The Prairie Willow

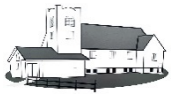
A joint newsletter for Shepherd of the Hills and West Zion Lutheran Churches

SOTH December 2026

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church (SOTH)
201 Falcon Avenue
Benson, MN 56215
320-843-3408
soth2008@live.com
www.shepherdofthehillslc.com
Facebook:
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church ELCA



West Zion Lutheran Church (WZ)
29190 357th Avenue
Hancock, MN 56244
320-239-4195
wzlutheranchurch@gmail.com
www.westzionlutheranchurch.com
Facebook:
West Zion Lutheran Church



Information & Contacts

Pastor (Vacant)

Church President
Stephanie Smith
320-766-3945
sscdtsmith@yahoo.com

Office Secretaries
Betsy Anderson
320-444-2425
betsyanderson3@hotmail.com

Jim Ostlie
320-444-1113
jtostlie@yahoo.com

Custodians
Stephanie Smith – SOTH
320-766-3945

Monthly Message

As we step into the season of Advent, we're reminded that this is a time of waiting, reflection, and joyful anticipation. Each candle we light brings us closer to the celebration of Christmas — a reminder that even in the darkest days, hope shines brightly.

May this Advent be a gentle pause in the rush of life, a chance to savor moments of peace, kindness, and gratitude. Let's carry that light into our homes, our communities, and our hearts.

Wishing you a season filled with warmth, joy, and the promise of new beginnings.



BAPTISM 10/25/26

Welcome **Minnie Hazel Ziehl** daughter of Brooke Anderson & Christian Ziehl. Welcome Minnie!

Parish Calendar

SOTH

Saturday, December 5	10am – Sunday School Christmas Program Practice
Sunday, December 6	9am – Sunday School Christmas Program, Fellowship following
Sunday, December 20	9am- Worship, NO SUNDAY SCHOOL
Thursday, December 24	5:30pm – Christmas Eve Service
Sunday, January 3	9am- Worship, Fellowship and Sunday School to follow
Sunday, January 17	9am- Worship, Fellowship and Sunday School to follow
Sunday, January 31	9am- Worship, Fellowship and Sunday School to follow

WEST ZION

Sunday, December 6	11am – Worship
Sunday, December 20	11am - Worship
Friday, December 25	10am – Christmas Day Service
Sunday, January 3	11am- Worship
Sunday, January 17	11am- Worship
Sunday, January 31	11am- Worship

EAST ZION

Sunday, November 29	11am - Worship
Sunday, December 13	11am – Worship
Thursday, December 24	4pm – Christmas Eve Service
Sunday, December 27	11am – Worship
Sunday, January 10	11am – Worship
Sunday, January 24	11am - Worship

Worship services are live streamed on the Facebook page of each specific church.
Search and follow East Zion Lutheran, West Zion Lutheran or Shepherd of the Hills ELCA.

Please note that with Pastor Steve's retirement, volunteers are learning the live streaming process and it may not go according to plan!

Prayer Requests

SARA & JON REICH, PHILIP SKARSTEN, INGA URKE, DARLENE DERGEN, RAY ANDERSON & THE FAMILY OF CAROL SKARSTEN



PASTORAL VACANCY

At this point in time, there are no updates in our quest to fill our pastoral vacancy with an interim pastor. It takes time for the three congregations to develop a plan not only for an interim, but also plan for the call process of a permanent pastor. We are grateful to those pastors filling in while our search continues and our church councils for keeping the ball rolling!

Schedule Assignments

SOTH Computer Operators & Acolyte Schedule

	Computer	Acolyte
Sunday, October 11	Blake Larson/Betsy Anderson	Jayce Reich
Sunday, October 25	Jayce Reich/Roxanne Nelson	Aletta Larson
Sunday, November 8	Coy Kobbermann/Ryan Davidson	Kinsley Trump
Sunday, November 22	Logan Hight/Roxanne Nelson	Lily Wrobleski
Sunday, December 6	Aletta Larson/Trista Hess	Blake Larson
Sunday, December 20	Kinsley Trump/Betsy Anderson	Coy Kobbermann
Sunday, January 3	Blake Larson/Ryan Davidson	Jayce Reich
Sunday, January 17	Jayce Reich/Roxanne Nelson	Aletta Larson
Sunday, January 31	Logan Hight/Trista Hess	Kinsley Trump

SOTH Fellowship Schedule

Sunday December 6 – Sunday School Christmas Program – All bring cookies to share!
Sunday, December 20 – Dennis & Jodi Hippen/Bobby & Melissa Wrobleski
Sunday, January 3 - Rick & Jody Davidson/Ryan Davidson
Sunday, January 17 – Steve & Miranda Henrikson/Matt & Mel Siefkes
Sunday, January 31 – Jonathan & Sherri Fahl/Nathan & Erica Hughes



SOTH Altar Guild

December	Dee Baird/WELCA Officers
January	Jenny Trump/Carrie Anderson
February	Debbie Flatten/Ashley Skarsten
March	Betsy Anderson/Michelle Nelson
April	Trista Hess/Melissa Wrobleski
May	Gail Svor/Janet Mitteness
June	Marge Anderson/Roxanne Nelson

Please note, if you are unable to fulfill a scheduled duty, please find someone to take your place!

Announcements

LUTHER CREST BIBLE CAMP SUMMER REGISTRATION

Registration opens for the Summer of 2027 camping on November 1, 2026. Youth, adults and families are encouraged to visit the Luther Crest website to see what events are available. There is something for everyone. Day camps, multi-day camps and trip programs are some of the options. It is also retreat season at Luther Crest, so check out the non-seasonal opportunities available for youth, adults and families! Visit www.luthercrest.org or call 320-846-2431.

Announcements

EAST ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH INFORMATION

28745 County Road 10
Starbuck, MN 56381
Phone: 320-239-4195
Email: office@eastzionlutheranchurch.org
Interim Administrative Assistant: Mary Jo Forbord
Custodian: Sandy Knutson, 320-843-4342
Website: eastzionlutheranchurch.org
Facebook: East Zion Lutheran Church

SOTH CHURCH RENTAL

Make sure to visit the website, speak with a church secretary or grab a facility use policy contract from the church office door to reserve the church, its tables and or chairs for your special events!

ON-LINE GIVING OPTIONS

To make it easier to give, SOTH and West Zion have partnered with Tith.le. Tith.le offers automatic withdrawals from an account of your choice or from a credit card. Visit the Shepherd of the Hills website under giving or the West Zion website under give to learn more and sign up! Tith.le is recommended by the Southwest Synod of the ELCA and is notably safe!

BULLETIN DEADLINE

Announcements for bulletins must be emailed to soth2008@live.com or call/text 320-444-1113 by noon Tuesday prior to church service.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

Material for newsletters must be emailed to soth2008@live.com or call/text 320-444-1113 by the 20th of each month.

VIDEO SYSTEM ISSUES

Be patient as we have contacted the contractor who installed our video system to get us back on track. We may not have live streamed services until we can get it figured out.



DONATIONS TO THE RESCUE!

Huge thank you to Doran & Terri Jergenson and Nelson Farms for donating money for a new basement kitchen fridge. Also to Joyce Nelson for donating a used fridge we will be picking up soon!

GLENWOOD RETIREMENT VILLAGE AUXILIARY'S CHRISTMAS COOKIE WALK

Saturday, December 5 from 9-11am at the Glenwood Lutheran Church in Glenwood, MN. Choose from a variety of pre-packaged cookies, lefse, krumkake, rosettes, rommegrot, quick breads and more!



Announcements

ELVIS: A CHRISTMAS SPECIAL



BAC offers extended early bird prices and a new group rate.

Benson's Arts Council proudly presents "Elvis:A Christmas Special" featuring Anthony Shore and his All-Star Band, which will take place on Saturday, December 19 at 7:00 pm at the Performing Arts Center. Ticket options are as follows:

- Early Bird ($25) are available through December 1
- New Group Rate (buy 10 adult tickets, get two free)
- After December 1 ($30) At the door ($35)
- Student tickets (18 years and younger) $10.

To purchase tickets, go to https://www.vancoevents.com/us/DUHU. Tickets are also available by going to www.benson.k12.mn.us and clicking on Community Education from the Menu, to PAC events.

PRAIRIE FIVE COMMUNITY ACTION 100 PEOPLE GIVE $1000 CAMPAIGN

Prairie Five is experiencing a higher demand for home-delivered meals then we have in available funding. We may need to transition individuals to a waitlist. The waitlist may include current & new participants. We are seeking private donations that will allow older adults to continue to receive meals in Big Stone, Chippewa, La Qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine counties, rather than implement a waitlist.

If you are interested in donating to the Prairie Five Meals Program, please mail donations to: Prairie Five Meals Program, PO Box 159, Montevideo, MN 56265.

$100 can provide 16 hot or frozen home delivered meals!

Prairie Five Community Action
Helping People. Changing Lives.



Children's sermon by Pastor Seyward Ask.



Church Council Reports

From the Council Secretary Janine Ellingson…

The November Council meeting of Shepherd of the Hills was called to order by President Stephanie Smith on Wednesday, November 11 at 7:30PM via Zoom. Those present were Stephanie Smith, Jim & Laura Ostlie, Betsy Anderson, Rick and Ryan Davidson, & Brenda Nelson. Due to it being a virtual meeting, the agenda was condensed to actionable items of which there was one.

Stephanie Smith explained the SOTH council needed to vote on a reduction in the percentage we pay between our three churches for pastoral services moving forward. Currently SOTH pays 38% and EZ and WZ pay 31%. After discussions with the other churches, the Zions suggested that we all pay equal shares. To do so, all three congregations needed to vote on the equal pay measure.

A motion was made and seconded for our three congregations to each pay a third of the cost for pastoral serves moving forward. The motion passed unanimously.

Jim Ostlie has been in contact with Mike Cihak of Morris who put in our video system since it is not working correctly and we cannot live stream. Jim will meet with Mike when he returns from vacation in late November/early December to determine the issues.

Meeting adjourned.





Church Council Reports

From the Council Treasurer Jim Ostlie…

Please take note of our monthly expenditures and income on the next few pages. Always feel free to reach out with questions or if you need clarification!

November Financial Report

Checking Account

Line Item	Date	Check #	Description	Payment	Deposit	Balance
1304.1	10/26/2026	Auto	Great America Financial Services	$211.89		$7,644.36
1407.6	10/26/2026	Auto	West Central Sanitation	$130.22		$7,514.14
1404	10/26/2026	Debit	Quality Appliance (basement Fridge)	$780.18		$6,733.96
1608	10/27/2026	Auto	Tithe.le Offering		$189.84	$6,923.80
1608	10/27/2026	Auto	Tithe.le Offering		$40.00	$6,963.80
1604	10/31/2026	Auto	Interest		$1.50	$6,965.30
1407.3	11/5/2026	Auto	Federated	$86.47		$6,878.83
1608	11/6/2026		Offering-Regular (10/25/26)		$2,105.00	$8,983.83
1608	11/6/26		Offering - Donation for Refridgerator (10/25/26)		$500.00	$9,483.83
1611	11/6/2026		Offering-Harvest Meal (10/25/26)		$100.00	$9,583.83
1608	11/6/2026		Offering-Lunch (10/25/26)		$37.00	$9,620.83
1608	11/6/2026		Offering-Loose (10/25/26)		$81.00	$9,701.83
1206	11/8/2026	15024	Seyward Ask (Pulpit Supply 11/8/26)	$150.00		$9,551.83
1608	11/10/2026		Tithe.le Offering		$224.84	$9,776.67
1608	11/10/2026		Tithe.le Offering		$40.00	$9,816.67
1608	11/11/2026		Offering-Regular (11/8/26)		$1,975.00	$11,791.67
1608	11/11/2026		Offering-Lunch (11/8/26)		$52.00	$11,843.67
1608	11/11/2026		Offering-Loose (11/8/26)		$59.50	$11,903.17
1614	11/11/2026		West Zion Shared Expenses		$435.00	$12,338.17
1407.5	11/17/2026	15026	SOTH (First Citizens Bank) Final Culligan payment	$109.60		$12,228.57
1407.4	11/17/2026	15027	GPC (Propane Budget Billing)	$310.00		$11,918.57
1407.2	11/17/2026	15029	GPC (Dyed Fuel)	$1,498.95		$10,419.62
1304.1	11/17/2026	15030	Coordinated Business Systems	$199.00		$10,220.62
1405	11/17/2026	15031	Zosel's True Value	$44.97		$10,175.65
1109	11/17/2026	15032	Benson Prom Afterbash	$50.00		$10,125.65
1206	11/18/2026	15033	John Smith (Pulpit Supply 10/11/26)	$192.00		$9,933.65
1201	11/18/2026	15034	Stephanie Smith (December Custodial)	$505.50		$9,428.15
1203	11/18/2026	15034	Stephanie Smith (Dec organist 2x)	$101.10		$9,327.05
1202	11/18/2026	15035	Betsy Anderson (Dec secretarial)	$379.13		$8,947.92
1202	11/18/2026	15036	Jim Ostlie (Dec Secretarial)	$379.13		$8,568.79
1205	11/18/2026	15037	Melissa Wrobleski (Dec Powerpoint)	$91.91		$8,476.88
1101	11/18/2026	15038	Benson Fire Dept (Donation)	$50.00		$8,426.88
1103	11/18/2026	15043	Glenwood retirement Village (Donation)	$200.00		$8,226.88
1104	11/18/2026	15040	Luther Crest Bible Camp (Donation)	$100.00		$8,126.88
1107	11/18/2026	15041	SW MN Synod (Benevolence)	$300.00		$7,826.88
1105	11/18/2026	15042	Lutheran Social Service (Donation)	$100.00		$7,726.88
1407.1	11/20/2026	Auto	Agralite	$220.00		$7,506.88
1304.1	11/26/2026	Auto	Great America Financial Services	$211.89		$7,294.99

Total Income to date 2026:	$84,191.80
Total Income to date 2025:	$79,264.46

Members Money Account (1.739%)

Line Item	Date	Check #	Description	Payment	Deposit	Balance
	10/28/2026		Deposit-Fidelity Carol Hagemeyer		$10,000.00	$31,079.66
	11/18/26		Deposit - Thrivent Linda Amlie		2546.95	$33,626.61
	11/18/26		Deposit - Raymond James Sidney Nyhusmoen		2500	$36,126.61

Mission Investment Funds through ELCA

6 Year Term Building Fund (3.7%) $79,727.95
Demand Checking Building Fund (.0004%) $9,851.99
Demand Checking Memorial Fund (.0004%) $128.62

2026 Budget

			2026 Budget	Spent to date
1100 Missions/Donations/Memberships			**$910.00**	$940.00
1101	**Benson Fire Department**		**$50.00**	$50.00
1102	**Glacial Ridge Conference**		**$160.00**	$140.00
1103	**Glenwood Retirement Village**		**$200.00**	$200.00
1104	**Luther Crest**		**$100.00**	$100.00
1105	**Lutheran Social Service**		**$100.00**	$100.00
1106	**Misc. Missions**	*Based on donations*	**$0.00**	$0.00
1107	**SW Minnesota Synod**		**$300.00**	$300.00
1108	**Love Fund**	*Based on donations*	**$0.00**	$0.00
1109	**Other**		**$0.00**	$50.00

Note Love Fund budget is carryover from previous year plus any new money given in current year

1200 Staff and Ministry			**$66,377.50**	$49,323.53
1201	**Church Custodial Salary**		**$6,095.16**	$6,065.91
1202	**Office Secretary Salary** (incl. WZ portion)		**$9,142.68**	$8,342.66
1203	**Organist Salary**		**$1,700.00**	$1,516.83
1204	**Pastoral Salary**		**$44,511.46**	$28,009.37
1204.1	*Pastoral Benefits*		*$6,079.62*	$6,852.24
1204.2	*Pastoral Mileage*		*$1,800.00*	$0.00
1204.3	*Pastoral Professional Development*		*$525.00*	$114.34
1204.4	*Pastoral Salary*		*$36,106.84*	$21,042.79
1204.5	*Other*		*$0.00*	$1,116.98
1204.6	*Workers Comp*		*$0.00*	$228.38
1205	**PowerPoint Creator Salary** (incl. WZ portion)		**$1,108.20**	$1,104.24
1206	**Pulpit Supply (sub Pastors)**		**$300.00**	$1,776.00
1207	**Employee Quarterly Taxes**		**$3,200.00**	$2,233.52
1208	**Sub organist fees**		**$220.00**	$150.00
1209	**Tax Prep**		**$100.00**	$125.00
1210	**MN Paid Leave**		$0.00	$97.71

1300 Congregational Life			**$6,530.64**	**$6,053.74**
1301	**Altar Supplies**		**$500.00**	$262.20
1302	**Church Worship Material**		**$500.00**	$256.34
1303	**Convention (Synod Assembly)**		**$700.00**	$610.00
1304	**Office Supplies/Rentals**		**$3,930.64**	$4,010.43
1304.1	*Copier Lease*		*$2,805.64*	$3,024.79
1304.2	*Copier staples/paper*		*$400.00*	$115.04
1304.3	*Other*		*$250.00*	$870.60
1304.4	*Postage*		*$250.00*	$0.00
1304.5	*Website Fee*		*$225.00*	$0.00
1305	**Other (Kitchen)**		**$300.00**	$546.17
1306	**Living Lutheran**		**$0.00**	$0.00
1307	**Transfer to Building Fund**		**$0.00**	$0.00
1308	**Transfer to Memorial Fund**		**$0.00**	$0.00
1309	**Youth Programs**		**$600.00**	$368.60

1309.1	*Sunday School*	*$0.00*	$0.00
1309.2	*Confirmation*	*$0.00*	$85.10
1309.3	*Graduation*	*$0.00*	$0.00
1309.4	*Other (VBS)*	*$600.00*	$283.50
1309.5	*Youth Mission Trip & Luther League expenses*	*$0.00*	$0.00

1400 Church Building/Property		**$23,588.20**	$21,352.36
1401	**Dept of Labor (Elevator Inspection)**	**$100.00**	$145.00
1402	**Insurance**	**$5,500.00**	$5,008.48
1403	**Mowing**	**$700.00**	$935.00
1404	**Repairs/Maintenance**	**$1,500.00**	$1,777.44
1405	**Supplies** *(custodial)**	**$500.00**	$418.86
1406	**Utilities***	**$15,238.20**	$13,067.58
1407.1	*Electricity*	*$4,000.00*	$2,720.00
1407.2	*Fuel*	*$5,000.00*	$4,854.43
1407.3	*Phone/Internet*	*$1,150.00*	$926.63
1407.4	*Propane*	*$4,200.00*	$3,315.11
1407.5	*Water*	*$888.20*	$737.90
1407.6	*Garbage Service*	*$495.00*	$513.51
1408	**Flowers**	**$50.00**	$0.00
1500 Fundraiser Expenses		**$200.00**	$0.00
1501	**Harvest Dinner**	**$200.00**	$0.00
1502	**Other**	**$0.00**	$0.00
	Proposed Operating Budget:	**$97,606.34**	$77,669.63
1600 Income		**$97,606.34**	**$69,065.21**
1601	**Youth Programs (i.e. SS & VBS)**	**$600.00**	$650.00
1602	**Church Rentals**	**$0.00**	$0.00
1603	**Grants**	**$0.00**	$0.00
1604	**Interest**	**$0.00**	$2.41
1605	**Memorials**	**$0.00**	$0.00
1605.1	*Love Fund*	***$0.00***	$0.00
1605.2	*Other*	***$0.00***	$0.00
1606	**Missions**	**$0.00**	$0.00
1607	**Mowing**	**$700.00**	$480.00
1608	**Offering-Regular** (includes loose offering & online)	**$85,286.34**	$60,475.82
1609	**Offering-Lunch**	**$500.00**	$328.00
1610	**Other Income**	**$3,000.00**	$222.98
1611	**Harvest Lunch**	**$1,300.00**	$1,075.00
1612	**Thrivent Grant Funds**	**$1,000.00**	$1,046.00
1613	**Youth Mission Trip**	**$0.00**	$0.00
1614	**West Zion (shared costs)**	**$5,220.00**	$4,785.00