd, December 3rd, 10th, and 17th
Advent Choral Service at St. Stephen: Sunday, December 14th at 9am
Advent Choral Service at Pilgrim: Sunday, December 21st at 9am
Blue Christmas Service at Mount Calvary: Sunday, December 21st at 4pm
Christmas Eve Service at St. Stephen: Wednesday, December 24th at 4pm
Christmas Eve Service at Pilgrim: Wednesday, December 24th at 5pm
Combined Candlelight Worship at St. Stephen: Wednesday, December 24th at 10pm
Combined Christmas Day Service at Pilgrim: Thursday, December 25th at 9am



A note on the combined services:

Many people have the tradition of attending a late night service on Christmas Eve or worship on Christmas morning, even if they are no longer connected to a congregation. Through collaboration we are able to offer a greater variety of services and worship times. Last year we experimented with offering a combined late service and we noticed that the majority of those in attendance were visitors not connected to either congregation. This year we decided to offer a shared late service planned by multiple congregations held at St. Stephen and to offer a community Christmas morning service at Pilgrim. Come join us! This is a great opportunity to invite neighbors, friends, and family!

Worship schedule for after Christmas: January & February

As we prepare for the merger of our congregations, we are taking the in-between time between Christmas and Lent to plan some combined worship services. These services are a short-term way to help us continue to get to know one another and to prepare us for joining together.

*December 28th: Combined service "Brunch Church" at Pilgrim. This will be in the fellowship hall with a breakfast potluck using the Sanctified Art Brunch Church Liturgy.

*January 18th: Combined worship at St. Stephen

*February 1st: Combined worship at Pilgrim

*February 15th: Combined worship at St. Stephen

On the Sundays we have combined worship, Pastor Karoline will lead the Thursday evening service at Pilgrim (with the exception of brunch church). That will be January 15th, January 29th, and February 12th.

"What do you fear? Insisting on hope this Advent season"

It feels like we've been living a lot in the "in-between" lately. We've been in the space between "what was" and "what's next" for a while now.

In-between can be uncomfortable. We might be filled with anxiety and fear over not knowing what to expect, grief over what feels lost, and frustration over having to be patient. It can also be a holy and exciting feeling.

Advent is an in-between time too. We experience that feeling of waiting for a Messiah, wondering how our world will change with the incarnation of God. This year our Advent and Christmas theme reflects honestly on the feelings that come on the in-between. It acknowledges our reality with a question, "What do you fear?" But it does not leave the question there. The theme continues with "insisting on hope this Advent season."

Transformation happens in the in-between spaces.

Ministry happens in the in-between spaces.

God is present in the in-between spaces.

Join us as we explore together the future that God has in store for us! Join us as we encounter hope in the ministry God has for us in the right now in-between spaces!

Pastor Karoline

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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St. Stephen Calendar of Events							December 2025	
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY		
	1 11:00 Staff Mtg. 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:00 Bell Choir 6:30 Grief Share 7:00 Dartball	2 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 3:00 Transition Team Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	3 5:30 Confirmation Class 6:30 Choir Practice	4 8:30 Quilting 6:00 Al-Anon 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim	5	6 9:00 Stephen's Angels		
7 Shut-in Basket Pick Up 9:00 Worship 10:15 Trust Fund Comm. Mtg. 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	8 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:00 Bell Choir 7:00 Dartball	9 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:30 Council Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	10 1:00 Women's Bible Study 5:30 Confirmation Class 6:30 Choir Practice	11 8:30 Quilting 6:00 Al-Anon 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim	12	13		
14 Choral Service at SSLC 9:00 Worship/Choral Service at St. Stephen 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	15 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:00 Bell Choir 6:30 Property Comm. Mtg. 7:00 Dartball MEMORIAL DEADLINE FOR DECEMBER	16 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 3:00 Transition Team Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	17 5:30 Confirmation Class 6:00 Little Scholars Christmas Program	18 8:30 Quilting 6:00 Al-Anon 6:00 Special Olympics 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	19	20 3:00pm—10pm Candlelight Concert		
21 Choral Service at Pilgrim 9:00 Worship at St. Stephen 9:00 Choral Service at Pilgrim 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	22 Winter Break Begins 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:00 Bell Choir 7:00 Dartball	23 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	24 Christmas Eve 4:00 Christmas Eve Service at St. Stephen 5:00 Christmas Eve Service at Pilgrim 10:00 Combined Candlelight Worship at St. Stephen OFFICE CLOSED	25 Christmas Day 9:00 Combined Worship at Pilgrim OFFICE CLOSED	26	27 3:00pm—10pm Candlelight Concert		
28 9:00 Combined Worship at Pilgrim 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	29 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:00 Bell Choir 7:00 Dartball	30 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	31					

ANNIVERSARIES & BIRTHDAYS



Anniversaries

The following couples are celebrating their December Wedding Anniversaries.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

December 3rd

William & Sandra Moss

December 7th

Joe & Heather Matter



Birthday Blessings

The following people are celebrating December Birthdays

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

December 2nd

Sharon Lohrey

December 9th

Paul Oestreich

December 10th

Thomas Harry

John Teske

December 18th

Troy Sekaney

December 20th

Allen Brouchous

Dan Peters

December 24th

Shirley Kasten

December 26th

Heather Matter

December 30th

Cheryl Lonsdorf

November 2025 Memorials

In loving memory of Herb Yolitz

\$3255 – Capital Campaign

Family & Friends

Capital Campaign

In loving memory of family and friends –
Kelly Brown

In memory of loved ones –
Joyce Fromfeld

Choral Fund

In memory of Jerry Preller and dear loved
ones –

Kay Preller

Quilting Fund

In loving memory of our Parents, Don &
Jean Romang –

Vicki & Scott Romang

Stained Glass Window Maintenance

In loving memory of our Parents, James &
Betty Boerner –

Vicki & Scott Romang



Adopt-A-Family

We are doing Adopt-A-Family again this year! We have adopted 20 kids. There are gift tags in the back of the church and they will be available through Sunday, December 7th. All gifts need to be back to the church by Sunday, December 14th. We will be having a "Wrapping Party" on Saturday, December 13th from 10:30am until 2pm if anyone is interested in helping wrap gifts. We will also be collecting monetary donations for these gifts as well. If you would like to donate towards Adopt-A-Family, please make a note in the memo line of your check and we will use the money accordingly. Let's help the kids feel the magic of Christmas this year.

December Memorials

If you would like a memorial placed in the December bulletins and January newsletter, it needs to be to the office by Monday, December 15th. Poinsettia memorials will be in the Christmas Eve bulletin.

Marty Bus Needs

With the cold weather here, the Marty Bus is looking for WOMEN'S winter coats in the following sizes: 2X thru 4X and one 6X MEN'S coat. If you would like to donate any of these items or give money to purchase any of these items, please contact Shauna Robinson at 608-514-4504. Thank you!

Office Closed

The office will be closed starting Thursday, December 18th until Monday, January 5th as Nancy Henke will be on vacation. If you have a pastoral emergency during this time, please call Pastor Karoline Schwantes at 715-370-5514.

Sunday, December 28th

On Sunday, December 28th, a Combined Service is scheduled at Pilgrim at 9am. The order of service will be casual, with the service held in Pilgrim's Fellowship Hall with a potluck breakfast during the service (similar to our Wednesday Lenten services). If you are interested in bringing a dish to pass, there is a sign-up sheet located on the counter by the office. Looking forward to seeing you there!

Thank You

This year the Angels presented the Children's Advocacy Center with 50 fleece blankets! The CAC is a safe place for children and adolescents who may have been abused. Professionals at the CAC evaluate and investigate cases of abuse and help the child and families feel safe. Thanks to Thrivent Action seed money, we were able to purchase material from Hobby Lobby to create many of the blankets that were on display on Sunday, November 9th when they were blessed and then transported to the center.

Women's Bible Study

On Wednesday, December 10th, the Women's Bible Study group will meet at The Palms Restaurant at 11:30 am for a Christmas celebration. Each person will order off of the menu, and pay their own way. If you wish to attend, please call Jane Seubert at 715-297-6407 by Monday, December 1st so she can make reservations. Following lunch, a Bible Study will be held at church in the Conference Room. Any women in the congregation who would like to attend are WELCOME!

Benevolence

Through your support of St. Stephen in the month of October 2025, we were able to contribute to the following ministry:

ELCA National & Synod Support \$596

This is the tenth month of our unified budget in which we now give four and one half percent (4.5%) of our current expense receipts and loose plate offerings for benevolence. The above amount is based on the income of \$13,254 for October.

St. Stephen Family Checkbook

For the month of October 2025 and the year to date, the St. Stephen family checkbook looked like this:

October 1—31, 2025

What we received.....\$19,457.
What we spent.....(\$19,935.)
Our balance.....(\$ 478.)

January 1—October 31, 2025

What we received.....\$206,455.
What we spent.....(\$208,608.)
Our balance.....(\$ 2,153.)

Order of Importance of Memorials and Other Special Offerings

Primary Funds: Current Expense Receipts, Building Improvement/Maintenance Fund, and Sustainability Trust Fund.

Secondary Funds: Bell Choir Fund, Brick Maintenance (tuck pointing), Choral Fund, ELCA Scholarship Fund, Good Neighbor Fund, Library Fund, Organ Fund, Quilters Memorial Fund, Parish House Alarm, Technology Fund, and WELCA Clean Water Fund.

Other Funds: Confirmation/National Youth Gathering, Faith Enrichment Fund, Major Church Improvement, Missionary Sponsorship, Rooted in Faith (Crossways Capital Improvement) Fund, Seidel/Meyer Scholarship, Seminary Scholarship, and World Hunger.

CHORAL SERVICE/CHRISTMAS SERVICES



Advent Choral Services

Sunday, December 14th
9am at St. Stephen Lutheran

Sunday, December 21st
9am at Pilgrim Lutheran

JOIN US FOR CHRISTMAS!!!

Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24th
4pm & 10pm at St. Stephen Lutheran Church

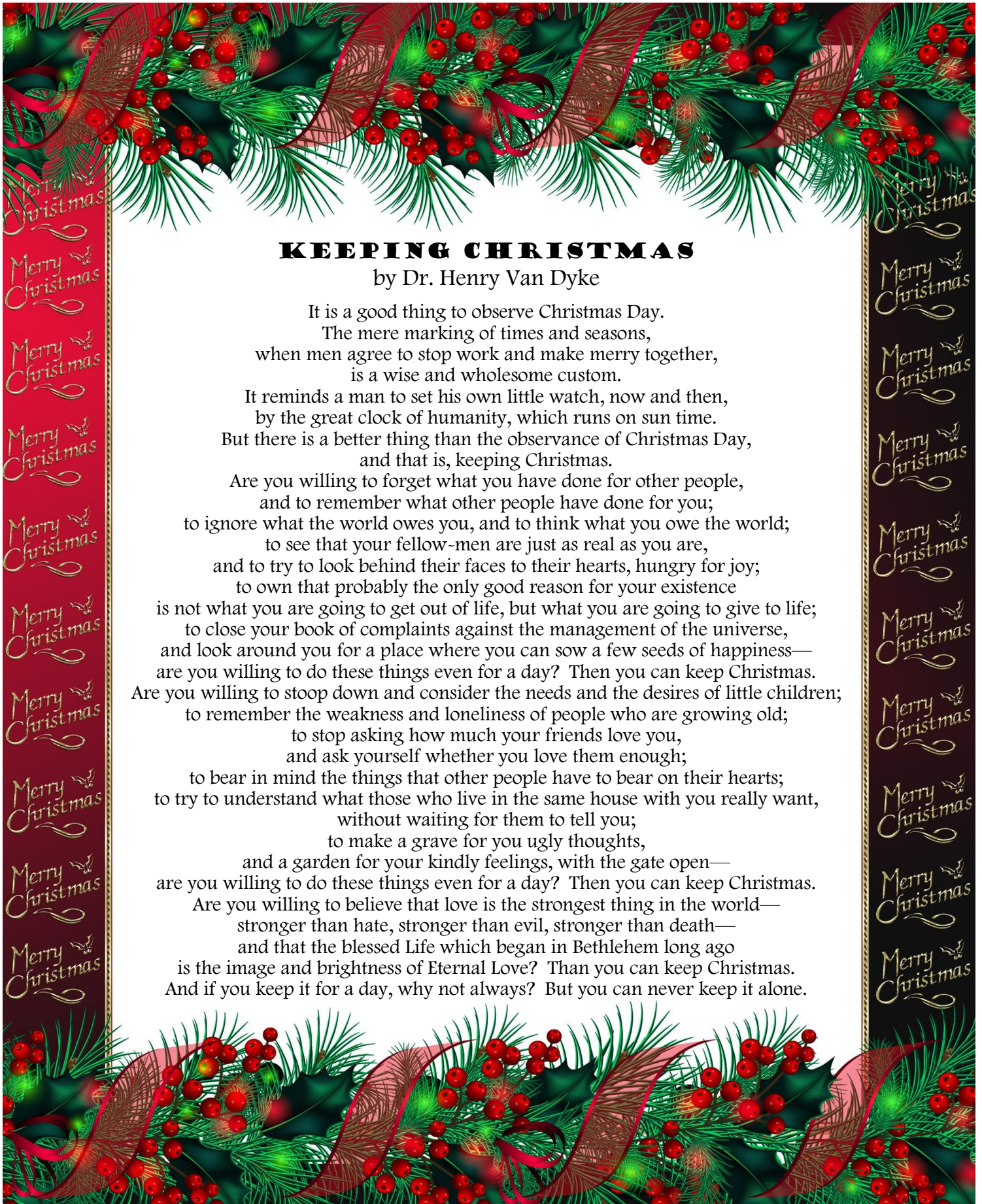
Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24th
5pm at Pilgrim Lutheran Church

Christmas Day, Thursday, December 25th
9am at Pilgrim Lutheran Church

KEEPING CHRISTMAS

by Dr. Henry Van Dyke

It is a good thing to observe Christmas Day.
 The mere marking of times and seasons,
 when men agree to stop work and make merry together,
 is a wise and wholesome custom.
 It reminds a man to set his own little watch, now and then,
 by the great clock of humanity, which runs on sun time.
 But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas Day,
 and that is, keeping Christmas.
 Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people,
 and to remember what other people have done for you;
 to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world;
 to see that your fellow-men are just as real as you are,
 and to try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy;
 to own that probably the only good reason for your existence
 is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life;
 to close your book of complaints against the management of the universe,
 and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness—
 are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.
 Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and the desires of little children;
 to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old;
 to stop asking how much your friends love you,
 and ask yourself whether you love them enough;
 to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear on their hearts;
 to try to understand what those who live in the same house with you really want,
 without waiting for them to tell you;
 to make a grave for you ugly thoughts,
 and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open—
 are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.
 Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world—
 stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death—
 and that the blessed Life which began in Bethlehem long ago
 is the image and brightness of Eternal Love? Then you can keep Christmas.
 And if you keep it for a day, why not always? But you can never keep it alone.



TRANSITION TEAM MINUTES ~ NOVEMBER 4, 2025

Present at meeting: Dick Holster, Jean Trempe, Pr. Cath Mode, Pr. Karoline Schwantes, Pam Hackbart, Jeff Kessel, Sue Koerten, Sarah Lonsdorf, Verlyn Oelke, Jim Von Rueden.

Our synod coach, Pr. Cath Mode, started the meeting. She reviewed our new Mission Statement that came out of the retreat on Oct. 26: **“Walking Together to Celebrate Christ’s Love.”** We should use this from now on in meetings and written communications.

Pr. Cath continued with a hymn, “Woke Up This Morning”. We sang this together. This hymn was printed in a handout that includes a brief write-up on each verse incorporating a short quote from scripture. This handout can be used as a resource in the merger process. The very last sentence concludes with the sentence: Stirring The Pot. She reminds us that **Doing God’s work stirs the pot.**

Dick read an email he received from a person who attended the retreat on Oct. 26. The email showed us the enthusiasm and excitement that can be generated by the work that the congregations are doing.

Pr. Cath presented a handout titled “Seven Stages of Congregational Grief and Loss”. We were asked to draw an emoji representing where each of us is at today. Our emojis were discussed and followed with a discussion of the seven stages. At any given time, there will be congregation members in most or all of the stages. The members of the transition team may be in the same stage but stay aware that members of the congregations may feel differently.

Pr. Cath advised us to pray for Pr. Karoline and all our leaders daily.

A handout, “4 C’s OF CONGREGATIONAL GRIEF”, was read aloud and discussed in detail. Communal grief will be experienced as we go through the process. A grief support plan is essential. The four elements of support are **Choose, Communicate, Connect, and Compromise.** The handout will be made available to all leaders in our congregations. In summary Pr. Cath stated that **the main job of leadership is dealing with the grief that will occur.**

Should we have a timeline for tasks or events in the merger process? Pr. Cath stated: I encourage you to not set a timeline. If, for example, someone asks about Easter, we can say that by Easter we will be well into the transition.

Our most immediate task: Pr. Cath indicated that the first step is to be sure that the constitution is 100% done before we proceed.

WORK GROUPS.

- **Ten work groups were proposed at the last Transition Team meeting.** The groups are: Legal; Constitution and Bylaws; Real Estate with a focus on physical plant, grounds, and maintenance; Real Estate with a focus on long term uses for Pilgrim’s property; Finance; Policies and Practices; Communications; Worship; Ministry (outreach, education, and evangelism); Celebration Team.
- **Another work group was proposed at this meeting: A Prayer Work group.** The function of this work group was discussed.
- **Getting the work groups started.** After much discussion it was decided that Dick, Jean, and Sarah will meet to come up with a spreadsheet of 11 work groups and present this at the next Transition Team meeting on the 18th. The spreadsheet should include:
- A recommendation on how many people there should be in each work group.

- The functions of each work group.
- A list of people who have volunteered to date for each of the work groups.
- We agreed that when each group first meets, the members should select a chairperson or co-chairs.
- It was suggested that 4 members of the combined Worship Team serve as the Worship work group. There was another suggestion: allow for two at large members. These at large members would be two congregation members not on the worship team who are interested in the process.
- The spreadsheet will be presented to the Transition Team for discussion and final approval at our next meeting on 11/18.
- The completed spreadsheet will be sent to both congregations.
- Following distribution of the spreadsheet let's plan for a **"coffee cake retreat"** after a service at Pilgrim and St Stephen. At these coffee hours we can present details about the work groups and recruit additional work group members.
- We envision a work group kickoff event later.

Discussion points during the meeting:

- Continue to be inclusive. This includes consideration of members with mobility problems: We are walking together; we are rolling together.
- We informed Pr. Cath that we will publish Transition Team Minutes in our bulletins and monthly newsletters.
- There was general agreement that there are important reasons for keeping the name St. Stephen for the merged congregation.
- Pr. Cath recommended that Pilgrim have heart to heart discussions about closure.
- Pr. Cath recommended that we need a tangible symbol such as a gift to show that we are all part of the merger.
- Pr. Cath advised us to consider the legal requirement that we have worship services or other programs frequently enough to maintain legally exempt status.
- Think about more items for the agenda for our next meeting.

Next Meeting: A Zoom meeting on November 18th.

Pr. Cath concluded the meeting with a blessing.

Submitted by Jeff Kessel

IMPORTANT TAX INFORMATION

Checks and money must be delivered by hand or mail, and postmarked on or before December 31, 2025 in order to claim a charitable contribution deduction for 2025. Checks that are placed in the church offering at the first service of January 2026, **WILL NOT QUALIFY FOR A CHARITABLE DEDUCTION IN 2025**, even if the check was dated for 2025, or was actually written in 2025.

To ensure the deductibility of your church contributions, please do not file your 2025 income tax return until you have received a written acknowledgment of your contributions from the church. You may lose a deduction for some contributions if you file your tax return before receiving a written acknowledgment.

Below is a form requesting your year end tax statement. Forms will also be available in the back of the church and on the counter by the church office. If you prefer, you can email Jim Von Rueden at mbtolley@sslclwausau.com and give him the following information:

Envelope Number (Optional) _____

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

____ I will pick up at the back of the church in January

____ Mail it to me

____ Email it to me – Email Address _____

If you do not have email, you can call the church office at 715-845-7858 leave your name, and indicate that you want a tax statement, and a form will be filled out for you and given to Jim Von Rueden.

Otherwise, completed forms can be placed in the brown box in the back of the church, mailed in, dropped off at the office, or put in with the offering. Statements will be ready by January 18, 2025.

If you have questions, you may call the church office at 715-845-7858.

COUNCIL MINUTES ~ NOVEMBER 6, 2025

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Present: Dick Holster, Vicki Romang, Jim Von Rueden, Betsy Utecht, Sarah Lonsdorf, Darrin Koehler, Jeff Blomquist, Pastor Karoline, Jacque Schremp

Absent: Sue Holster, Nancy Prigge, and Shauna Robinson

Council Minutes for October 14, 2025: A motion was made and carried to accept the minutes without changes.

Pastor's Report: Pastor Karoline provided a written report.

Treasurer's Report: The total capital is \$23,708.96.

A motion was made and carried to accept these reports.

Committee Reports:

Good Stewards: A written report was provided.

Property: No written report was provided. A section of sewer line was replaced in the basement. Risers in the stairwell are being painted on Sunday. Agreements for snow removal have been made with the same providers as last year.

Worship: No written report was provided.

Trust Fund: A written report was provided from the November 5, 2025 committee meeting.

A motion was made and carried to accept these reports.

Old Business:

- Memorial Fund Order – No change to the order this month. Current Expense Fund is number one, Building Improvement and Maintenance Fund is number two, and Sustainability Trust Fund is number three.

New Business:

- Invoice Approval—The total amount of invoices paid was \$25,108.03. **A motion was made and carried to approve the paid invoices.**
- Noisy Offering—November 16, 2025: Donations from the noisy offerings will continue to be added to the Community Outreach Fund.
- Capital Campaign Update—Double payment was made in October. Capital Campaign 2024 fund balance is \$15,083.92.
- Transition Team Update—The Transition Team has continued to discuss work groups for the merger with Pilgrim. The next meeting will take place on November 18th.
- Wausau Area ELCA Church Presidents' Meeting—The next meeting will take place on November 18th.
- Community Outreach Fund—A request for funds for a security deposit was made to Laurie Sturzenegger from Good Shepherd.
- Combined Congregational Retreat—October 26, 2025: The group chose the following purpose statement: Walking Together to Celebrate Christ's Love! Work will continue on a statement of values.
- Bulletins—The Council continued to discuss printing the readings in the bulletin each week and will revisit this topic next month.
- Child Safety Plan—This topic will be addressed by a work group as part of the merger with Pilgrim.
- New Member Welcome—A New Member Welcome will be held during the first quarter of 2026.
- Family Christian Education—This topic will be addressed by a work group as part of the merger with Pilgrim.
- Budget—A proposed budget for 2026 was presented for review.
- Work groups—A table talk will be held following worship on November 16th to discuss work groups for the merger with Pilgrim. Individuals will have the opportunity to volunteer for work groups at that time.
- Advertisements for the December choral service and Christmas service will be placed in the Wausau Pilot and Review and on Facebook.

The next Council meeting will be on Tuesday, December 9, at 5:30 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Betsy Utecht, Council Secretary