

Balsam Lutheran Church
1115 Mains Crossing Avenue
Amery, WI 54001

Address Service Requested

COMING WORSHIPS: Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, March 28 and 29. Both of these worships will be at 7:00 PM.; Maundy Thursday at Balsam; Good Friday at Elim. Kindermass March 24; Easter March 31, both at 10:15

Daylight Saving Time begins March 10.

THE BALSAM BRANCH

March 2024

Balsam Lutheran Church

1115 Mains Crossing
Amery, Wisconsin 54001

Laurie Kenyon Woods, Pastor



Pastor Laurie's e-mail: pastorlauriekw@gmail.com
Church Website: www.balsamlutheranchurch.org
Church email: balsamlutheran@amerytel.net
Balsam Branch Editor: *Bonnie Corcoran*

Church Phone: 715-268-9291
Pastor Laurie's phone: 269-552-8245

Pastor's Pen

Hello friends,

I'd like to talk about something that's both profound and personal: testimony. It's about sharing our stories – the highs, the lows, and everything in between – and finding God in the midst of it all. And as Lutherans, we've got a unique take on why testimony matters so much.

Testimony, in a Christian context, is the act of publicly bearing personal witness to God's action in your life.

You see, testimony isn't just about recounting events; it's about weaving together the tapestry of our faith community. When we open up and share our experiences, we create sacred spaces where authenticity and vulnerability flourish. It's like the apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 1:12, "that is, that you and I

may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

Sharing what we believe is a huge part of our faith. Throughout scripture, we hear the encouragement to tell of God's mighty acts, to point people to the Spirit's action in our lives, to share the stories of Jesus' ministry. Your testimony helps others watch for how God works in their own daily experiences. It invites them to consider for themselves what God might be up to. It preaches the gospel, the saving truth of Jesus, in a basic, accessible, meaningful way. Testimony is powerful!

And here's the beautiful thing: Testimony isn't just for those that we think are more spiritual or faithful than we are. It's for all of us – the doubters, the seekers, and the steadfast alike. Because no matter where we are on our journey, our stories matter.

They remind us of God's grace and love, which knows no bounds. As it says in Psalm 107:2, "Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story." Our testimonies are a testament to God's faithfulness and a beacon of hope for others.

So, let's try sharing our stories. Whether it's over coffee with a friend or in the pews on Sunday morning, let's open our hearts and listen to each other. Because in those moments of vulnerability and authenticity, we catch glimpses of God at work in our midst.

Additionally, I'd like you all to be thinking about stories in your own life where God showed up and consider sharing them briefly (2-4 min) with our entire Balsam family during a worship service in the Easter Season (April and early May). Our scripture readings then will be talking to us about the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church and I'd love for us to learn together how God is still working in each of us as the church here and now. Prayerfully consider if this is something God's Spirit might be putting on your heart.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Laurie

Balsam Lutheran Church

Unapproved Minutes of the Annual Meeting

February 4, 2024

Call to Order, Opening Prayer/Liturgy,
Introduction

Steve Frederickson, church council president, called the annual meeting to order at 11:17 AM. Pastor Laurie Kenyon Woods opened with a prayer. With 38 plus voting members in attendance a quorum was determined. Voting members are required to commune and make a financial contribution at least once per year.

Minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting
The verbal reading of the 2023 annual meeting minutes were waived. There being no comments, questions, or corrections to these minutes a motion was made by Betty Collins to accept the minutes as printed, a second was made by Charlie Cran. Motion passed.

Reports

Standing Committees - Steve Frederickson mentioned that reports from all standing committees are included in the annual meeting booklet. There was no additional discussion regarding the reports and standing committees.

Council Report – Steve Frederickson reviewed the council report that is in the annual meeting booklet. He expressed his Thanks to the many people who do work for the church and the outside community. May people do considerable work within the church but also people do work “outside the box” of the church for people and groups that need help. Groups such as WELCA, Social Ministry, and Backpack help make an impression in the outside community that Balsam Lutheran Church is a very giving church. Steve also expressed his Thanks to Pastor Laurie, Adam, and Peter for their hard work and presence in our church over the past year.

Pastors Report – Pastor Laurie reviewed the pastors report that is in the annual meeting booklet. Pastor Laurie Thanked

and commented that her transition to being a full-time mother in addition to a full-time pastor was made easier by all the help she received from the Balsam Lutheran congregation.

Old Business

Congregational committees and revivals – Steve Frederickson said the church council is looking into.

Constitution and by-laws revision – Steve Frederickson said updates are needed and church council will be looking into.

Church use updates – Steve Frederickson said updates are needed especially in areas where the church and pastor receive income such as funerals and weddings. Church council will be reviewing.

Other – no comments

New Business

Appointment of tellers – Sue Fougner and Char Swenson were appointed as tellers.

Council Elections – Gail Peterson, Ruth Hart, and Charlie Cran were elected to serve a three-year term on the council. This was done by a write-in vote by the congregation.

Cemetery Board – a motion was made by Bob LaBathe to elect Mike Morel, Linda Peterson, and Steve Frederickson to serve a three-year term and to elect Ryan Moltzer to replace Alan Moltzer as cemetery board president. Charlie Cran seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Financial Updates and Budget

Proposals – Vickie Hammer reviewed the Balsam Lutheran Church loans (page 15 of annual meeting booklet). She mentioned that the Bremer mortgage loan was down to zero as of 3-16-23. This is due to many donations made to the church to reduce this debt. She also reviewed the Memorial Fund Giving for 2023 (page 15 of annual meeting booklet).

She also reviewed the church checking and savings account and that the CD holding Margurete E. Memorial Funds earned \$2800.

Gail Peterson covered the general fund (page 18 of annual meeting booklet), In & Out Accounts (page 23 of annual meeting booklet), 2023 Expense Summary (page 19 of annual meeting booklet), and the 2024 Budget (page 24 of annual meeting booklet). Gail discussed the following areas that have been budgeted for an increase in 2024:

Line 46 Accounting – this is not an increase but rather a new line to identify outside accounting expense.

Line 51 Pastor – pastor salary has increased due to years of service.

Line 53 Social Security Allowance Pastor – increases along with pastor salary.

Line 54 Pension and Health – increases along with pastor salary.

Line 58 Audio/Visual Tech – the church is looking for help to operate the audio/visual equipment when Brad Fougner is not available to do so. Brad has indicated he does not want to be paid but does want to have someone available that can replace him when necessary. These funds will be used to pay that person along with Brad if needed.

Line 61 Organist/Pianist – in 2023 the church council approved increased pay for these services.

Line 63 Janitorial Service – increase in pay for this in-house service.

Line 65 Financial Secretary – increase in pay for this in-house service.

Line 66 Treasurer - increase in pay for this in-house service.

Line 68 Conv. Delegates, Pastor & Offering – increased travel expenses due to the Synod convention this year will be two days instead of the typical one day.

Line 72 Repair and Maintenance – as the church ages expenses continue to go up in regards to building maintenance, repair, and upkeep.

Line 75 Ins. & Workmen's Comp - increases along with pastor salary.

Line 76 Property Taxes & Licenses – increase due to an increase in the Serve Safe Certification license.

A motion was made by Bob LaBathe to accept the 2024 proposed budget. Betty Collins seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Memorial Updates – need for approval on one project:

Steve Frederickson explained all the work that the Memorial Committee and the Church Council has done in regards to the use of the remaining Marguerite E.

Hallquist Memorial Funds. Steve explained that 16 projects were submitted and that there are many different opinions that had to be considered. Additionally, he explained the spending parameters the council has been using to approve projects (Memorial Committee Annual Report, 2023). Steve reviewed the following projects from the Memorial Committee Annual Report, 2023

1 Scholarship program in memory of Marge. Approved and in process.

2 Soundproofing (glass windows and doors) between sanctuary and fellowship area. Brad Fougner brought up that noise bouncing insulators may also be needed. This project is over \$20,000 so it requires a vote by the congregation. Mike Morel made a motion to approve this project. Ruth Hart seconded the motion. Motion passed.

3 Replace/upgrade kitchen sink and faucets. Approved and in process.

5 New bathroom stalls and update. Approved and in process.

6 Replace chairs in fellowship area. Approved and in process.

9 Pave the parking lot. Bob LaBathe covered the expense and upkeep of paving the parking lot.

This project is not approved.

13 Construct a pavilion in the park. Approved.

Delegates to Synod – Bonnie Corcoran, Ruth Hart, and Pastor Laurie have volunteered to go the Synod Convention. Elim will send their own delegates. Bob LaBathe made a motion to approve sending them to the convention. Betty Collins seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Betty Collins made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Bob LaBathe seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Pastor Laurie closed with a prayer.

Respectfully Submitted, Jon Karsten,
Church Council Secretary

Balsam Lutheran Church

Unapproved Minutes of the Church Council Meeting

February 11, 2024

In Attendance: Pastor Laurie Kenyon Woods, Jon Karsten, Ruth Hart, Steve Fredrickson, Bob LaBathe, Gail Peterson, Bruce Hammer, Charles Cran
Steve Fredrickson led in devotions.

The following people were nominated and confirmed three times to serve the following positions for one year.

Steve Frederickson – President

Mike Christensen – Vice President

Jon Karsten – Secretary

Gail Peterson – Treasurer

Vicki Hammer - Financial Secretary

Secretary's Report: A motion was made and seconded to accept the January 2024 secretary's report. Motion passed.

Treasurer's Report: January 2024 General Fund ending balance = \$46,457.69. January offerings were good. Paid for new furnace. We need to review pastor miscellaneous expenses for billing to Elim. A motion was made and seconded to accept the January 2024 treasurer's report as presented. Motion passed.

Pastors Report: January busy with new members, a baptism, annual meeting, and a funeral at Elim.

Attending Winter Theological where pastors meet to learn and share ideas. Apple River Conference Assembly will be nominating two people for bishop. In April and May would like to have some members give testimony of how God has shown up in their lives. Confirmation is May 19th. We will have 5 or 6 being confirmed. Synod is June 7th and 8th. Pastor will be attending the ordination of her husband Adam in Green Bay.

Committee Reports:

Social Ministry – will be setting date for rummage sale.

Worship and Music – communion is every week during Lent. There was a question on having the Easter breakfast. It was felt we should have it. Bob is looking into.

Other – WELCA is working on spring salad luncheon.

Old Business:

Other – Lenten Supper will be February 28th (served by the council) and March 13th (served by Social Ministry Committee).

New Business:

Church use updating – Pastor Laurie, Gail, and Ruth will review. Church bylaws will be reviewed at a later time

June date for Malawi project – this is to drill water wells. We need to approve the donation by end of June. We will ask the congregation, and may involve other churches, to make specific donations to this cause. Memorial Committee will match.

Memorial projects – motion was made and seconded to proceed with the kitchen sink project not to exceed \$6000. Motion passed.

Another motion was made and seconded to proceed with the bathroom project not to exceed \$12,000. Motion passed.

There being no other business, a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed. Council reviewed member and neighborhood prayer concerns. Council closed with the Lord's Prayer.

Respectfully Submitted, Jon Karsten,
Church Council Secretary.

Financially Speaking

Our general fund balance has held steady through January and February. The fund balance as of February 29, 2024 is \$46,091.76. Your generosity helped to maintain this balance while also paying for a new furnace and some hefty insurance premiums.

We have started the bathroom remodeling using funds from the generous gift we received from Marge Hallquist's estate. Even though the plan is to work on only one set of bathrooms at a time, we may have some interruptions to access. Please look for signage regarding access

to the bathrooms. The glass wall and doors project for the back of the sanctuary will be starting soon.

As always, we ask that you please prayerfully continue your generous contributions to our general fund and special projects. All is so much appreciated.

In Christ,
Gail Peterson, Treasurer

Balsam Lutheran Gives Big

WOW! Balsam Lutheran members have big, generous hearts! Below, you will find the 2023 totals of our giving to a wide range of organizations—local to worldwide. These donations were made as a budgeted general fund expense, from Social Ministry funds, from WELCA funds, from Youth/Sunday School funds, and from designated member donations.

Northwest Synod of WI	\$1200
Luther Point Bible Camp	\$1500
Lutheran Social Services	300
Missionary Support	1000
World Hunger	1250
ELCA Disaster Relief	800
Lutheran World Relief	200
Polk County Salvation Army	1800
Amery Area Food Pantry	1350
Interfaith Caregivers	1000
Community Referral Agency	200
Northwoods Homeless Coalition	800
Compassion International	486

This list does not include all the supply donations made for school kits, World Relief quilts, personal care products for the backpack program, door prizes, bake sale items, food for our many congregational meals (funeral lunches, Lenten soup suppers, Easter Breakfast, WELCA Spring Luncheon, Baked Potato

Supper, and Fall Dinner), and many other donations made by our members.

Let's keep up the good work and giving in 2024!



Thank you for always supporting this Community Radio Station, WPCA. This is the only community public radio in Polk County, and it is only able to continue with the support of our business communities, and the more than 100 individuals who pledge twice during the year. We appreciate that you have always recognized the value of community radio to our city and county. Thanks again for your support.

Bob Zank,
General Manager, WPCA

March "Birth" days	
09 Mary Peterson	18 Brady Kobernick
10 Norman Fougner	20 Lisa Duden
11 Vivian Moltzer	22 Aricka Stream
13 Carlene Swanson	30 Brayden Miller
	31 Janice Petersen

WELCA Meeting Minutes

February 2, 2024

Officers for the coming year: Bonnie - president; Sue A. - vice president
Ruth H. – secretary; Vicki - treasurer

We discussed upcoming events - April 13 Apple River Conference spring meeting at Deronda Lutheran Church
April 24-26 Feed My Starving Children at the Polk County Fairgrounds

We worked on plans for the spring salad luncheon, especially setting a date and getting a speaker. April 6 was chosen. Sue A. will look at speakers. Meeting was adjourned.

February 9, 2024

A brief meeting was held to address concerns over the April salad luncheon date being immediately after Easter. It was decided to check with social ministry to see if the rummage sale could be the second week in May so the luncheon could be set for May 4.

(They later agreed, so the date of the salad luncheon would now be May 4) Sue A. would check with Sue Saarem to see if she was available to speak on that date.

The next meeting will be February 25. Meeting was adjourned.

February 25, 2024

We fine-tuned the spring salad luncheon plans including:

Times - registration 10-10:30

Program at 10:30 with lunch to follow

Sue Saarem will be our speaker.

Poster will need a quilt picture as soon as it's delivered.

We discussed other raffle items, including a table runner (two?), and baskets.

We went over the assignment list with suggestions and substitutions made.

Bonnie suggested the group doing personal care kits. She will look into possible Thrivent money to help with that.

Feed my starving Children is in April. We need more info and talked about making a contribution.

(All the notes) Respectfully submitted, Ruth Hart, secretary

Christmas Message from Bishop Laurie

***Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed.
Alleluia!***



The gospel of Mark begins with this verse, Mark 1:1, *The beginning of the good news^[a] of Jesus Christ*. Then it ends with an incomplete sentence¹. Mark's Easter Story ends with an incomplete sentence. What was the editor thinking? Where are the punctuation police when you need them?

Look at it for yourself. Mark 16:8 in Greek και ἐξεληθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, εἶχεν ἰγὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν, ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ

See, it ends with the word “*gar*” which can be translated “*for or because.*” Why did the writer of Mark end the gospel with the word “*because?*” Word-for-word the last part of the verse reads *to none nothing they spoke they were afraid because*

So just to be clear, the purpose of the gospel of Mark is to tell the good news of Jesus Christ and then it ends with an empty tomb and the only witnesses to it

¹ McCoy and Fistler, Pulpit Fiction Podcast #540, Easter 2023

run away in fear saying nothing to anyone because...

It should be noted there is no punctuation in the original Greek and we can of course rearrange the English words and make a sentence, but still the incompleteness of the Greek sentence, abrupt ending and the incompleteness of story itself are telling.²

Matthew, Luke and John end their Easter story with Jesus appearing to the disciples after the resurrection. These gospels end with proof of the resurrection that others see with their own eyes and some even touch Jesus. Mark has no proof of the resurrection. He doesn't even finish his last sentence.

Mark 1 was intended to be just **the beginning** of the story of the good news of Jesus. It can't be completely recorded with paper and pen because it is still being written in the lives of the believers today. Friends, the story of Easter didn't end with the frightened women. If it did we wouldn't be here today. Some of Mark's Easter story will be written by your life, my life, our witness to the empty tomb and the transforming power of God love in our life. The rest of the story will be written by those who come after us and whose lives bear witness to God's power to transform

death to life. We are proof of the resurrection. Our lives transformed by the power of God's love and forgiveness are proof that Jesus rose from the dead. We are writing new verses and chapters for Mark's gospel, so that the next generation will come to know and love Jesus and all generations will experience God's grace.

Rev. Laurie Stan. O'Brien

Mark 16 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴ When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵ As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. ⁶ But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

² Mark has two alternative endings (Mark 16:9-20) which many biblical scholars believe were added at a much later date by those who couldn't tolerate ending with an incomplete sentence!

³ Image by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay