

Progress

Volume 24, Issue 6—FINAL

June 2026

Pilgrim Lutheran Church

709 Weston Avenue
Wausau WI 54403

715.842.4544

pilgrimofwausau@gmail.com
www.pilgrimofwausau.org

WORSHIP SCHEDULE

SUNDAYS

9:00 am

St. Stephen
Lutheran Church

THURSDAYS

6:30 PM

Pilgrim

St. Stephen Office Hours

Monday & Thursday

8 – 3

A Message...

from Frank Koerten

There is a beginning and there is an end. The final vote on April 26th, 2026 marked the end of a very storied 78 years for Pilgrim Lutheran Church. One of our members said to me, "I didn't know whether to cry or jump for joy." We experienced a flood of emotions as the reality of that moment set in and what it meant for all of us. As I reflected on the significance of that day an old song from the 60's came back to me. The song by the Byrds *Turn, Turn, Turn.*, later recorded by Peter, Paul, and Mary, which is based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 with lyrics adapted by Pete Seger. Some the lines that stand out for me are:

Refrain

To everything turn, turn, turn

A time to be born, A time to die

There is a season turn, turn, turn

A time to laugh, A time to weep

And a time to every purpose

A time to build up, A time to break down

under heaven

A time to dance, A time to mourn.

There are all kinds of emotions that are experienced as we say goodbye to Pilgrim and hello to St. Stephen. My wife Sue and I were married at Pilgrim by Pastor Larry Hendriksen some 55 years ago, and Sue as a child attended Sunday school and was confirmed at Pilgrim so our history doesn't go all the way back to 1948, but I can reflect on many of those years. As we started to prepare for "The Leave Taking Service" Our July 19th Celebration, I started going through some of the old church directories and again was amazed by Pilgrims Past and the many people who have passed through our doors over the past 78 years. The 1971 directory in particular caught my eye. At 25 years in existence Pilgrim had two services one at 8:30 AM and the second at 11:00 AM. and in between services our Sunday school staff of 16 teachers were busy teaching our children. We had 21 members in the church choir and 25 children in our junior choirs. There were 7 Women's circles. Pilgrim had about 200 families, most of them came from Wausau's South east side neighborhood, and Pilgrim was at the heart of neighborhood life. As mothers started to enter the work force in the 70's and 80's, Pilgrim started a successful preschool that served not only church families but also reached out to the community for many years.

(Continued on page 2)

(Frank Koerten Message continued from page 1)

The decline at Pilgrim started right around the turn of the century, early 2000. The demographic makeup of the congregation started to change. The Boomer generation became the predominant group and our children Generation X, followed by the Millennials for the most part left the congregation, and in many cases the city of Wausau. I call them the “lost generations”. This resulted in a decline of growth from within, and a need for Pilgrim to attract new members from outside our walls, which was slow to happen. Young families are attracted to churches with other young families who they can relate to, we lost that draw. Over the last 10 years we were without a pastor, and we got to the point where we couldn’t even afford to hire one should there be one available. We realized about three years ago that we needed to look at alternatives like a merger with another congregation or to close our doors. Half of the 8,400 ELCA churches have 50 or fewer members, so we were not alone in our need to take action. We started to explore joining with other Wausau congregations and settled on St. Stephen and Good Shepherd who were receptive, and set up a Task Force to explore a possible consolidation. After 2 years of meeting together, Good Shepherd decided to drop out of consideration, but Pilgrim and St. Stephen decided to continue on, and 10 months later the final vote to merge was unanimously passed by both congregations on April 26th 2026.

The Pilgrim Choir and the St. Stephen Choir joined together about 4 years ago and bonded to make great music together. I think this was a real catalyst in our desire to move forward with our merger. Pilgrims are excited in having Pastor Karoline, Our first full time pastor in 10 years. Pilgrims are excited about the ability for greater outreach and the added manpower to make a difference. Our merger also provides greater financial resources to help us do all these things. St. Stephen is a great match with great people who welcome us. Together we can continue to do God's work and make a difference. Alleluia!

Frank Koerten

The Future of the Blessings That Give Hope (BTGH) Program

“Walking Together to Celebrate Christ’s Love.”

Our Pilgrim ministry, Blessings That Give Hope (BTGH), started in 2018 and will continue at our new merged congregation, St. Stephen Lutheran Church.

The name will be the same. We will continue donating a wide variety of items to needy students at John Marshall Elementary, Horace Mann Middle School, and Wausau East High School. This spring we’ve expanded BTGH to serve needy students at Franklin Elementary School, the school closest to St. Stephen.

All four schools will be restocking their pantries in the summer and early fall. We will distribute lists of pantry needs in the St. Stephen newsletter, The Deacon’s Spirit.

Over the years we’ve been amazed at the generosity of Pilgrim members, friends of Pilgrim members, and Southeast siders! Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Jeff Kessel, for the Blessings That Give Hope team.



Make a joyful noise!

“It’s the sturdy old hymns of the faith that strengthen and steady me when I’m weary and worn. They’re the ones I sing when rising troubled in the night.”

~ Robert J. Morgan

Pilgrim’s leave-taking service is scheduled for July 19. As we prepare for it, members of the congregation were invited to submit the names of hymns they would like to have included in that service. The results have been very interesting and different than I expected. Most of them are very personal songs that reflect our own faith journeys. They are the hymns of people who are digging deeply into their faith as a resource during this momentous transition.

Here are a few examples:

I was there to hear your borning cry. I’ll be there when you are old. I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold. I see in this song the assurance that our lives matter to God. He is with us all our lives through. This song embodies the image that we carry of a God who is actively involved in each of our lives; he’s not some disengaged judge who looks at us from afar.

I want Jesus to walk with me. All along my pilgrim journey, I want Jesus to walk with me. A powerful spiritual that asks for Jesus’s presence throughout our lives.

O Christ the same through all our story’s pages, our loves and hopes, our failures and our fears. Each verse ends with this phrase, “we bring our thanks”. We bring our thanks for you, O God, for being a constant in our lives.

Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life. This paraphrase of the 23rd Psalm which uses the word “shepherd” as a verb. It asks God to be with us in all our wants, fears, death, and life.

Spirit of Gentleness, stir me from restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea. The last line of this song speaks to how the people of God “with bold new decisions” respond to God’s call.

Take my life that I may be consecrated, Lord, to thee. This happy, rhythmic song looks at the ways the people of God want to serve him with our hands, our feet, our silver and gold, our intellects, and every power God has given us. We want to use our voices to sing, our lips to speak God’s message, our will which we are willing to bend to God’s will, and our hearts. We want to use our whole bodies to serve God and God’s people.

As we embark in a new direction following July 19, this sampling of the hymns represents deep faith and trust in God and a desire to serve others. They bring us full circle, they represent our shared belief that God is always with us, directing our paths and in response to God’s presence in our lives, we want to serve all God’s creation.

Our prayer is that these hymns, and others, will be helpful as we begin “Walking together to celebrate Christ’s love” as members of St. Stephen Lutheran Church. Amen.

Delores Kessel

From Our Pastor, Karoline Schwantes

When I went to seminary, I followed a distance learning track. Members of the congregation I was a part of were expressed confusion that I was in classes and still at choir every Wednesday and worship on Sundays. It was sometimes hard to explain accessing classes via zoom, “We’re in the classroom from home, tiled on a screen kind of like the Brady Bunch intro, some students are in the classroom, the professor can see us, we can participate in conversations.” These descriptions became unnecessary in 2020, when online spaces became necessary for so many more things.

In addition to my online home creating community with my colleagues, there were in-person opportunities at the beginning of each semester and at other times. I loved the chances to travel to Wartburg Seminary, connect face to face, and to soak up the time on campus in the chapel, library, refectory. We often called it “the castle,” because the architecture and tower are modeled after Wartburg Castle in Germany. My first experiences as a student were in-person for a 7-week summer Greek intensive. And it was intense. I moved to campus for that short time, just me, my dog Pi, and whatever I could fit in the minivan.

I remember moving out after those short weeks, loading up the minivan with the colors of the sunset fading and darkness settling over the castle. September coolness settling in alongside a profound feeling of “leaving home to go home.” Sadness of leaving a place I loved so much and knew that I would not experience in the same way ever again, but also the joy of heading home and getting back to my family. I had moved several times growing up, so it was not an unfamiliar feeling of launching into a big change. I know so many others who can feel this, students moving to dorms, people who travel for work, “snowbirds” who have homes in multiple places. I felt very lucky to be able to say, “my other home is a castle” but it can also be bittersweet wanting to be both places at once.

These feelings all come to mind as we begin our united worship services with Pilgrim. We take the next steps, knowing there is joy and excitement in coming into community as the Church together, in new friendships and opportunities. We also hold room for the bittersweet feeling of moving from a beloved church home. We know God’s presence is fully in both feelings, fully in both places. We remember the feeling of “leaving home to go home” and ask the Holy Spirit to help us through these times of transition. Each of us has a different story of the homes we’ve had, physically, online, and spiritually. I hope you find ways to both share and hear, “Welcome Home!”



Church Offerings

For all worshippers--Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings—beginning June 1st, please make checks payable to St. Stephen Lutheran Church. Also beginning June 1st, we will no longer collect for the monthly designated benevolences listed on your envelopes. Continue to use your weekly envelopes through the end of 2026, when you will receive new envelopes starting January 2027. Thank you. St. Stephen’s mailing address is:

St. Stephen Lutheran Church
512 McClellan Street
Wausau, WI 54403

Summer Song Madness

Each week, there will be opportunities to vote for your hymns. The 2 hymns with the top number of votes will move on to Round 2, beginning in August. Round 3 will take place on August 30 and September 6, with the ultimate vote for our 2026 Song of the Summer on September 13!

For each voting opportunity you may vote for two hymns. You may vote by:

- In person at worship on Sunday at 9:00 am
- In person at worship on Thursday at 6:30 pm (at Pilgrim)
- Comment on the Facebook Post by midnight on Sunday
- Comment on the Facebook Live recording of the worship service by Sunday at Midnight

Winning Hymns will be shared on Mondays and will move on to the next round!

| | | |
|-----------------|-----|--|
| May 21—May 24 | 597 | My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less |
| | 789 | Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us (Blessed Jesus) |
| | 767 | Lord, Take My Hand & Lead Me |
| | 396 | Spirit of Gentleness |
| May 28—May 31 | 413 | Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty! |
| | 525 | You Are Holy |
| | 759 | My Faith Looks Up to Thee |
| | 836 | Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee |
| June 4—June 7 | 774 | What a Fellowship. What a Joy Divine (Leaning on the Everlasting Arms) |
| | 638 | Blessed Assurance |
| | 773 | Precious Lord, Take My Hand |
| | 742 | What a Friend We Have in Jesus |
| | 731 | Earth and All Stars! |
| June 11—June 14 | 779 | Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound |
| | 502 | The King of Love My Shepherd Is |
| | 787 | On Eagle's Wings |
| | 838 | Beautiful Savior |
| | 824 | This Is My Father's World |
| June 18—June 21 | 631 | Love Divine, All Loves Excelling |
| | 801 | Change my Heart, O God |
| | 785 | When Peace Like a River (It Is Well with My Soul) |
| | 856 | How Great Thou Art |
| | 840 | Now Thank We All Our God |
| June 25—June 28 | 880 | O God beyond All Praising |
| | 661 | I Love to Tell the Story |
| | 592 | Just As I Am |
| | 781 | Children of the Heavenly Father |
| | 618 | Guide Me Ever, Great Redeemer |
| July 2-July 5 | 887 | This is My Song |
| | 423 | Shall We Gather at the River |
| | 656 | Blest Be the Tie That Binds |
| | 623 | Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me |
| | 890 | Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory |
| July 9-July 12 | 669 | Rise Up, O Saints of God! |
| | 817 | You Have Come Down to the Lakeshore |
| | 379 | Now the Green Blade Rises |
| | 733 | Great is Thy Faithfulness |
| | 826 | Thine the Amen |



Pilgrim/St. Stephen Rummage Sale

Thursday, June 4th, 8:00 – 3:00

Friday, June 5th, 8:00 – 3:00

Saturday, June 6th, 8:00 – 1:00

Second chance to look for rummage sale treasures to donate. Please bring any donated items to Pilgrim on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday, June 1-3 for pricing. There will be a bake sale as well. If you have any questions, please contact:

Shirley Ecker at 715-301-3372.

FATHER’S DAY SLIDE SHOW

We will be having a slide show honoring fathers during the announcements on Father’s Day which is Sunday, June 21st. Please submit your favorite photo of you and your father and/or a photo of you and your children/grandchildren. Please, no more than one photo from each category. All photos (submitted electronically) must be to Nancy Henke by Wednesday, June 17th. If you would like to submit a photo electronically, email it to nhenke@sslcausau.com. It would be preferable to have electronic submissions in a jpg. format. Please include the names of the people in the photos with your submissions. If you have questions, contact Nancy at 715-845-7858.

Men’s Monthly Bible Study Brunch at Eagle’s Nest

2nd Thursday of the Month
11:00 a.m.

The next gathering for food, faith, and fellowship is June 11. If you are interested in joining, contact Eugene Viegut at (715-359-9895).

Weekly Prayer Circle Tuesdays 11:45 a.m.

If you would like to join the group, drop in. If you would like to receive the weekly prayer list, or place a prayer request, contact the office.

Parish Updates

TRANSFERS: May 12, 2026

Virginia Kirsch to St. John Immanuel Lutheran, Town of Maine
Brad Bartell to St. Andrew Lutheran, Wausau

BAPTISM

Adalee Ann Moon — June 9, 2020
daughter of Shylo Moon and Anjelique Moore

MINUTES

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

May 12, 2026
Not Yet Approved

This meeting was a combined meeting with the St. Stephen Council. It was determined to have one meeting rather than have a joint meeting and then break off into individual groups. These meeting minutes provide information on the business that Pilgrim council acted on along with information on some of the actions of the St. Stephen council.

PRESENT IN PERSON: Charlie Freiberg (Treasurer), Linda Konkel (Secretary), Jim Lenselink (Building & Grounds Chair), Charlene Buttner (Church & Society Chair).

Delores Kessel attended the meeting as a guest.

ABSENT: Frank Koerten (President), Sue Koerten (Worship Chair), Janet Williams (Life & Growth Chair).

In Frank’s absence and no council vice president, Charlie Freiberg was acting president for the meeting. Charlie declared that a quorum of members existed so the meeting could continue.

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: St. Stephen Council President Dick Holster called the meeting to order at 5:30.

Dick Holster led devotions.

PASTOR’S REPORT: Pastor Karoline reported on the Alliance for Safe and Prosperous Communities group. They are in the process of creating a family support network in response to recent ICE enforcement actions. An informational meeting will be held at St. Stephen on June 8 at 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Karoline led the graveside service for David Theis in April.

The Prayer Work Group is collaborating with Pastor Cath Mode to organize a congregational retreat sometime in October that will focus on prayer and dealing with change. In conjunction with the retreat, a “timeline” for St. Stephen will be created.

(Continued on page 7)

(5/12/26 Minutes continued from page 6)

Motion to accept her report was made and approved.

WORSHIP REPORT: (Sue Koerten) The worship report was given by Delores Kessel in Sue's absence. Also combined with a report given by Sarah Lonsdorf from St. Stephen.

May 17th will be the last regular Sunday worship service at Pilgrim until the leave taking service on July 19.

The free will offerings from the Lenten services totaled \$853 with this amount being sent to Wausau Free Clinic. The average mid-week attendance was 15-20.

The Summer Song Madness activity will start soon. The goal is to have congregational members submit their favorite hymns with 4-6 being sung during the service. Two of these will move forward in the "bracket." More information to follow.

May 24th is Pentecost. Red geraniums will be ordered and planted around both church buildings.

There will be a Graduation service on June 7th. Three Pilgrims are graduating. Letters will be sent out to graduates asking them to confirm their attendance. The quilters have made quilts for them and the St. Stephen's graduates. Corsages will be ordered.

July 26th will be Christmas in July with music and lectionary to be Christmas themed.

Pastor Dara will be visiting St. Stephen and leading a retreat after the worship service. It will be like the one that was held last fall for both congregations. It will assist us in becoming one family.

On September 20th there will be a celebration of the merger. The celebration committee will be organizing this.

Next meeting will be May 14th at 1:00 p.m.

Delores Kessel addressed the group regarding Pilgrim's Thursday Evening Service. She provided information about the service and how it

is currently structured. She is concerned about what will happen to this service and the Pilgrims that attend once the merger is completed. A discussion followed as to the future of this service. It was decided that this topic should be sent back to the worship committee for more discussion and the committee should come back next month with options for the future of the service. The council agreed to continue with the Thursday night services till July 16th with Pastor Karoline presiding.

The group thanked Delores for her input and for bringing this matter to the council.

SECRETARY'S REPORT: (Linda Konkell) Motion by Jim Lenselink and seconded by Charlie to approve the secretary's report. Motion carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT: (Charlie Freiberg) Cash in the banks totals \$82,984. Again, the largest portion of the restricted funds are Blessings that Give Hope. Our long-term debt stands at \$49,569. A reminder that the church real estate is not included on the balance sheet. The heat and snow removal costs were up from last year. The year-to-date giving is down \$7,000 from last year.

These figures are as of April 30th.

As of May 5th, the mortgage has been paid in full. The pay-off amount was \$48,952.

Charlie and Jim Von Rueden have been working on transferring Pilgrim's Budget amounts to St. Stephen's budget records.

Motion by Jim Lenselink to accept the Treasurer's Report with a second by Charlene Buttner. Motion passed.

MEMBERSHIP TRANSFER: Brad Bartell has submitted a request for transfer of membership to St. Andrew in Rib Mountain. Ginny Kirsch has also requested a transfer of membership to St. John, Town of Maine. Motion by Charlene Buttner and seconded by Jim Lenselink to accept the transfer of Ginny and Brad. Motion carried.

BUILDING & GROUNDS REPORT: (Jim Lenselink) No report. Jeff Bloomquist mentioned that St. Stephen's maintenance man will be

cutting the lawn once a week at Pilgrim over the summer and do a walk-through of the building and flush the toilets weekly.

Jim Van Rueden reported that he and Frank Koerten are having a meeting with Shelby Brod regarding future employment opportunities.

LIFE & GROWTH REPORT: (Janet Williams) Charlie Freiberg reported that the script account will be closed on May 13th.

CHURCH & SOCIETY REPORT: (Charlene Buttner) The quilters donated quilts to the Sleep in Heavenly Peace Organization. They will again be constructing beds in December. We are planning to donate more quilts at that time.

The Rummage Sale at Pilgrim will be May 14-16 and again on June 4-5. Both congregations are donating items to sell along with baked goods for the bake sale. Both congregations have volunteers working at the sale.

OLD BUSINESS: None

NEW BUSINESS: Dick Holster presented a copy of a proposal from Cox & Associates to review the Pilgrim facility and do an analysis on how the facility could be used for different functions and what various code implications there may be on use and occupation. The outline was divided into six tasks. It was determined that since there is some interest in the Pilgrim facility the best plan would be to accept Task #1 which is to draw a background floor plan from the existing drawings to better illustrate the uses of the space and recommendations. The St. Stephen's council passed motion.

Dick Holster thanked the Pilgrim council members for their dedication and hard work that is being done to make this merger go smoothly.

Meeting adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Konkell

Pilgrim/St. Stephen
Rummage and Bake Sale—Part 2
June 4, 5, 6

Father's Day Slide Show
June 21

(See Page 6 for Details)

Staff

Ministers
Music Coordinator
Choir Director
Pianists
Custodian
Office Manager

All Pilgrims
Delores Kessel
Jim Lenselink
Delores Kessel, Norah Brown
Shelby Brod
Fred Patten

If you wish to give a gift to Pilgrim electronically,
please go to www.pilgrimofwausau.org and click
on the DONATE button on the home page.

Thank you.



Services

Sundays at 9:00 am / Thursdays at 6:30 pm

PILGRIM LUTHERAN CHURCH...

Sharing God's Never-Ending Love with All People through Faith and Service!
www.pilgrimofwausau.org

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Electronic Service Requested

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