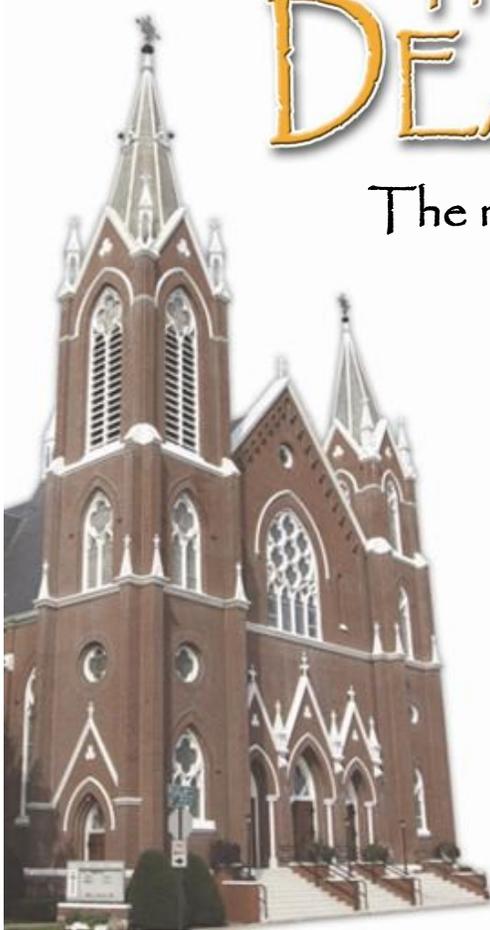


THE DEACON'S SPIRIT

The newsletter of St. Stephen Lutheran Church



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Wausau, WI 54403-4882

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Website: www.sslcwausau.com

Email address:
information@sslcwausau.com

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

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.



Pastor Karoline Schwantes/Phone: 715-370-5514/Email: prkaroline@sslcausau.com



WALKING TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE CHRIST'S LOVE

Epiphany is the season where we celebrate the revealing of God in our world – the places and ways that Jesus Christ shows up in our lives. Epiphany itself is celebrated on January 6th as the 12 days of Christmas wrap up and celebrates the arrival of the Magi, having followed the star from far away to find the incarnate savior.

The weeks following in January and February include “Baptism of Christ,” readings about the call of the disciples, and who recognizes Jesus. These Sundays are known as the “time after Epiphany” and they lead us to Ash Wednesday and Lent.

This year, I used some Christmas money to buy myself a new poetry book. “A Rebellion of Care” by David Gate arrived on my doorstep right around Epiphany. One of the first poems caught my attention with the repeated line, “Another way is possible.” In this line, I heard echoes of the Magi’s story, returning home by a different way because they had been warned in a dream not to return to King Herod with information about Jesus. This phrase of poetry has stuck with me through this cold season. Another way is possible.

During these Sundays, in our baptisms, we are called to walk “another way”. Together we follow Christ, often with old traditions and still in new ways. We, as congregations, are learning to walk together, celebrating God’s presence in Christ along our way. We discern together which ways we keep and which ways are new. We are called forward together in our baptismal identity.

There is a lot new coming up. Worship at its core is the same, but some weeks we might be in new locations and there might be aspects that feel less familiar. Our Lenten midweek service schedule has aspects that are new, like Lenten evening services on Thursdays at Pilgrim and even a new practice time for choir. Mark your calendars and join us as we learn to “walk together.”

Pastor Karoline

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

St. Stephen Calendar of Events					February 2026	
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 Angels Food Drive Begins 9:00 Combined Worship at Pilgrim 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	2 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 7:00 Dartball	3 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 3:00 Transition Team Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	4 5:00 Trust Fund Comm. Mtg. 5:30 Bell Choir 5:30 Confirmation Class 6:30 Choir Practice	5 8:30 Quilting 11:00 Staff Mtg. 6:00 Al-Anon 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim	6	7 9:00 Stephen's Angels
8 Annual Meeting 9:00 Worship/New Member Welcome 10:15 Annual Mtg. 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	9 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 7:00 Dartball	10 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:30 Council Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	11 9:00 Quilting at Pilgrim 1:00 Women's Bible Study 5:30 Bell Choir 5:30 Confirmation Class 6:30 Choir Practice	12 8:30 Quilting 3:00 Worship Comm. Mtg. 6:00 Al-Anon 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim	13	14 Valentine's Day 9:00am—4pm Saturday Crafterday 3:00pm—10pm Candlelight Concert
15 9:00 Combined Worship at St. Stephen 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	16 Presidents' Day 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:30 Bell Choir 6:30 GriefShare 6:30 Property Comm. Mtg. 7:00 Dartball NO SCHOOL MEMORIAL DEADLINE FOR FEBRUARY	17 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 3:00 Transition Team Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	18 Ash Wednesday 6:30 Ash Wednesday Service at Pilgrim	19 8:30 Quilting 6:00 Al-Anon 6:00 Special Olympics 6:30 Midweek Holden Evening Prayer at Pilgrim 7:00 Choir Practice NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	20	21
22 9:00 Worship 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 7:00 AA	23 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:30 Bell Choir 6:30 GriefShare 7:00 Dartball	24 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	25 12:00 Midweek Lent Lunch Church at Pilgrim 5:30 Midweek Lenten Service at Good Shepherd w/ supper & Confirmation to follow	26 8:30 Quilting 6:00 Al-Anon 6:30 Midweek Holden Evening Prayer at Pilgrim 7:00 Choir Practice	27	28



Anniversaries

The following couples are celebrating their February Wedding Anniversaries.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

February 23rd

Caleb & Jennifer Deffner

February 28th

Dan & Melissa Peters



Birthday Blessings

The following people are celebrating February Birthdays

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

February 1st

Elizabeth Beilke

February 2nd

Kristine Mohr

February 4th

Jeff Blomquist

Carol Sekaney

February 6th

Sandra Schilling

February 8th

Tammy Kromrei

February 9th

Harold Peterson

February 11th

Randy Beyer

February 15th

Chuck Kershaw

Marjorie Zweck

February 17th

Pat Lonsdorf

February 22nd

Marjorie Nimz

February 25th

Kaleb Holster

Jim Lee

February 27th

Tim Gritzmacher

February 28th

Caleb Deffner



Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of St. Stephen Lutheran Church will be held on Sunday, February 8th, 2026, immediately following worship.

Capital Improvement /Mission Investment Loan

In the fall of 2024, St. Stephen borrowed **\$121,000** from the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA to finance building improvements. Beginning in early 2025, we began making monthly payments, with the goal of paying the loan off in 5 years' time. As of **January 1, 2026**, our current balance is **approximately \$100,000**. Our goal, with your support, is to pay the loan off in 5 years' time. With the start of the new year, year 2 of our campaign, please remember to continue your payments as you are able; be it weekly, monthly, semi-annually, or annual payment. If you need a reminder on your pledge amount, please contact the office and Jim Von Rueden will provide you with your pledge amount. Thank you! The Capital Committee—Jeff Blomquist, Randy Van Natta, Sue Holster, Dick Holster, and Pastor Karoline.

Christ In Our Home Devotionals

Beginning in April, we will be shifting our devotional subscription to Christ in Our Home. This quarterly devotional is similar to Portals of Prayer and is available in standard print and large print. There is also an audio format available. Please let us know in the office if you would be interested in the audio version to listen to the devotional.

Civil Rights Educational Tour with Bishop Anne

Join Bishop Anne Edison-Albright on a Civil Rights Educational Tour, June 10th thru the 16, exploring pivotal sites of the Civil Rights Movement through learning, reflection, and shared witness. This immersive journey includes Atlanta, Birmingham, Selma, Montgomery, and Tuskegee, with guided visits to historic landmarks and museums. Learn more, view the full itinerary, and register at the Educational Opportunities Tours website by scanning the QR code or visiting the website at: <https://www.eo.travelwithus.com/tours/dt26061026w64031#eotours>.

Food Drive

The Angels will be sponsoring a food drive for First Presbyterian's Food Pantry during the month of February. Let's help our neighbors who need a little assistance, especially during the winter months when heating bills cause shortage of cash for food for the family. The pantry could use sources of protein (baked beans, spam, tuna, canned chicken). Also items such as stuffing mix, pasta, cake mixes, frosting, rice, Hamburger Helper, and cooking oil. In the past, our contributions have replenished a much depleted pantry at First Presbyterian. Thank you for your support.

GriefShare

GriefShare is a 13-week video session and is a national program to help individuals journey with their loss of a loved one or someone very close to them. We held 2 sessions in 2025 with the help of co-facilitators Jane Seubert and Lynn Deffner. We will be offering another session at St. Stephen Lutheran Church beginning on Monday, February 16th and ending on May 11, 2026 at 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in the Conference Room. You can register by contacting Shirley Ostrem either by phone 715-359-5531 or by email sjostrem2113@outlook.com OR go to the GriefShare.org website. Thank you for supporting this outreach program.

Benevolence

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

ELCA National & Synod Support \$793

This is the twelfth 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 \$17,613 for December.

St. Stephen Family Checkbook

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

December 1—31, 2025

What we received.....\$24,252.
What we spent.....(\$23,139.)
Our balance.....\$ 1,113.

January 1— December 31, 2025

What we received.....\$251,662.
What we spent.....(\$250,441.)
Our balance.....\$ 1,221.

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.

MORE CONGREGATION NOTES

Office Closed

The office will be closed the week of January 26th as Nancy Henke will be on vacation due to the service being held at Pilgrim Lutheran on Sunday, February 1st with no service at St. Stephen. If you have a pastoral emergency during this time, please call Pastor Karoline Schwantes at 715-370-5514.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church Quilting

Pilgrim Lutheran Church invites anyone who would like to come and quilt with them. They meet the second Wednesday of every month from 9am until 11am. There will NOT be quilting during Lent.

Saturday Crafterday

Saturday Crafterdays Return! February 15th, March 28th, and May 16th. Bring your favorite craft and play! Join us for a fun and relaxing day of crafting and conversation. We will be meeting upstairs in the choir/arts room. We've had people work on a variety of projects like, scrapbooking, card making, diamond art, embroidery, and many others. There are lots of stamps and other craft supplies here as well. This activity is FREE! Lots of space, natural light, and long tables. Elevator access. Bring a snack to share. Coffee provided. Bring your own lunch or there are lots of food options downtown. Card making supplies available. The church address is 512 McClellan St., downtown Wausau. Parking available on the street or in the St. Stephen lot on McClellan (on the other side of the brick house).

Scam Warning

There has been another round of e-mails impersonating Pastor Karoline. Be cautious and remember there are several verifications you can use:

- Pastor Karoline will not contact you asking you to purchase gift cards or other financial donations. Do not give out account numbers or any financial or personal information!
- You can call church or Pastor's cellphone to verify.
- Pastor has 2 e-mail accounts. Double check the e-mail address of the sender to make sure that it is from a trusted account.
- Wait and verify with Pastor Karoline in person. Scams are becoming more and more sophisticated! A scamming tactic is to make whatever issue seem urgent. They might try to pressure you into acting now. Give it time, double check, and be safe.

Women's Bible Study

The Women's Bible Study Group will meet on Wednesday, February 11th at 1pm in the Conference Room. Any women in the congregation who would like to attend are WELCOME!

Worship News

In anticipation of our upcoming merger, Pilgrim and St. Stephen are sharing some of our worship services throughout January and February. Mark your calendar and help us spread the word: February 1st at Pilgrim, and February 15th at St. Stephen.

JANUARY 2026 MEMORIALS

Building Improvement and Maintenance Fund

In loving memory of Shirley and Merritt Gleason on their January 29th Wedding Anniversary –
Deb Gleason

Capital Campaign

In memory of loved ones –
Joyce Fromfeld

Library Fund

In loving memory of Angie Ninnemann –
Tim Gritzmacher



Come walk with us as we remember Christ's Love during this Lenten Season. All are welcome!

- *February 18th - Ash Wednesday Service at 6:30 p.m. at Pilgrim.*
- *February 25th thru March 25th - Wednesday Lunch Church Service. This casual service will be held in Pilgrim's Fellowship Hall and will include a lunch. Lunch will served at noon with the service beginning around 12:15 p.m.*
- *February 25th thru March 25th - Weekly Wednesday Worship Services and Soup Suppers begin at Good Shepherd. Services at 5:30 p.m. with soup supper and Confirmation to follow.*
- *February 26th thru March 26th - Weekly Holden Evening Prayer services begin on Thursday evenings at 6:30 p.m. at Pilgrim.*
- *February 22nd thru March 22nd - Sunday Worship Services during Lent will be held at 9:00 a.m. at St. Stephen.*
- *March 29th - Palm Sunday Service at 9:00 a.m. at Pilgrim, including a baptism.*
- *April 2nd - Maundy Thursday Worship Service at 6:30 p.m. at Good Shepherd.*
- *April 3rd - Good Friday Worship Service at 12:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. at St. Stephen.*
- *April 5th - Easter Sunday*
 - *6:00 a.m. Good Shepherd Sunrise Service held at Sylvan Hill*
 - *8:30 a.m. Pilgrim*
 - *9:00 a.m. Good Shepherd*
 - *10:30 a.m. St. Stephen*

Pilgrim services held in the Sanctuary will be recorded and available at Pilgrim's website. St. Stephen's services are available livestream via their website and on Facebook.

*For more information, check out the Pilgrim website at <https://www.pilgrimofwausau.org> or St. Stephen's website at <https://sslcwausau.com>
Good Shepherd's information is available at <https://gswausau.org>*

GREETINGS FROM GERMANY

Greetings from Germany!

I have taken a short break from my internship to spend two weeks in Germany with some Wartburg seminary friends. It has been a time of learning, growth, and renewal.

We have been visiting many places that are full of Lutheran history. Our first stop was in Wittenberg, where Luther lived and taught for 36 years. We visited the home where Luther and his wife raised their children.

We also visited the town of Torgau, where we toured the only church that was designed by Martin Luther in 1544. In this city, we also visited the church where Martin Luther's wife, Katharina, was buried.

Of course we visited the church where Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door, and the town church in Wittenberg, where Luther preached.

As a special treat, we visited the beautiful Wartburg Castle in the snow. After rain turned to ice, then snow, the shuttle couldn't run, so we did what Martin Luther once did (no donkeys available either) — we walked. Cold, steep, 1/3 of a mile each way, and absolutely worth it. The castle rising out of the mist was breathtaking.

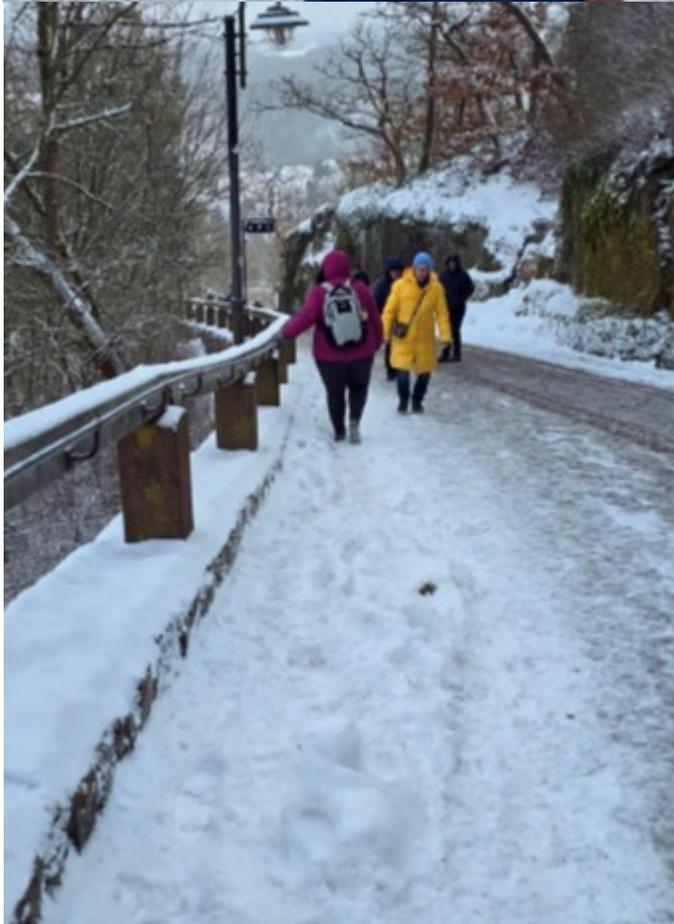
This is where Martin Luther was hidden after the Diet of Worms in 1521. Under the protection of Frederick the Wise, Luther was brought here in a staged "kidnapping" and lived in disguise as "Knight George," complete with a beard. He spent a lot of time alone and isolated because he wasn't actually a very good actor — I guess he was meant to always just be himself. In that quiet, hidden space, he translated the New Testament into German so everyday people could read the scriptures for themselves.

Our time here is coming to an end, and I am looking forward to getting back to the United States. Sadly, I need to preach on Sunday, so I will not have time to visit in person. Know that I think of my St. Stephen family often, and hold you in prayer while I am away.

Kathy Robinson

Some pictures of Kathy's travels are on the page opposite this letter.

PICTURES FROM GERMANY



COUNCIL MINUTES ~ JANUARY 13, 2026

Present: Dick Holster, Vicki Romang, Jim Von Rueden, Betsy Utecht, Sarah Lonsdorf, Darrin Koehler, Jeff Blomquist, Shauna Robinson, John Kronenwetter, and Pastor Karoline.

Absent: Sue Holster and Jacque Schremp.

Council Minutes for December 9, 2025: A motion was made and carried to accept the minutes without changes.

Pastor's Report: Pastor Karoline provided a written report. Delegates are needed for the upcoming Synod Assembly in Oshkosh from June 4th thru the 6th. Additionally, volunteers will be sought to formulate policies and procedures for responding to potential ICE action on St. Stephen premises.

Treasurer's Report: The total capital is \$27,082.17.

A motion was made and carried to accept these reports.

Committee Reports:

Good Stewards: The Good Stewards Committee did not meet in November or December. The main activity in December was the Adopt-A-Family program. Gifts were provided for 20 kids and 8 families.

Property: A written report was provided for December 2025.

Worship: A written report was provided from the January 8, 2026 committee meeting.

Trust Fund: A written report was provided from the January 11, 2026 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 \$29,597.77.
 - **A motion was made and carried to approve the paid invoices.**
- Noisy Offering—January 18, 2026
 - Donations from the January Noisy Offering will be added to the Community Outreach Fund.
- Capital Campaign Update—Following the December payments, the balance of the Capital Loan is approximately \$100,000.
- Transition Team Update—The next meeting will take place on January 20, 2026, at 3 pm. The Transition Team is engaged in ongoing discussion regarding updates to the Constitution and Bylaws and potential changes to Council positions going forward. Some work groups have started meeting.
- Barb Schewe Estate Disbursement—An initial distribution was received. **A motion was made and carried for the Council to recommend at the Annual Meeting that the initial distribution from the Barb Schewe Estate be placed in a Sustainability Fund managed by the Trust Fund Committee.**
- New Member Welcome—February 8, 2026, coinciding with the Annual Meeting
- Little Scholars Flooring—The flooring project in the southeast classroom has been completed.
- Annual Meeting—February 8, 2026
 - **A motion was made and carried to approve Resolutions 1, 2, and 3 for presentation to the Congregation at the Annual Meeting.**
 - **A motion was made and carried to approve the proposed Agenda for the Annual Meeting, with the following changes: changing the year of the budget to 2026; changing agenda item 8 to "Transition Team Update—Work Group Reports"; and adding an agenda item for the Barb Schewe Estate Disbursement.**
- Audit Committee—The audit has been completed, with no issues.
- **A motion was made and carried to appoint John Kronenwetter to one of the vacant Member-at-Large Council positions.**

The next Council meeting will be on Tuesday, February 10, at 5:30 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Betsy Utecht, Council Secretary