
BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN NEWSLETTER

Pastor Sue Sinclair

JANUARY 2026

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From the Pastor...

Christmas & Epiphany

As this newsletter arrives, it is still Christmas. The twelve days that we celebrate the birth of our Savior continue through Jan. 5th. On the 6th we celebrate Epiphany.

Today, we tend to think that Christmas is over as soon as we throw out the torn wrapping paper, and we don't think about Epiphany much at all. It is our loss, because they both have a rich and lasting impact on our Christian life.

The word epiphany means 'an illuminating discovery of the essential meaning of someone or something. On Epiphany we remember the epiphany that 3 wisemen had thousands of years ago. They realized that the birth of someone extraordinary was taking place. The epiphany that these 'Magi' had drew them out of their own comfortable lives and into a foreign land, to discover the birth of the Messiah.

Though these things happened thousands of years ago, we still carry in our hearts the essential truth and deep meaning that began then. God has sent a Savior into the world, and his saving grace continues through the centuries.

Bishop Scott recently wrote of how the words of a friend reminded him of the power of this truth. She said, "To YOU...is born a savior." He continued, "Remember, in the midst of all the hustle and bustle...Jesus is born...The promise of God, made manifest in the birth of Jesus, remains valid for us each and every day."

I want each of you to hear the same--A savior, Christ, the Lord is born...FOR YOU. We live in this extraordinary truth!

Thank You So Much

I am so thankful for everyone who remembered me with well wishes, prayers, cards, and gifts this Christmas. You are the best!

~ Pastor Sue

Thank you Bethlehem Church Women, Bethlehem, and our members for your gifts and prayers this season. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and joyous New Year!

- Hannah Olson

We have many thanks to spread here at Bethlehem. Andrea Hoogendoorn for all her vocal and piano accompaniments for our services and funerals through the year.

Thank you to our youth leaders Noah & Teresa Kerkvliet for arranging all the gatherings and including everyone and their friends.

Thank you to all our teachers and subs and director for our Sunday school children!



Thank you, Hallie & Dan Brueggeman, and Caleb & Tracy Gayer for adding to the Christmas spirit with your brass playing talents.

A Zoom Opportunity:

Thriving Ministry in Small Congregations

Did you know that HALF of all the congregations in the ELCA are smaller ones? That is true of many other denominations as well.

Today, loneliness is on the rise. Technology can isolate people rather than help them to connect. Many yearn for the opportunity to interact with others. Younger people report wanting to connect with spiritually grounded people who love God, love others, and who are willing to be in relationships with new people. Making a difference around them through a church that is serious about continuing Jesus' ministry is important to them. This means that small congregations have gifts to share that 'mega churches' are missing.

On January 20th at 7pm you can join the zoom meeting Thriving Ministry in Small Congregations. It is a great opportunity to learn more about how churches like Bethlehem can share God's love with people who are searching for it!

It is being presented by Pr. Dave Daubert, the interim Director for Evangelical Mission for our synod. He will help us understand the key ways that smaller congregations can be welcoming, vibrant and impactful.

Pr. Dave grew up in a setting like ours and knows the dynamics of small town and rural church life. He has been a leader in the ELCA focusing on congregational vitality and renewal.

To join, simply register at:
<https://tithe.ly/event-registration/#/10694803>
on or before January 20th.



GREETERS SCHEDULE for January

January 4: David & Sandy Lantz

January 11: Scott & Pam Hanson

January 18: Bob & Lori Tracy

January 25: Paul & Sue Kippley



January 2026

January 4 – Paul & Sue Kippley
Randy & Michelle Kippley

January 11 – Aaron & Lori Kock
Dan & Barb Pedersen

January 18 – Jesse & Kaitlyn Van Beek
Steve & Lori Ahrendt

January 25 – Jim & Rhonda Jensen
Jon & Gloria Bonjour

WORSHIP HELPERS THIS MONTH

Usher Team:	Larry Van Roekel
Reader:	Dustin Hoogendoorn
Altar Guild:	Dianne Eiesland

SPECIAL DATES FOR JANUARY

Jan. 1 - New Year's Day
Jan. 6 - Epiphany
Jan. 11 - Baptism of Our Lord
Jan. 14 - Board Meetings
Jan. 20 - Martin Luther King Jr.



Now and Not Yet: Pressing In When You're Waiting, Wanting, and Restless for More

by Ruth Chou Simons.

January 7 – February 11. Wednesdays at 7:00 in the church library.

Sign up is posted in the window. Please do so by December 21. Questions? Talk to Becky (605-759-0908), Megan, Michelle, DJ, or Deb.



- 1 Isla Cartmill
- 2 Irene Antrim, Cora Van Beek
- 4 Tara Hoogendoorn
- 5 Ruth Johnson
- 6 Clint Berentschot, Monica Ortiz
- 7 Michael Van Hill
- 10 Taylor Rentschler, Michelle Kippley
- 12 Opal Niemeyer, Sophia Niemeyer
- 16 Travis Jensen
- 19 Kim Hage, Thea Twedt
- 22 Caleb Gayer, Chase Thiessen
- 23 Matt McKenney
- 24 Trevor McKenney, Josh Winter
- 26 Virginia Beynon
- 28 Dan Brueggeman, Eric Fiech, Jacob Standley, Tara Twedt, Jerry Van Voorst
- 29 Paula Bosler

Anniversary Blessings 

The following couples will celebrate the gift of marriage this month by observing their wedding anniversaries:

Jan. 25 Randy & Betty Kock-(1975)



In Holy Baptism our gracious heavenly Father liberated us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We celebrate the January baptismal anniversaries of the following members of Bethlehem Lutheran:

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|---------------------|---------------------|
| John Twedt-4 | Cristen Standley-5 |
| Brandon Mika-6 | Kay Twedt-6 |
| Pam Kock-7 | Ryan Bahnson-13 |
| Dylan McKenney-13 | Jennifer Kleeman-14 |
| Tylee Kippley – 17 | Kaylee Kroger-19 |
| Bryden Jensen-21 | Deb Van Roekel-26 |
| Jonathan Folkens-31 | Michael Van Hill-31 |



Grant & Trent Hoogendoorn, Thiessen Family, Tara Hoogendoorn, Norman Rentschler, Matt, Kendra Michael, Sadie Moen, Dan Moen, Rebecca Wolf, Austin, Erin Van Der Brink and Hazel Mae, Olson Family, McKenna Bouwman, Holly Horstman, Arnie Van Voorst, Arlyn Schreurs, Nate Weberg, Ed Baatz, Don Eiesland, Wayne Kollis, Michelle Johnson, Sarah Krupke, and all our Nursing Home residents (Vern, Joy, Marion, Bev, Jean M.)

A NEW MINISTRY



Bethlehem is beginning a new ministry this month.

We are calling

it “**Caring Support**”. We will be ordering some copies of the booklet series Journeying Through Grief and making them available to anyone who would like to share them with someone they know is grieving.

If you know of someone who you would like to share this resource with, please contact the Caring Support coordinator, Marilyn Caswell.



to the family of Ken Thiessen who passed away on December 5. Funeral was December 10.

A Prayer For Rural Iowa

God of the land, we give thanks for the safe gathering of this year's harvest and for the hands that brought food from field to table. Bless our rural communities with sustainable livelihoods, strong schools, and vibrant congregations. Grant wisdom as we navigate challenges of consolidation, economic pressure, and changing demographics. Help us to see possibilities where others see only decline and give us courage to innovate while honoring tradition. Amen.

BOARD



REPORTS

December 2025

Board of Lay Ministry

Present: Dustin, Dave, Dave, Kim, Jim, P. Sue

Pastor's report

Confirmation: Apostles' Creed is complete. Tracy will teach scripture for the next session.

She will be on vacation Dec.29-31st.

Pastor joined a zoom seminar called “The Invitational Christian”. Bethlehem does do a lot of the suggestions, but we could do more by physically inviting people to church. Invitations for Christmas Eve, Easter, and any other special service would be a good place to start. Paper invitations have been printed. Take one and invite someone!

Journey through grief is a program from Stephen's Ministry. It is a 4 booklet program that starts shortly after loss occurs and then quarterly through the year. Bethlehem will provide materials, but it is meant to be given by someone who cares for the grieving person. Marilyn Caswell will facilitate the program.

Christmas Eve service will be at 5:00pm with the youth once again leading. Offering will be used by the youth as they shop for supplies for the local food pantries.

Thank you to the Parsonage Committee for getting the furnace fixed so promptly.

It was brought to Dustin's attention that we need better signage for bathroom locations.

The usher schedule was revised. Right now we only have men on the list, but women are welcome as well!

It was brought to Kim's attention that the sound booth may need some work done. It was suggested asking the company who installed it to come back and check it over.

Miracle Sunday's offering was \$14800.00

Thank you to Dustin and Kim whose terms are complete.

Stewardship

Members present: Dan Bruggeman, Cindy Van Voorst, Steve Arendt, Cynthia Haugland, Nancy Halma, Dan Moen, Tom Rentschler

Reviewed minutes of November 5, 2025

Miracle Sunday: \$14,860

Served pie and ice cream as a thank you to the congregation.

Net year purchase: 3 pumpkin, 3 pecan, 1 apple, 1 cherry, and 1 gluten free) and 3 gallons of ice cream (2 vanilla and 1 chocolate).

Discussion of Super Bowl Sunday, February 8, 2026. Cynthia will get prizes.

Thanked Cindy Van Voorst for her service and welcomed Nancy Halma.

Next meeting Wednesday January 14 2026 at 7pm.

Education

Members: Liza, DJ, Becky, Deb, Michelle, Megan, Glennie

Old Business:

- Christmas program December 14
 - Becky will order 75 candy bags from the Larchwood Food Center and Becky will pick up December 12
 - Sunday school party will be after the program and the following Sunday (2part movie) we will watch a movie and have drink/popcorn and ice cream
 - Gifts have been purchased
- Board members
 - Kristi H will join the board next year
- Bible study
 - Now and Not Yet Pressing in When You're Waiting, Wanting, and Restless for More. By Ruth Chou Simons.
 - Jan 7-Feb 11 at 7 pm in church lib
 - Sign up deadline by Sunday Dec 21
 - Megan will orders books
 - Megan will lead

BLC MISSION STATEMENT:

"To welcome all people to seek and serve God as members of the Body of Christ."

BLC VISION STATEMENT:

We will be:

A welcoming Church:

Opening our doors and hearts to all who enter.

A Church that seeks after the heart of God:

Maturing in faith.

Trusting His word.

Living God's love.

A Church that is committed to one another:

Through fellowship.

Through love and service.

Through grace and forgiveness.

A Church that ministers to the world around us.

A Church that brings its gifts back to God:

Through good stewardship of time, talent, and treasures.

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Thank you to our board members who completed their 3-year term and to the new and returning members willing to serve. We appreciate your service to BLC!