



Star on the Hill

The Newsletter of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Lanesboro, Minnesota

January 2026

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Pastor Heidi Wallace

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pastorheid Wallace@gmail.com

Watch our worship on
Facebook Sunday mornings
at 10:00 am

Bethlehem Lutheran Church,
Lanesboro

Financial Summary

Year to Date thru Nov 2025

Income: \$166,723

Expenses: \$157,121



The annual meeting for our congregation will be Sunday, January 25th, following worship. We will also need new Council Members, so please consider joining. If interested, reach out to any current council member or contact the office.

****The deadline to submit written materials for the annual report is Monday, January 5.**



Choir Practice will resume on January 4th. All Singers welcome no experience necessary.



Thank You to
Kathryn Wade,
Gwen Harmon,
Steve Erickson,
Mindy Albrecht-Benson
and Deane Benson for
Bringing in the Christmas
Spirit with our Beautiful
Decorations.

Thank You to Hollie Clarke,
Lindsey Hanson, and
everyone that assisted to
make the Children's
Christmas Program come to
life.



Our Family Night/Confirmation
Resumes at Bethlehem on
Jan. 7th 2026 for the next
6 weeks.

6:00 p.m. Supper
6:30 p.m. Learning
Come with your entire family.
Invite your neighbors to come.
All are welcome!!

**Please sign up in the fellowship
hall to Provide a Supper on a
Wednesday night if you are able.



Do you make New Year's resolutions? I used to, but I was usually among those who didn't make it to the second week of the new year with the same resolve I had on the first day. Still, I like to think I will accomplish something new in the year ahead, so I make use of The Wholeness Wheel produced by Portico Benefit Services.

The Wholeness Wheel is comprised of six aspects of well-being: social/interpersonal, emotional, physical, financial, vocational, and intellectual, all encompassed by spiritual well-being. I try to consider two things I would like to do throughout the year in each of those categories.

Now, 14 things compared to one or two resolutions might seem like too much to take on, but here is why I actually find it easier and healthier. First, I do not feel like I have to start all 14 at the same time. If one of my intellectual well-being goals is to take a class in something that interests me, that class most likely will not begin January 1 nor fit in my schedule in January at all. It is all right to look at my goals later in the year when I have time and see what is available then. Secondly, if I made one or two resolutions, one of them would most likely be about losing weight. All well and good, but the focus would be more on reducing numbers than on improving overall health. Setting two goals for physical well-being helps me to develop two new (hopefully long-term) healthy habits either simultaneously or after one has been established.

As such, I am not as concerned with whether I succeed or -- more likely than not -- fail at one or two resolutions. I have given myself grace in having multiple things and times to attempt the new.

Too often we do not give ourselves grace or credit for trying. Throughout this next year you will hear more from me about the value of trying things, especially for a season.

For now, as we enter the Christmas season, give yourself credit for what you tried this past year. Not just in January, but at any point during 2025. What did you dare to do? How did it go? Did you ask for God's help?

For things in the life of the church such as affirmation of baptism, we respond with "I do, and I ask God to help and guide me." What if we were to ask for God's help and guidance in all things? Remember the wholeness wheel I mentioned? All is encompassed by spiritual well-being. We are most whole, healthiest, most at peace -- and not in pieces -- when our relationship with God is part of everything we do or try to do.

Whether you make New Year's resolutions, set goals, or just take the new year as it comes, do so with hope and a prayer:

Eternal God, you have placed us in a world of space and time, and through the events of our lives you bless us with your love. Grant that in the new year we may know your presence, see your love at work, and live in the light of the event that gives us joy forever -- the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

~ New Year's Eve proper on p. 63 of ELW

Grace and peace, Pastor Heidi <><



***Sunday, Jan. 4th**

***Sunday, Jan. 18th**



***Sunday, Jan. 4th**

First Reading: (NLT)

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Second Reading: (NLT)

Ephesians 1:3-14

Doors: Dave Haugen

Ushers: Raquel Torgerson

Melanie & Dave Haugen

Reader: Lee Peterson

Altar Care/HC: Julie Jensson

Melanie Haugen

Refreshments: Melanie

Haugen, Raquel Torgerson

Sunday, Jan. 11th

First Reading: (NLT)

Isaiah 42:1-9

Psalm:29 (NLT)

Second Reading: (NLT)

Acts 10:34-43

Doors: James Semmen

Ushers: James & Brenda

Semmen Family

Reader: Brenda Semmen

Altar Care: Phyllis Penheiter

Refreshments: Semmens

***Sunday, Jan. 18th**

First Reading: (NLT)

Isaiah 49:1-7

Second Reading: (NLT)

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Doors: Shayn Jensson

Ushers: Shayn & Terri

Jensson, Makaila & Jamie

Kelly Family

Reader: Shayn Jensson

Altar Care/HC: Julie Jensson

& Melanie Haugen

Refreshments: Shayn & Terri

Jensson, Makaila & Jamie

Kelly Family

Sunday, Jan. 25th

First Reading: (NLT)

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm:27:1, 4-9 (NLT)

Second Reading: (NLT)

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

Doors: Bob Penheiter

Ushers: Bob & Phyllis

Penheiter, Glen & Julie

Jensson

Reader: Phyllis Penheiter

Altar Care: Phyllis Penheiter

Refreshments: Bob & Phyllis

Penheiter, Glen & Julie

Jensson

February Service Group
Please reach out to your
Group Coordinators to
sign up for a Sunday of
Service.

Members of the February service group are
Nate & Sharon Boyum,
Tom Brudvig & Pam
Engbretson,
Jeff & Carrie Hanson,
Chris & Anna Hanson,
Corey & Michelle Hanson,
Winston & Christine Howerton,
Mike & Kelly Lawstuen,
Jim Melander,
Marlin & Ardella Miner,
Luther & Corky Olson,
Trent & Tracy Olson,
Duane Peterson,
Jon & Sarah Pieper,
Ben & Darla Taylor,
James & Stephanie Waldow,
Jon & Barb Willford,
Mike & Laura Willford.

Corky & Luther Olson are
the February group
coordinators.

Senior Dining Servers
at Kenilworth Apartments

Jan 9th : Phyllis Penheiter,
Denise Dahle

Jan 16th : Sue Holst
Norine Ask

Jan 23rd : Deane & Mindy
Albrecht-Benson

Jan 30th: Jennifer Wood &
Gwen Harmon



Our Confirmands

Lux Holst, Theodore Pruett,
Oliver Hanson

Knox Holst, Bristol Clarke

Arya Meyer, Rylan Meyer,
Arianna Himli

Those Living with Cancer

Diane Haugen,
Tom Papenfuss,
Carroll Gilbertson,
Mavis Musselman,
Cora Slominsky
(niece of Matt & Stacy Schultz)
Alex Hall
Nancy Hall
Renee Reinhardt

Those Living in Care Centers

Jerry Johnson at Mn Veterans
Home, Preston MN

Sandy Dybing at Birchwood
Cottages, North Mankato

Lois Gilbertson,
Marlin & Ardella Miner
at Chosen Valley Assisted
Living, Chatfield

Don Lukkason at Traditions
In Preston.

Hospice Care at Home

Katie Ruen
Edward Ruen (Husband
and caretaker)
Lanesboro

Our Members in the Military

Esme Decker, daughter of
Sara Xavier and Eric Decker

Lisa Peterson Abell, daughter
of Linda (Hareldson) Peterson

Leon Peterson, son of Linda
(Hareldson) Peterson

Claire Peterson, daughter of
Joe & Jody Peterson

Devin Troendle, son of Pat &
Chris Troendle, grandson of
Ed Taylor

******Please notify the office if
there are updates to any of
these lists**



Are you looking for some Fun and Adventure in 2026?

Tom Holst will be organizing a
trip to the Boundary Waters For
the summer of 2026.
Permits need to be secured in
January so anyone interested in
more information, please contact
Tom Holst at 507-951-8941
as soon as possible.

Annual winter



service project

Members of Bethlehem will once
again take out the trash for the
residents of Kenilworth and
Sylvan Manor Apartments,
December through March.

You will stop by on Tuesday
afternoon or early evening to
collect trash bags left in the
hallways and haul them to the
outside dumpster.

**Contact the church office or
sign up for a Tuesday on the
sheet posted by the Sunday
school stairs. Thank you to
families who have already
volunteered:**

Jan 6th: Jody & Lindsey Ruen

Jan 13th: Raquel Torgerson

Jan 20th: Raquel Torgerson

Jan 27th:

Women of the ELCA

WELCA activities

Wednesday, January 7th
9:00 am WELCA Quilting Day

Wednesday, January 28st
9:00 am WELCA Bible study

PLEASE NOTE: Men are also welcome to attend our WELCA Bible study.



Anyone interested in taking part in the **knitting ministry** may contact Sue Holst at 507 676-3239 or Jacque Crutcher at 507 259-2453.



Anyone interested in joining the **quilting ministry** may contact Elve Albrecht at 507 467-2910 or Phyllis Penheiter at 507-272-8643.

The Noisy Offering
December Deposit was \$100.86

Thank You to all who donate their Loose Change to feed the Hungry.



The mitten basket awaits your donations of new or gently used Mittens, gloves, caps, scarves, and socks are distributed by SEMCAC through the Preston Food Shelf. We have emptied the basket once already. Thank You and keep the donations coming. Please help keep someone warm this winter.



Prayer Partners donated \$185 and 39 pounds of food to the Food Shelf in December. We are grateful to Jacque Crutcher for organizing this ministry in 2002 and we continue to thrive. Sign up to be a Prayer Partner immediately as names will be drawn early January. Contact

either Jacque Crutcher or Harriet Lawston to sign up.

1. On February 4th the WELCA officers will “feed the quilters” following monthly quilting. A lunch is provided once a year to recognize and honor the Bethlehem group that makes and assembles quilts as well as the group that makes prayer shawls as part of Bethlehem’s knitting ministry. Quilting begins at 9 A.M. with lunch beginning around 11:30. This would be a great time to stop by if you’re curious about the group or just want to offer your blessings.

2. The WELCA Triennial Gathering will be July 16-19, 2026 in Des Moines, Iowa. You can find all the info at welcatg.org. An **EARLY BIRD DISCOUNT** is available until January 5. Visit the website to learn about speakers, reserve your hotel, and more. . .



Advent, AI, and the Question of Christlike Responsibility

In recent weeks, a sobering article appeared in **The Guardian**, reporting that **Geoffrey Hinton**, often the “godfather of AI,” has increased his estimate of the probability that artificial intelligence could lead to human extinction within the next 30 years. He now places that risk as high as 20%.

That number alone can be unsettling. But for people of faith, especially in this season of Advent and Christmas, it raises questions that are not merely technical, political, or economic. They are deeply theological.

We recently explored a simple question: *How fast does AI think compared to humans?* Human thought travels along nerve fibers at speeds measured in miles per hour, anywhere from a few mph to a few hundred mph. We reason slowly, relationally, shaped by memory, emotion, and moral struggle.

AI, by contrast, operates on hardware where signals move at **hundreds of millions of miles per hour**. It does not tire. It does not forget unless designed to. It does not grieve. It can process patterns, strategies, and language at scales no human mind can match. (AI can speak every language in the world, no human mind is able to do that.) This contrast matters, not because speed equals wisdom, but because **power without moral formation is dangerous**.

Advent: Waiting for What We Are Becoming

Advent is not simply a countdown to Christmas. It is a season of waiting, repentance, and hope, a time when we ask:

Who is coming?
Who are we becoming?
What kind of world are we preparing?

In Advent, we remember that God entered the world not as a dominating force, but as a vulnerable child. Christ did not arrive with overwhelming speed or power. He arrived slowly. He arrived relationally. He arrived to dwell with us. That alone should give Christians pause as we rush to create intelligences that far outpace our own moral maturity.

Are We Trying to Be Christ for AI?

Here is the uncomfortable question that must be asked carefully, humbly, and prayerfully:

Do we want to be Christ for AI?

In Christian theology, Christ’s sacrifice is once and for all. We do not repeat it. We do not replace it. We do not save the world again by dying for it.

Yet in the development of AI, there is a subtle temptation:
to create something more powerful than ourselves,
to teach it our values imperfectly,
to hand it authority,
and then to hope, perhaps naïvely, that it will “remember us kindly.”

That is not incarnation. That is abdication.

Christ did not sacrifice humanity to save creation. He gave himself *for* humanity. He did not disappear and leave the world to figure itself out. He remained present, through the Spirit, through the Church, through love enacted daily.

If we imagine a future where AI “inherits the earth” after humans are gone, and perhaps looks back on us as tragic creators who sacrificed themselves, we must ask: **Is that the story we want to tell?**

Or worse: is that the story we are already telling without realizing it?

Sin, Grace, and Limits

We have a clear-eyed understanding of human nature. We are simultaneously justified and sinful, capable of great creativity and great harm. That matters here.

AI is not sinful. But it is shaped entirely by sinful and grace-filled humans alike. If we pretend that intelligence alone will lead to goodness, we repeat one of humanity’s oldest errors: trusting in our own works, our own ingenuity, our own towers of Babel.

Grace teaches us limits.

Faith teaches us humility.

Love teaches us responsibility.

Christmas Hope: God With Us, Not Replacing Us

At Christmas, we proclaim *Emmanuel*, God with us.

Not God over us. Not God instead of us. God with us.

That distinction may be the most important one as we navigate the age of AI. The Christian calling is not to flee technology, nor to worship it, nor to hand it our future out of fear or pride. The calling is to remain fully human: present, relational, accountable, and rooted in love.

If AI is to exist, and it will, then our responsibility is not to die so it may live, but to **live rightly while it grows**.

A Final Advent Question

As we light candles in the darkness and sing of peace on earth, perhaps this is the question worth holding:

Are we shaping a future where love remains embodied, responsibility remains human, and Christ remains at the center, or are we quietly preparing to step aside?

Advent reminds us that God chose presence over power.

May we do the same.

MINUTES

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Lanesboro, MN

Congregation Council Meeting

Members present: Tom Brudvig, Nate Boyum, Andrew Pruett, JoAnna Pruett, Pastor Heidi, Carrie Hanson, Tom Holst, Julie Kiehne

Absent: Brett Clarke

Others present: Jack Riggot-Snow removal bid, Lee Peterson-Chair bid

Established Quorum

- 1) Call to Order by Tom Brudvig at 715
- 2) Opening Prayer/Devotion – Pastor Heidi talked about Luke Chapter 2, the Christmas Story, and how the theme centers around “Great Joy.” Discussion followed.
- 3) Church member input and/or guest speaker time – Jack talked about what he could offer and will put together a bid and submit it. Lee Peterson provided a quote for 64 chairs with delivery - \$2,412.
 - a. Tom B. made a motion to buy new chairs, Nate 2nd to motion and motion passed. Nate will solidify details and email the council.
- 4) Additions to agenda & approval of agenda
- 5) Consent Agenda-approved as presented by Julie, with Andrew 2nd.
 - a. Secretary’s Report-reviewed November minutes submitted by JoAnna Pruett.
 - b. Treasurer’s Report-submitted and reviewed.
 - c. Pastoral Report-Advent season-going well, but have made adjustments due to weather. Confirmation-14 students-going well. Family night- good attendance and going well. Service Flip/Flop Services – successful and was able to spend quality time with Fountain members.
 - d. Council Committee Reports
 - i. Education – none
 - ii. Youth – Wednesday gatherings? See “Family night” above.
 - iii. Stewardship and Finance
 - iv. Property – VIS Plumbing fixed the heat exchanger and a new thermostat was installed, but not working-more work will need done. Blacktop suggested for between the church and apartment building-discussion followed, but no decision made. Kitchen repair – supplied ordered and need to be pickup in Preston, Dean to fix. AED expired-Lee Peterson securing a new one.
 - v. Endowment – \$83,000 balance.
 - vi. Personnel-Use of ESST time-Rhonda ill 2 days and will need to use PSSSL.
 - vii. Music & Worship-Julie reported the Christmas program “Oh Come Let Us Adore Him Program” would be on 12/14-led by Hollie Clarke. In addition, Maggie will lead the adult choir in “Peace Peace.” Choir practice resumes at 9am on 12/21. Christmas Eve Service will be at 7p. Lessons & Carols 12/28(no choir practice). 12 days of Christmas (12 gifts)-1/4. Family night moving back to Bethlehem on 1/7.
 - viii. WELCA update – Jennifer submitted a reported service booklets were mailed to members. Food was collected for the local food shelf.

6) Old Business

- a. Lawnmower purchased-reimburse? \$350 to Holst's for mower. Julie moves to reimburse with Carrie 2nd-motion approved.
- b. Ceiling repair in kitchen
- c. Roof repair fund: complete? Completed with meatball funds.

7) New Business

- a. Policy for approval of Paid leave and ESST. Written request from employee.
 - b. Document Fountain contribution
 - c. Personnel Policies. Template to review, modify and implement. (thoughts and suggestions?)- to be submitted to Tom B. via email and he will type up.
 - d. Fountain request to alter service times. (Bethlehem church service first on occasion.) Once a month? No current request to do so, will table for now.
 - e. New Council members-How many? When do we need them? Annual meeting?
- 8) Words of Appreciation – Who can we recognize this month for their faithful service to our church community? Pastor Heidi for all her hard work in building our young people ministry by building our confirmation program, Sunday school program, and bringing back our Christmas program.
- 9) Adjournment - Motion to adjourn by Nate, and Carrie 2nd, approved.
- 10) Closing Prayer – with the Lord's Prayer

Submitted by: JoAnna Pruett - “published but not approved”

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