

The Prairie Willow

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

SOTH October 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)

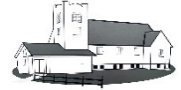
29190 357th Avenue
Hancock, MN 56244
320-239-4195

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

Gary & Connie Williams – WZ

320-843-4417

Monthly Message



Blessing of the Backpacks by Pastor A Williams

In this newsletter you will find a retirement update from Pastor Steve and Leanne, as well as a thank you. Life without a pastor can be a challenge and we do pray that God will set us up in the interim while we seek to find a permanent solution. In the meantime, we need to thank our Church Presidents for securing pulpit supply while in this transition and to those pastors agreeing to hold services at our churches. Those include A Williams, Maddie Elliot, John Smith, Brad Belgum Blod and Seyward Ask. We are grateful for their work!

Continued on next page...

Monthly Message Continued...

Retirement Greetings from Pr. Steve & Leanne,

On September 16th, our new grandson, Rush Tyler Leisinger was born, much to the delight of our daughter Alyssa and her husband Tyler. Rush is doing great as he awaits an expected surgery at his hospital in Omaha. Meanwhile, Leanne and Steve are enjoying his siblings, Ridge and Meadow, back at their home in Madison, SD....along with the many other joys that retirement has brought so far. Thanks again for all your kindness and friendship during our years with you, and for your continued prayers now for Rush in these coming days.

In Christ - Steve & Leanne Carmany



Shepherd of the Hills Member,

Thank you so much for sharing these past 7 years with us! We have appreciated all the laughs and tears and caring moments we got to share with all of you.

Thank you also for the farewell service and meal and wonderful gifts you graced us with as we moved into this retirement stage of our lives.

God's blessings to all of you, as you have blessed us in countless ways!

In Christ.

Leanne + Steve

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church



Sunday, October 11, 2026 following worship service at 9AM

Sit down at the church, pick-up at church, delivery to home or to the field!

Meal includes:

Burger, cheeseburger or brat, beans, bag of chips, cookie, water & condiments.

Pre-orders for pick-up or delivery by:

1. Texting 320-444-2425
2. Leaving a message at 320-843-3408
3. Emailing soth2008@live.com

Please indicate how many orders,
burger/cheeseburger or brat and if you plan to pick
up at the church or the address you want it to be
delivered to. Walk ins welcomed!

Parish Calendar

SOTH

Sunday, October 11	9am – Worship followed by Harvest Meal & Sunday school
Wednesday, October 14	7pm – Church Council
Sunday, October 25	9am – Worship followed by fellowship & Sunday school
Sunday, November 8	9am – Worship followed by fellowship & Sunday school
Wednesday, November 11	7pm – Church Council
Sunday, November 22	9am – Worship followed by fellowship & Sunday school
Sunday, December 6	9am – Sunday School Christmas Program



WEST ZION

Sunday, October 11	11am - Worship
Sunday, October 25	11am - Worship
Sunday, November 8	11am – Worship
Sunday, November 22	11am – Worship
Sunday, December 6	11am – Worship

EAST ZION

Sunday, October 4	11am - Worship
Sunday, October 18	11am - Worship
Sunday, November 1	11am - Worship
Sunday, November 15	11am - Worship
Sunday, November 29	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!

Schedule Assignments

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

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

SOTH Fellowship Schedule (PLEASE NOTE CORRECTIONS)

Sunday, October 11 – Paul & Linda Amlie/Tom & Jane Petrak
 Sunday, October 25 – Jesse & Lisa Kent/Lori & Larry Thompson
 Sunday, November 8 – Mark Nelson/Jeff & Leslie Jacobson
 Sunday, November 22 – Mark & Emily Showalter/Brian & Karla Showalter
 Sunday December 6 – Sunday School Christmas Program – All bring cookies to share!
 Sunday, December 20 – Dennis & Jodi Hippen/Bobby & Melissa Wrobleski

SOTH Altar Guild

October	Janine Ellingson/Laura Ostlie
November	Joyce Lagred/Tammy Thompson
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
July	Linda Amlie/Jane Petrak



Prayer Requests

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



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.

SAVE THE DATE!

HARVEST MEAL

Council will be holding a Harvest MEAL following worship on October 11. Meals can be eaten at church or delivered to fields!



LUTHER CREST UPDATE

Luther Crest Bible Camp and Camp Emmaus located south of Park Rapids have decided to become one unified camping organization with two distinct ministry locations. Both will retain their names and unique programming, however they will share a unified leadership, governance, finances and vision. The main reason for the collaboration is they need more room. They have more kids that want to camp than they can accommodate!

RALLY SUNDAY THANK YOU!

Thank you for supporting the Rally Sunday burger and brat feed! The funds raised go the Lutheran Men in Mission Account to make the wooden hope chests given to those being baptized into our congregation.

Announcements

PLEASE JOIN ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH FOR OUR LUTEFISK AND TURKEY SUPPER!

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7TH
4:00-7:30 PM

ADULTS & TAKE OUTS - \$23
AGES 4-12 - \$12
AGES 3 AND UNDER - FREE

TICKETS CAN BE PURCHASED AT THE
FARMERS&MERCHANTS BANK IN
APPLETON AND THROUGH THE CHURCH
OFFICE



SEE YOU THERE!

PRAIRIE FIVE COMMUNITY

ACTION 100 PEOPLE GIVE \$1000 CAMPAIGN

Prairie Five is experiencing a higher demand for home-delivered meals than 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!



HABITAT HONKYTONK

Habitat for Humanity of West central Minnesota is seeking raffle item donations for the HonkyTonk Benefit scheduled for Friday, October 23 at The Wooden Silo near Murdock from 6-9PM. Live music by local band South 40. Raffle items are needed by September 30 and a scheduled pick up can be arranged if you cannot drop off in Willmar. Event tickets, rounds of golf, home services, themed baskets, memorabilia and or similar items (greater than \$50 in value) are suggested. Phone 320-231-2704 with questions.



71st
Annual

Smorgasbord

Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church

Velkommen!

800 10th St S, Benson

Wed., October 28

4:30-7:30 p.m.

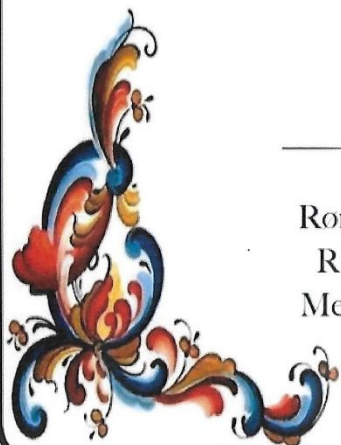
\$20 Adults · \$10 Children 7-12 · 6 & Under Free

DINE-IN * PICK-UP

Menu:

Rommegrot, Söt Suppe, Lefse, Blod & Potato Klub,
Rullepolse, Flatbread, Mashed Potatoes & Gravy,
Meat Balls, Roast Pork, Cole Slaw, Relishes,
Deviled Eggs, Assorted Fancy Cookies

Proceeds help support our
local & foreign missions.



SUNDAY SCHOOL

THANK YOU

It was fantastic to see all the kids show up for Rally Sunday to begin the Sunday School year and to participate in the Blessing of the Backpacks. Let's keep the momentum going! The more attendance we can get each Sunday, the better the experience it will be for all the kids, especially with the Christmas Program right around the corner.

Church Council Reports

From the Secretary...

**Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
September 9, 2026 Congregational Council Minutes**

The meeting was called to order by President, Stephanie Smith at 07:01 pm.

Members Present: Stephanie Smith, Ryan Davidson, Rick Davidson, Brenda Nelson, Jim Ostlie, Laura Ostlie, Janine Ellingson, Betsy Anderson,

Secretary's Report by Janine Ellingson: The minutes from the July 2026 meeting were approved as written. Betsy Anderson made a motion to approve the minutes with a second by Jim Ostlie. No further questions. Motions approved unanimously.

Treasurers Report by Jim Ostlie: Jim presented the treasurer's report. Everything is current and financially we are doing fine. Jim contacted the different banks in Benson to discuss other banking options. This will be discussed under New Business. Ryan Davidson made a motion to approve the Treasurer's report. Brenda Nelson seconded. No further questions. Motion approved unanimously.

Pastor's Report: No Report.

President's Report by Stephanie Smith: Stephanie reported that the congregation received a thank you card from Pastor Steve, who indicated that he and his family enjoyed their recent trip. Stephanie also

Secretaries report continued on next page...

Secretaries report continued...

provided an update regarding discussions about the future of the Cooperative Parish. She recently met with representatives from the other two congregations to discuss ongoing planning and collaboration. East Zion and West Zion are scheduled to meet at the end of October to continue those discussions. At this time, all three congregations have indicated a willingness to continue with a shared pastor compensation model, with costs divided equally (33% each). Stephanie noted that efforts to secure pastoral leadership remain ongoing. Pastor cover has been arranged through the end of November while the search process continues.

Trustee, Deacon and Board of Education Reports:

Trustee Report: Trustees will take care of the smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors.

Deacon Report: No Report.

Board of Education Report: First day of Sunday school, September 13. They have the schedule set up for the year. The books are ready and the Christmas program is on track. Christmas Program is December 6.

Old Business:

- Emergency response plan: The church has received all smoke and carbon monoxide detectors needed for the emergency preparedness plan. The trustees will determine the appropriate locations for installation. Once the locations have been established, Laura Larson will be notified so the information can be included in the emergency preparedness plans. The council also discussed storage of the plans and related materials.

New Business:

- Banking: Due to the acquisition of BMO Bank by First Citizens Bank, the council reviewed local banking options. Jim gathered information on services and interest rates from Benson-area financial institutions. Betsy Anderson moved to select Co-op Credit Union as the church's banking institution. Janine Ellingson seconded the motion. No further questions. Motion approved unanimously.
- Harvest Dinner: Sunday, October 11.
- Bringing back the holden evening prayer: December 20th service.

Announcements: None.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Motion to Adjourn by Stephanie Smith at 7:47 pm.

Next council meeting will be October 14, 2026 at 7 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Janine Ellingson - Secretary

Church Council Reports

From the Treasurer...

Yes, another banking update. Since the acquisition of certain BMO branches by First Citizens Bank, our church accounts would be getting new routing numbers, which means our checks, automatic payments, deposit stamps would all need to be replaced. I thought it would be a good time to bring up to council the banking options available in Benson to see if it would be in our best interest to stay at First Citizens or move our accounts to another institution. I provided a spreadsheet of each of the five institutions in Benson that described the pros and cons of each. Institutions included in the discussion were First Citizens Bank, Citizen's Alliance Bank, Lake Central Bank, National Bank of Commerce and the Co-op Credit Union. Council unanimously decided to transfer our accounts to the Co-op Credit union after significant discussion. Fee's at the credit union were low if any, interest on accounts was higher and dealing with people verses automatic recordings when challenges arise were the main reasons for the change. Please note that this change will not affect any of you that give online.

Sincerely, Jim Ostlie, Treasurer



First
Citizens
Bank®



WELCA Reports

From the Secretary...



SOTH WELCA Meeting minutes for Sept. 15, 2026

Members present: Marge Anderson, Louise Ferry, Gail Svor, Sherri Fahl and Deb Flaten.

Meeting was called to order by President, Marge Anderson. Our WELCA Purpose Statement was read.

Treasurer's Report: Reviewed report from Nov, 2025 through July, 2026. All expenses listed in our 2026 budget have been paid through the end of 2026, except the last quarterly fee to our Synod and our quilt donation to Luther Crest.

WELCA Secretary Report continued on next page...

WELCA Secretary Report from previous page...

Secretary's report: Minutes from March 29, 2026 were read. No corrections or additions made. WELCA had a brief meeting in April but no minutes were recorded.

Old Business:

- Thank you Notes: Read/reviewed from Pastor Steve, LSS, Swift Co Food Shelf, Glacial Ridge Hospice, WELCA, and Heartland Girls Ranch.

New Business:

- Glacial Ridge Conference Women of the ELCA Fall Conference: Monday, Sept. 21, 2026 at Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church in Benson with registration beginning @4:30. Light Meal at 5pm. Program @6pm by LSS on "Homeless Youth". Offering is 50% SWMN WELCA and 50% to LS
- Harvest Meal: Will be Oct. 11th, 2026. WELCA will not provide cookies or bars for the meal, but will have a bake sale during the Harvest Meal. Baked items, canned goods, garden produce, craft items, etc. may be donated to this effort.

Additional upcoming events:

- GRV Cookie Walk: Dec. 5th, 2026. We will need cookies/Christmas goodies for this. 50 dozen was requested last year.
- SW MN Synod Convention: May 1st, 2026 in Marshall, MN. We put together 28 school kits for this during our meeting today.

2027 Officers: Discussion held. Gail Svor agreed to be President, with help. Debbie Flaten, treasurer. Sherri Fahl, Secretary. We are asking for additional volunteers.

Next meeting: TBD.

Prayer Concerns: Ray Anderson, Darlene Dergan, Carol and Phillip Skarsten, Sara and Jon Reich.

Respectfully submitted, Sherri Fahl, Secretary



2026 Budget

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

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

1200 Staff and Ministry				\$66,377.50	\$44,194.21
1201	Church Custodial Salary			\$6,095.16	\$4,549.41
1202	Office Secretary Salary (incl. WZ portion)			\$9,142.68	\$6,826.16
1203	Organist Salary			\$1,700.00	\$1,264.18
1204	Pastoral Salary			\$44,511.46	\$27,961.53
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	\$66.50
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	\$828.51
1206	Pulpit Supply (sub Pastors)			\$300.00	\$1,050.00
1207	Employee Quarterly Taxes			\$3,200.00	\$1,514.42
1208	Sub organist fees			\$220.00	\$75.00
1209	Tax Prep			\$100.00	\$125.00
1210	MN Paid Leave			\$0.00	\$35.31

1300 Congregational Life				\$6,530.64	\$5,095.32
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	\$3,052.01
1304.1	Copier Lease			\$2,805.64	\$2,066.37
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** **\$16,583.96**

1401	Dept of Labor (Elevator Inspection)		\$100.00	\$145.00
1402	Insurance		\$5,500.00	\$4,593.17
1403	Mowing		\$700.00	\$770.00
1404	Repairs/Maintenance		\$1,500.00	\$635.83
1405	Supplies (custodial) *		\$500.00	\$373.89
1406	Utilities*		\$15,238.20	\$10,066.07
1407.1	Electricity		\$4,000.00	\$2,250.00
1407.2	Fuel		\$5,000.00	\$3,355.48
1407.3	Phone/Internet		\$1,150.00	\$753.89
1407.4	Propane		\$4,200.00	\$2,695.11
1407.5	Water		\$888.20	\$628.30
1407.6	Garbage Service		\$495.00	\$383.29
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	\$65,873.49
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1600 Income **\$97,606.34** **\$54,612.78**

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	\$0.54
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	\$380.00
1608	Offering-Regular (includes loose offering & online)		\$85,286.34	\$48,505.26
1609	Offering-Lunch		\$500.00	\$328.00
1610	Other Income		\$3,000.00	\$222.98
1611	Harvest Lunch		\$1,300.00	\$0.00
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	\$3,480.00

Please note that future financial reports will not include a Savings Account. We will be able to transfer dollars in between the Members Money Account and Checking account when needed. The October financial report only includes our new checking and members money account at the Co-op Credit Union in Benson.

October Financial Report

Checking Account

Line Item	Date	Check #	Description	Payment	Deposit	Balance
	9/14/2026		Initial Deposit from First Citizens Checking			\$2,500.00
	9/14/2026		Deposit for new checks and stamp		\$147.75	\$2,647.75
	9/15/2026		Deposit for kitchen supplies (used CCU debit)		\$273.47	\$2,921.22
	9/17/2026	Auto	Mainstreet Checks/Stamps	\$54.44		\$2,866.78
	9/16/2026	Auto	Mainstreet Checks/Stamps	\$106.70		\$2,760.08
	9/15/2026	Debit	Amazon Kitchen supplies	\$273.47		\$2,486.61
	9/21/2026		From FCB checking		\$500.00	\$2,986.61
1407.1	9/21/2026	Auto	Agralite	\$250.00		\$2,736.61
1608	9/22/2026		Offering-Regular (9/13/26)		\$1,960.00	\$4,696.61
1608	9/22/2026		Offering-Loose (9/13/26)		\$5.00	\$4,701.61
1608	9/22/2026	Auto	Tithe.le Offering		\$290.18	\$4,991.79
1608	9/22/2026	Auto	Tithe.le Offering		\$40.00	\$5,031.79
	9/22/2026		Remainder of FCB checking acct		\$712.19	\$5,743.98
1206	9/22/2026	15000	Maddie Elliot (Pulpit Supply 9/27/26)	\$175.00		\$5,568.98

Total Income to date 2026:

\$54,612.78

Total Income to date 2025:

\$52,741.70

Members Money Account (1.739%)

Line Item	Date	Check #	Description	Payment	Deposit	Balance
	9/14/2026		Initial Deposit from First Citizens Money Market		\$21,062.60	\$21,062.60

Mission Investment Funds through ELCA

6 Year Term Building Fund (3.7%) \$79,727.95

Demand Checking Building Fund (.0004%) \$9,845.42

Demand Checking Memorial Fund (.0004%) \$128.54