

BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH NEWSLETTER—January 2026 edition

PASTOR'S PAGE

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," Revelation 1:8

Which would you rather have? A beginning or an ending? If you chose beginning, you are one who looks forward to what lies ahead, you are readily drawn in for a new look or direction to take hold. If you chose ending, it means you enjoy overlooking the entire story to see if there moments you missed, or moments that are forgotten. It's hard to choose, a beginning or an ending. That is exactly where we are right now. We are poised at the ending of another year and soon a new year will dawn upon us.

What a year it has been, filled with new ideas, new possibilities, new things for us to try. It feels so long ago that this began and yet, we have barely covered the basics of what a church would or could be. It is good to reflect and consider all the things accomplished in a year, but it is also good to look forward trying to imagine what new possibilities could lie ahead. This is what the annual meeting is about. We look at the past and decide what could lie ahead.

Looking back gives us the advantage of seeing what we could have done better or what we might have planned for, this information helps us as we plan the future. Just as the church year follows seasons and events, so too does the church. Some people do not like a plan, they fly by the seat of their pants. While this has some advantages, you are open to anything that comes along, it also has some disadvantages, you are never prepared!

I like to live somewhere in the middle. Confident of what will happen, in the long run, but willing to take some side trips to see what could lie ahead. As God's people, we should never be afraid of what lies ahead because we know that God holds us. Whatever comes our way, we are in God's safe hands. It's an end, but it's also a beginning.

As this new year begins, be willing to try to new things, but also hang onto the old promises. Be open to new ideas, but rest firmly in God's grace. Be willing to say yes when asked and do not be afraid of where God is leading. God knows the beginning and the end of all of our stories. May that assurance of God's daily presence help us as we journey through the year ahead.

New Year's Blessings,

Pastor Lori

ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of Bethlehem Lutheran Church will take place on January 25, following worship. All confirmed, active members are invited to attend. If you have concerns that need to come to attention of the congregation, please contact either the church office or President Becca Spykerboer. All reports will be printed for use during the meeting.



BUILDING UPDATES:

Just a reminder if you host an event in the basement, please check out the list of things to do before you leave the basement, particularly in the kitchen. Some of them are common sense, like wiping off the counters, but some are reminders so that things will be clean for the next use. Thanks!

We are trying some new things with the backgrounds of the screens on Sunday mornings. Please let us know what you think. Also, know we are trying the best we can. We are not perfect and we don't always get it right. Making comments that are unhelpful are not enjoyable to hear, nor are they productive. We will make mistakes, we are human! Please remember that when you offer up your opinion on something you don't see working. Thank you!

PROJECT LOVE

Many thanks to all who were involved in the Project Love event before Christmas. What a great way to share our concern for the community and those in need. We were asked to provide paper products, thanks to those who donated! Many thanks to Missy Seachris for being the point person for our congregation. As a recipient of a fruit tray, it was a nice welcome to the community. All those in need received helpful groceries for the days ahead. What a great way for the local communities to come together for those in need.

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HALF PRICE MEAL AT GENERATIONS

Beginning in December, Bethlehem will be sponsoring a half price meal one day a month at Generations in Luverne. This is a new ministry we are trying out and encourage you to participate by making reservations for the meal the day we are sponsoring. Watch the Rock County Star Herald or Announcer for more information and we will let you know in the Sunday bulletins. You can also get the meal to go if you don't want to eat at Generations. They encourage you to call ahead. Call Pam at (507)283-9846, ext. 11. Thanks to the Council for being willing to try something new in helping those in need in our community.

JOYS AND CONCERNS

+ Karen Soehl had eye surgery mid-December.

+ Deb Warner had foot surgery early in December.

+ Doug Chapman had some shoulder surgery mid month. Please keep all these as they recover, in your prayers.

+ Doug Boeve spent a lot of October/November in and out of the hospital. He continues to fight cancer. Please keep him in your prayers.

+ Addison Swenson is still in the NICU, but continues to grow and thrive. Please keep the entire family in your prayers as she continues to grow.

+ Mahlon Bekedam passed away at the beginning of the month. Please keep the family in your prayers. Blessed be his memory.

+ Sympathy is extended to Larry Warner on the death of his sister. He was able to travel and be with her before she passed. Blessed be her memory.

+Sympathy is extended to Orv Sundem on the death of his sister. Blessed be her memory.

+ Starla Scholten is battling cancer and could use our prayers.

+ Doug McGuire is battling lung cancer and could use our prayers.

+ Congratulations to the Girls Basketball team this year! Abbie Harris and Hadley Spath are our members who are on the team!

+ Congratulations to Boston Groff on winning the Star Herald coloring contest for his age group! Great talent!

+ Huge Thank You to our snow removal team! Doug Chapman shows up to plow us out after every storm and he's had help from Mike Spath. Randy, Brenda, Becca, and Tony have all been known to pick up a shovel to help clean the walks! Caleb Ellingson is our weekly shoveler in case of heavy snowfall, not on a weekend!

+ Thank You to all who came and decorated the church for the holidays. We are planning to put all the Christmas stuff in the same location when we take it all down, so we can find it all! Maybe next year we will designate the Friday after Thanksgiving as a decorating day, as most people are tired after worship or need to get home to finish getting ready for Thanksgiving.

+ Thanks to Brenda Beyer and Pastor Lori for providing pies for after worship on Thanksgiving Eve. They were great! There was even some pie for Sunday morning after worship.

+ Thank You to everyone who came and helped with the fall/winter clean up on December 6. We were able to get a lot of things done. There were jobs for everyone from 4 year olds to 85 year olds! When everyone works together a lot gets done and it gets done quickly!

+Thank you to everyone who donated a poinsettia to decorate our church for the holiday season.

+ Just a Word: If you are hospitalized, and/or would like a visit, it is helpful if you let the church office know, or have a family member contact us. We want to care for you, but we cannot do that if we do not know what is happening. Thanks for communicating!

+ Congratulations to those from our BLC family who participated in the ribbon cutting of the new HBC elementary building—Boyd Leuthold, Nash Ellingson, Beckham Ellingson, Hailey Spyker-boer, and Harper DeJong.

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FROM THE BOARDS:

Trustees: New screens have been installed up front for the power point. One screen has been relocated to the back of the church and was helpful during the Sunday School Christmas program. Currently reviewing a proposal for upgrading the entire audio/video system. Meeting held to review and develop a proposed budget for 2026, which will be presented at full council on January 7, with final approval at the Annual Meeting on January 25.

Deacons: Continue to work on scheduling for assisting at the Tuff Chapel weekly, as well as serving communion at Bethlehem.

Board of Education: Trunk or Treat event in October had approximately 110 kids attend. Discussion on fundraising options, looking into a cheesecake fundraiser. Looking at revising confirmation requirements in 2026. Would like parent ideas to help create new requirements. Bingo is scheduled for Saturday, February 7th, with proceeds being split between families helping that they can use for camps and mission trips. Working on finishing the confirmation room with a goal to be done by end of winter/beginning of spring. Talk of ideas to have a church service that children assist with and have extra singing practice on Sundays. Successful Sunday School Christmas program. Next meeting is January 7 at 6:30 pm, prior to Full Council at 7 pm



NOVEMBER STATISTICS

Income \$30,697.09 Expenses: \$14,540.38

YTD Net Income/Loss: **-\$34,819.82**



**Break even for budget requires income of \$16,208 per month.

Thank you to all who supported our congregation financially this past year. You will see the final information for the year at the Annual Meeting. You will also be receiving your giving statements to use for tax purposes soon. Many thanks to Cami Verhey and Brenda Beyer for keeping track of each person's giving for this past year. All of your gifts have made a huge difference this past year!

LOOKING AHEAD

Mark your calendars for February 7 for a bingo evening with the young people at church. Watch for more information as it becomes available.

Ash Wednesday is February 18th. Watch for more information in next month's newsletter.

OPPORTUNITY

Thank you to everyone who has volunteered as monthly ushers. We are also looking for more volunteers to serve as **lay readers**—it's open to all! If you are interested, please sign up on the bulletin board, or contact the office to check availability.



| | |
|-----|----------------------|
| 02– | Brianna Leuthold |
| 04– | Larry Haak |
| 05– | Kelly Sandager |
| 06– | Pastor Lori Bonkoski |
| | Katie Hanson |
| | 26– Jim Brandt |
| | Gary Helgeson |
| | Wendy Buss |
| 09– | Adrienna Boltjes |
| | Mark Top |
| 13– | Karin Gaugler |
| | Brad Vaughn |
| | Madison Nelson |
| | 29 - Madison Gaugler |
| 14– | Tim Buss |
| | Maleeka Rozeboom |
| | Nash Ellingson |
| | 30- Tony Wertish |
| 18– | Bryton Haak |
| | 31– Dustin Seachris |
| 21– | Briar Hoogendoorn |
| 22– | Emryn Ellingson |

Name: _____ Date: _____



WINTER

Word Hunt Challenge: Find each vocabulary word in the grid!
They could be hiding in any direction even backwards or diagonally.

Bare
Blanket
Boots
Calendar
Calm
Chill
Cloudy
Coat
Cold
Comfort
Cool
Cozy
Crisp
Daylight
Draw
Evening
Fabric
February
Fireplace
Fleece
Focus
Freeze
Frost
Gloves
Gray
Heater
Hoodie
Ice
Icy

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| E | V | E | N | I | N | G | H | A | K | Y | W | Y | A | L | Y | D | A | U |
| S | E | A | S | O | N | P | I | S | N | S | Z | O | B | S | G | R | N | U |
| S | E | V | O | L | G | K | L | Z | W | U | T | O | I | C | R | E | G | R |
| O | R | K | S | T | D | N | L | H | N | E | C | C | A | T | I | L | I | A |
| L | V | E | R | N | A | I | Q | S | K | H | A | R | X | N | O | S | C | S |
| S | A | E | H | Q | E | T | E | C | C | O | F | T | I | A | K | L | K | E |
| J | E | M | R | T | R | T | A | C | A | O | S | W | E | C | L | G | D | P |
| S | M | H | R | C | A | J | T | R | L | D | T | C | O | R | A | E | C | W |
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| M | C | O | D | E | H | S | W | S | M | E | O | C | C | L | O | U | D | Y |
| V | O | I | W | Z | U | T | T | P | Y | C | B | E | C | E | E | L | F | C |
| L | D | A | H | E | Q | G | Y | D | B | L | A | N | K | E | T | I | I | A |
| W | R | I | T | E | H | U | N | R | S | R | K | X | F | H | N | G | R | L |
| D | O | A | L | R | A | I | N | A | L | F | R | T | D | W | N | E | E | T |
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| T | H | G | I | L | Y | A | D | Z | W | S | H | E | O | R | O | C | R | L |
| S | C | O | A | T | S | R | O | O | D | T | U | O | Z | F | N | M | E | W |

| | | | |
|---------|----------|----------|-------------|
| Indoors | Quiet | Sunrise | Winter |
| Jacket | Read | Sunset | Wool |
| January | Relax | Sweater | Write |
| Frost | Knit | Routine | Temperature |
| Gloves | Layers | Scarf | Thermal |
| Gray | Learn | Schedule | Trees |
| Heater | Mittens | Season | Walk |
| Hoodie | Morning | Sky | Warmth |
| Ice | Outdoors | Socks | Weather |
| Icy | Overcast | Study | Windy |



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| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|---|--------|--------------------------------------|---|---|--------|----------------|
| USHERS: Charlie & Dawn Sandager Ethan & Maleeka Rozeboom | | | | 1  | 2 | 3 |
| 4 9 – Tuff Service with Communion 10 - BLC Service with Communion— Pr Daryl Schubert | 5 | 6 | 7 9 - Quilting 6:30 —Bd of Ed 7 —Full Council | 8 | 9 | 10 2 |
| Pastor Lori on vacation | | | | | | |
| 11 9 – Tuff Service 9 - Sunday School 9 – Bd of Trustees 10 – BLC Service | 12 | 13 2 – Bible Study at Tuff | 14 9 - Quilting | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| 18 9 – Tuff Service 9 – Sunday School 10 - BLC Service with communion | 19 | 20 2 – Bible Study at Tuff | 21 9 —Quilting | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 9 – Tuff Service 9 – Sunday School 10 - BLC Service Annual Meeting | 26 | 27 2 – Bible Study at Tuff | 28 9 - Quilting | 29 | 30 | 31 |