

THE DEACON'S SPIRIT

The newsletter of St. Stephen Lutheran Church



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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.

Prayer for Independence Day

Dear God,
as we celebrate today
with fireworks and festivals,
help us never to forget
the reason for our joy.
Help us remember
that our rights to life, liberty
and the pursuit of happiness
were signed into our heritage
with the willing blood
of American patriots.
Most of all, help us remember
that the rights of all people
are more

than words on a document,
and that all people have rights
because you have given us
the dignity of human life.

Grant freedom to all,
and give us the strength
to protect the rights of others.

Amen.

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

This has been a momentous season in our congregation. A merger, a leave taking service, united worship, welcoming new people, we've had and will have many milestones as we continue to learn to walk together in Christ.



In the church, we profess faith in Christ who was, who is, and who is to come. This deeply shapes who we are. We know the stories of our past, how God has been faithful in gathering us and in guiding us. We live in the right now, witnessing God's faithfulness as we celebrate milestones together and grieve and honor our past. And God's faithfulness guides us into the future. We know that as we discern and follow, that God walks with us, shaping us into the body of Christ for the sake of the whole world.

On July 19th, there is a service of leave taking for Pilgrim at 10:30 am. There will not be a service at our St. Stephen location that morning as we celebrate Pilgrim's final worship service together. We celebrate the mission and the witness of Pilgrim to the southeast neighborhood and the community beyond. Join us as we walk faithfully into our future together, celebrating Christ's love.

Pastor Karoline

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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St. Stephen Calendar of Events						July 2026	
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	
			1	2 6:00 AI-Anon 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim	3 OFFICE CLOSED	4 Independence Day	
5 9:00 Worship 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 6:00 AA	6 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	7 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:00 Executive Comm. Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	8 9:00 Quilting at Pilgrim	9 11:00 Staff Mtg. 6:00 AI-Anon 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim	10	11	
12 9:00 Worship 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 6:00 AA	13 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	14 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 5:30 Council Mtg. 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	15	16 5:00 Trust Fund Mtg. 6:00 AI-Anon 6:00 Special Olympics 6:30 Worship at Pilgrim	17	18	
19 9:00 Worship 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 6:00 AA	20 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 6:30 Property Comm. Mtg. MEMORIAL DEADLINE FOR JULY	21 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	22	23 6:00 AI-Anon NEWSLETTER DEADLINE	24	25	
26 9:00 Worship 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 12:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 14/TDS 6:00 AA	27 3:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	28 10:00 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum 10:30 Worship Telecast Ch. 980/Spectrum	29	30 6:00 AI-Anon	31		

ANNIVERSARIES & BIRTHDAYS



Anniversaries

The following couples are celebrating their July Wedding Anniversaries.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

July 1st

Gene & Darlene Simmerman

July 4th

Chuck & Kim Kershaw

July 9th

Darryl & Cheryl Landeau

July 10th

Duane & Elizabeth Wolfe

July 11th

Ronald & Denice Foreman

July 14th

Don & Kathy Oakland

July 18th

Gerald & Marlene Kort

July 22nd

Jim & Bonnie Von Rueden

July 24th

Russell & Julie Post

July 30th

Patrick & Molly Kieper

July 31st

John & Elizabeth Beilke



Funerals

"...in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God..."

Harold Peterson ~ May 4, 2026

Dale Seymour ~ May 23, 2026



Birthday Blessings

The following people are celebrating July Birthdays

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

July 1st

June Champagne

July 4th

Lloyd Zimmer

July 6th

Kenneth Rueth

July 7th

Rita Jones

July 8th

Clara Lind

Dave Skola

Jim Von Rueden

July 9th

Jason Brown

Nancy Zelich

July 10th

Brianna Stromme

July 11th

Ben Roble

Betty Walters

July 12th

Kathy Brown

July 13th

Gabriel Dins

July 15th

Lauren Zaitz

July 16th

Joyce Fromfeld

Sue Holster

Lisa Koch

July 17th

Ben Fandre

Verlyn Oelke

July 18th

Lucy Schremp

Linda Salzman

July 19th

Kathy Kainz

Vanessa Koehler

Colton Lemanski

Leah Ryan

Mary Williams

July 22nd

Ella Fehlhaber-Poppe

July 23rd

Annika Tordsen

July 24th

Jeffrey Will

July 25th

Sharon Hopp

July 26th

Ramona Schmitz

July 27th

Jenna Brandenburg

July 29th

Sandra Moss

July 31st

Cole Hannes

Beth Lind



Board in the Back of Church

You are invited to make an addition to the three-panel board at the back of the church that is going to be at Pilgrim's leave taking service on July 19th. There are also some yellow suns that will be added to the board. Please take one of the suns and write a Bible verse, a prayer, or a hope for our future as our congregations are combined. It would be great if both sides of the panel are packed with suns at the final service.

Book Group

Join us for a summer Book Group! We will meet twice, once in July and once in August to discuss the book, "A Faith of Many Rooms: Inhabiting a More Spacious Christianity", by Debie Thomas. If you are interested, please contact Pastor Karoline at prkaroline@sslcwausau.com or the church office at 715-845-7858, by July 6th. Once we know who wants to participate, we will select dates and times accordingly.

Office Closed

The week of June 28th, Nancy Henke will be on vacation and will return to the office on Monday, July 6th. If you have a pastoral emergency during this time, please call Pastor Karoline at 715-370-5514. Thank you!

Penguin Project

All year long, theaters across the country burst to life with something nothing short of magical. On these stages artists step into beloved Broadway roles—each performance transformed by a powerful twist. Every character is brought to life by artists with disabilities, paired with dedicated peer mentors who support, encourage, and celebrate them at every turn. After months of rehearsals, they step into the spotlight together, delivering performances that radiate talent, friendship, and the unstoppable force of the human spirit. These shows don't just entertain—they redefine what's possible. The Penguin Project of Central Wisconsin presents Aladdin Jr., June 25th thru the 27th at Wausau East High School. You may purchase tickets at penguinprojectcw.org or at the door.

Singers Invited

The choir will be singing two anthems, "Day by Day" and "How Can I Keep from Singing" at the July 19th leave taking service at Pilgrim. Your voice would be a welcome addition to the group. You do not need to be a member of the choir to sing at this special service. There are four rehearsals left, all of which will be held at Pilgrim at 6:30 pm: Tuesday, June 30th, Thursday, July 9th, Tuesday, July 14th, and Thursday, July 16th. There is one additional practice held at Pilgrim at 10 am on Saturday, July 18th.

Volunteer Needed

Shirley Kasten has decided to retire from her volunteer job printing and collating bulletins. This job takes around an hour and is usually done on Thursday afternoons. If you would be interested in taking over as bulletin printer/collator, please contact Nancy Henke in the church office at nhenke@sslcwausau.com or call her at 715-845-7858. THANK YOU, SHIRLEY for your years of dedicated volunteerism! I will miss seeing you every week!

Benevolence

Through your support of St. Stephen in the month of May 2026, we were able to contribute to the following ministry:

ELCA National & Synod Support \$758

This is the fifth 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 \$16,842 for May.

St. Stephen Family Checkbook

For the month of May 2026 and the year to date, the St. Stephen family checkbook looked like this:

May 1—31, 2026

What we received.....	\$20,625.
What we spent.....	(\$24,726.)
Our balance.....	(\$ 4,101.)

January 1—May 31, 2026

What we received.....	\$104,868.
What we spent.....	(\$114,237.)
Our balance.....	(\$ 9,370.)

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.

2026 SYNOD ASSEMBLY REPORT

The 2026 Synod Assembly of the East Central Synod of Wisconsin gathered under the theme “to strive for justice and peace in all the earth”. Rostered leaders, synod staff, and voting members and guests were invited to remember that our ministry begins not with programs or institutions, but with God’s gracious promise in baptism. In Christ, we are named, renewed, forgiven, and sent for the sake of the world.

In her opening sermon and the keynotes that followed, Bishop Meghan Johnston Aelabouni reflected on the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and asked a powerful question: “Look, we are baptized! What is to prevent us from striving for justice and peace in all the earth”? That question helped frame the Assembly’s worship, learning, discernment, and decision-making.

The Bishop and Synod Staff report looked back over the past six years of shared ministry across our synod. Much of that work has been shaped by the baptismal promises: to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the Word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper, to proclaim the good news through word and deed, to serve all people following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

The report gave thanks for the ways our synod has adapted and grown through seasons of change. This included the challenges of Covid and hybrid ministry, the sale of the synod office building, the modernization of synod systems, new approaches to transition ministry, care for rostered leaders, support for congregations in discernment, and the development of resources such as Holy Conversations, the Doing a New Thing Fund, Synod Authorized Ministry, and lay leadership formation.

Worship at Synod Assembly was a time of healing, thanksgiving, and hope. The Assembly gave thanks for congregations entering new forms of shared ministry, honored mission completion and mission starts, and recognized the faithful work of leaders and communities across the synod. It was also a joy to see congregations, including St. Stephen and Pilgrim, recognized as part of this larger story of faithful transition, merger, and new life in Christ.

The Assembly also considered several resolutions. These included a resolution of appreciation for The Rev. Dr. Gerald Mansholt, conferring upon him the title of Bishop Emeritus; a resolution encouraging congregations to study the ELCA social statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All”; a resolution calling for mindful, ethical, and just employment practices for lay professional staff; and a resolution encouraging continued advocacy and support for ELCA World Hunger and the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin.

In addition, Bishop Anne Edison-Albright was re-elected to continue serving as bishop of the East Central Synod of Wisconsin. The Assembly also passed a spending plan to support and steward the ministries of the synod in the year ahead. Pastor Will Ostrem encouraged conversation among members in the Wisconsin River Valley conference of the ECSW, during breakout sessions. They discussed how Pastor Will can be a resource to coordinate between local ELCA churches; as a hub for communication, and operating a database of outreach programs that all the churches in the conference are involved with.

Rooted in baptism, we give thanks for the church we share, for the leaders and congregations of our synod, and for God’s continuing work among us. Thanks be to God.

QR Code Caption: Scan here to read ECSW's 2026 Bishop and Synod Staff Assembly Report.



2026 BAPTISMAL PROMISE
SYNOD STAFF ASSEMBLY REPORT

QR Code Destination: <https://www.ecsw.org/s/4-2026-Baptismal-Promise-Synod-Staff-Assembly-Report.pdf>

Respectfully submitted,
John Kronenwetter

Walking Together to Celebrate Christ's Love: A Final Transition Update

June 18, 2026

After a season of prayerful discernment, listening, and planning, the congregations of St. Stephen and Pilgrim voted on April 26, 2026, to approve a merger. That merger officially went into effect on June 8th, marking a new chapter in our shared life together as St. Stephen Lutheran Church.



We give thanks for the relationships and memories that have shaped Pilgrim's life as a congregation. We also give thanks for the members of both congregations who've helped guide this transition with patience, care, and trust in God's timing. Through the work of the Transition Team, which first met June 15, 2025, and transition work groups, we have been preparing to become one renewed church family, involving staff, councils, volunteers, and many faithful members.

At the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin Assembly, held June 4–6 in Oshkosh, Pilgrim and St. Stephen were formally recognized in connection with our merger. The Assembly acknowledged the prayerful discernment and shared vision that led to this moment, giving thanks for Pilgrim's faithful ministry and naming the hope and new life God is bringing forth among us. The Assembly also offered a prayer for unity, hospitality, care for one another, and continued witness to Christ's reconciling love.

As part of this transition, Thursday evening worship services will continue at Pilgrim through July 19th. That date will also mark a significant leave-taking from Pilgrim's building, held with gratitude and tenderness. After July 19th, Thursday evening services will be held at St. Stephen for the remainder of the summer, while conversations continue about future midweek worship opportunities.

Although this is the final transition update in this format, the work of becoming one community continues. There will be more opportunities to worship, serve, and pray together, and to learn from others' stories. We walk together to celebrate Christ's love, with gratitude for what has been and hope for what God is bringing to life among us.



JUNE MEMORIALS/NEW BOOKS

JUNE 2026 MEMORIALS

Building Improvement and Maintenance Fund

In loving memory of Dale Seymour –
Brenda Prieve

Capital Campaign

In loving memory of Harold Peterson –
Kelly Brown

In loving memory of Esther Gabriel –
Gerald & Marlene Kort

In loving memory of Susan Hackbarth –
Gerald & Marlene Kort

Current Expenses

In loving memory of Dale Seymour –
Darleen Fust

Seidel Meyer Pastoral Ministry Fund

In loving memory of our Mothers, Sue Kratwell and Sadie Borth –
Sandy & Ron Borth and Family

NEW BOOKS IN THE CHURCH LIBRARY

Mona's Eyes

by Thomas Schlessner
Inspirational story about a girl,
her grandfather, & great works of art

Death of an Honest Man

by M.C. Beaton
Murder mystery set in Scotland

Singing Boy

by Dennis McFarland
Story about recovery after the shock
and grief of losing a loved one

The Art of Rocking in the Rain

by Garth Stein
Family life seen
through the eyes of a dog

The Mother-Daughter Book Club

by Susan & James Patterson
Reunion of 4 college friends
and their daughters in Lake Como, Italy

4th of July

by James Patterson & Maxine Paetro
Murder mystery suspense novel

The Saints of Swallow Hill

by Donna Everhart
Novel about survival & friendship
following the Great Depression

COUNCIL MINUTES ~ JUNE 9, 2025

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

Absent: Sue Holster, Shauna Robinson, and Jacque Schremp

Council Minutes for May 12, 2026: A motion was made and carried to accept the minutes without changes.

Pastor's Report: Pastor Karoline provided a verbal report. Confirmation took place at Good Shepherd on May 10th. Four students from Good Shepherd were confirmed. One student from St. Stephen will be confirmed in the fall. St. Stephen has one student who will be participating in confirmation class next fall. There has been discussion among area ELCA churches about organizing joint youth get-togethers.

A motion was made and carried to accept Pastor Karoline's report.

Treasurer's Report: The total capital is \$17,862.49.

A motion was made and carried to accept the treasurer's report.

Committee Reports:

Good Stewards: No report was provided.

Property: A written report was provided.

Worship: A written report was provided from the May 14, 2026 meeting. Thursday evening services will continue at Pilgrim until July 19th and will then be held at St. Stephen for the remainder of the summer. Discussions continue regarding different options for midweek services after that point.

Trust Fund: A written report was provided from the June 8, 2026 meeting. **A motion was made and carried to appoint Jim Lenselink as the fifth member of the Trust Fund Committee.**

A motion was made and carried to accept the committee 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 \$19,731.26.
 - **A motion was made and carried to approve the paid invoices.**
- Capital Campaign Update—The current loan balance is \$91,751.
- **A motion was made and carried to approve the employment of Shelby Brod and Fred Patten.**
- Parsonage Remodel Proposal—**A motion was made and carried to approve a resolution for presentation to the congregation at the June 14th Special Congregational meeting.**
- Little Scholars Classroom Floor—The intention was to replace the flooring in another classroom during the Fourth of July break when Little Scholars is closed, but the project will now be pushed back until December.
- Combined Pilgrim and St. Stephen Rummage Sales took place on May 14-16 and June 4-6.
- The Synod Assembly took place from June 4-6 in Oshkosh. St. Stephen's delegates were Shirley Ostrem and John Kronenwetter. Bishop Anne Edison-Albright was reelected to another six-year term as bishop. The theme of the assembly was striving for justice and peace throughout the world. Pilgrim and St. Stephen were formally recognized by the Synod in connection with our merger.
- Communications Work Group Update—A written report was provided by the Communications Committee from its May 21, 2026 meeting.
- Offerings from the July 19, 2026 service—The Celebration Committee will make a decision regarding the disposition of loose offerings made during the July 19, 2026 service.
- No new information was provided regarding the appraisal of the Pilgrim property, the architect's proposal, or interest in the Pilgrim property by other congregations.
- **A motion was made and carried to accept Gerald and Marlene Kort as members by transfer.**
- **A motion was made and carried to approve a donation of \$204.96 as an offering for the Synod Assembly.**

The next Council meeting will be on Tuesday, July 14th at 5:30 pm.

A motion was made and carried to adjourn the meeting at 7:08 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Betsy Utecht, Council Secretary