

**Balsam Lutheran Church**  
1115 Mains Crossing Avenue  
Amery, WI 54001

## **Address Service Requested**

**Kindermass will be on April 13.**  
**Maundy Thursday worship at Balsam, 7:00**  
**Good Friday worship at Balsam, 3:00**  
**Good Friday worship at Elim, 7:00**  
**Easter Worship, usual times**

**Rummage Sale May 1 and 2**

# THE BALSAM BRANCH

April & May 2025

## Balsam Lutheran Church

1115 Mains Crossing  
Amery, Wisconsin 54001

Pastor Laurie Kenyon Woods



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Dear church family,

When a lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29), he isn't just making small talk. He's looking for a definition—some clear boundaries around who counts and who doesn't. But Jesus, as he often does, doesn't give a straightforward answer. Instead, he tells a story.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the people you'd expect to help—good church folk—walk past a wounded man on the road. It's the Samaritan, the outsider, who stops, bandages his wounds, and makes sure he gets the care he needs. Then Jesus flips the question back on the lawyer: Who was a neighbor to the man in need?

Jesus refuses to put limits on love. Being a neighbor isn't about proximity—it's about compassion. And compassion has no borders.

This question, "who is my neighbor?", is one that many of us still struggle to answer even. Too often, we let lines—national, political, ideological—determine who we think deserves our help. But the Samaritan's kindness wasn't restricted by boundaries or social divisions. He didn't stop to ask if the injured man was his kind of person. He simply saw someone in need and responded with love.

So, who is our neighbor? The unhoused person on the street. The refugee seeking safety. The hungry children on the other side of the world. The person we don't see eye to eye with. The ones we tend to overlook. To love our neighbor is to expand our circle of care, to step beyond what feels comfortable, and to show mercy, no matter what barriers the world tries to put in place.

The real question isn't who is our neighbor—it's how we are called to be

one. And Jesus makes it clear: "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

Join me in repeating this prayer again and again until it is inscribed on our hearts: God of boundless love, open my heart to see our neighbors the way you do. Break down the walls I build, and help me love without limits. Amen.

Blessings,  
Pastor Laurie

## **Balsam Lutheran Church**

*Unapproved Minutes of the Church Council*  
March 9, 2025

**In Attendance:** Mike Christensen, Bruce Hammer, Pastor Laurie, Barb Friese, Bob LaBathe, Charlie Cran, Craig Olson, Ruth Hart  
Absent -Taunya Kobernick

The meeting was called to order. Gail Peterson led devotions.

### **Secretary's Report:**

a motion was made and seconded to approve the February secretary's report with no changes. Motion carried.

### **Treasurer's Report:**

a motion was made and seconded to approve the February treasurer's report as printed. Motion carried.

### **Pastor's Report:**

It has been a month of preparing for Ash Wednesday and Lenten services. Pastor led a prayer memorial service for a nonmember at a local funeral home on March 7.

Our church is hosting the Apple River Pastors' Conference in April. Pastor Laurie will be handling the meal. The bishop will be attending.

### **Committee Reports:**

**Adult Ed.** now back on schedule after a few disruptions

**Finance** - will be meeting

**Property** - Water run-off needs to be diverted in back of the church. We will be getting a couple loads of trap rock for the driveway. Electric will be trenched from the church to the park, with a turn off switch located at the church. Some of the front shrubs will be torn out and replaced this spring.

**Social ministry** - the spring rummage sale is May 1 & 2, Thursday and Friday.

**Staff** - will be meeting the last Sunday of March.

**Worship and music** - there will be two Good Friday services, Elim and Balsam both.

**Youth Ed.** - are planning for Kindermass on Palm Sunday. First communion for two youths will be on Maundy Thursday. The youth will be hosting the Easter breakfast.

### **Old Business:**

Variety show/baked potato feed went very well and \$629 was added to the social ministry fund.

Annual meeting minutes were distributed and a motion was made by Gail, seconded by Charlie to approve. Motion passed.

Turn up the heat will continue until the end of March. Gail noted that it really helps defray winter expenses.

Outdoor worship - the goal is to have 4 services in the summer. There would probably be a regular service at Elim,

and the outdoor at Balsam, so people could choose which to attend.

### **New Business:**

Soup supper schedule is organized and ready to go.

Council installation will be March 23.

Ruth asked about the possibility of having some Bibles in the pews. Pastor said there are some made just for that purpose and she will check into it.

Gail discussed moving away from Bremer bank. Since they are changing hands, it would be a good time. She checked locally with Pillar and Westconsin to get info on their approach to nonprofit groups.

The Laker ad should include info on our outdoor services.

There being no other business, a motion to adjourn was made by Bob, seconded by Gail. Motion carried

Respectfully submitted,  
Ruth Hart, council secretary

## **Financially Speaking**

Our general fund balance remains healthy despite some increased expenses early this year. The general fund balance as of March 24, 2025 is \$44,226.84. (There is a 5th Sunday this month so there will be another offering added.) Thank you so much for your continued generosity in supporting Balsam Lutheran.

The Finance committee met on March 23 to discuss funding for the completion of the new pavilion in our church park. This includes funds for running electricity with lights and outlets to the pavilion, and a storage shed for tables and chairs. The committee will be recommending using undesignated and Hallquist memorial funds to complete this project.

The finance committee also discussed the status of our banking needs. Bremer Bank has been sold to Old National Bank. We no longer have a mortgage that holds us to Bremer Bank and have encountered some issues working with Bremer. The committee will recommend to the council that we begin the process of moving our checking, savings and CD's to Westconsin Credit Union. If approved by the council, Vicki and Gail will meet with Westconsin as well as Bremer to begin the process. The recommendation will only be for the church accounts and will not require other church groups with Bremer accounts to make a change.

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

### April "Birth" days

01 Marlys Kromrey	24 Tammy Olson
02 Caressa Fougner	25 Sue Albright
03 Ashton Duden	25 Jean Pearson
08 Lisa Markee	27 Eileen Markee
11 Janet Cran	28 Nancy Bottolfson
15 Michelle Stone	29 Jane Olson
16 Amie Costello	29 Dianna Nelson
24 Bonnie Corcoran	

### May "Birth" days

08 Kinsley Kobernick	27 Sarah Moltzer
12 Tyler Wirth	29 Taunya Kobernick
13 Karen Ford	30 Susan McElfresh
17 Steve Frederickson	

### Apple River WELCA

Apple River WELCA offers "Spring into Life" on Saturday, April 12. Registration at 8:00, program at 9:00, lunch at noon. The theme is LOVE MERCY. The guest speaker, Gail Lando, is part of a team of anti-racist educators for the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin. Registration and lunch are \$15. Please put your check or name in the envelope to be mailed in, due April 5.

### Social Ministry Rummage Sale

Our annual rummage sale will be held the afternoon of Thursday, May 1 and all day on Friday, May 2. The BBQ dinner will be available on Friday only. We will have coffee and treats available on Thursday afternoon.

Many of you have already purged your closets, dressers, and storage areas. As a result, our back conference room is very full of donations. We have started to sort through the donations using the library to open more space for future donations.

Requests from the sorting team:

1. Put your donations in the conference room not the library. There are reminder signs on the doors.
2. Please label your boxes, containers, and bags with the contents. It really speeds up the sorting process. Please label any container that you would like to be returned to you.
3. Please make sure items are clean and in good condition. We really don't have time to wash things.
4. We will need boxes for packing up the remaining items for donation at the end of the sale on Friday.

Thanks so much.

Social Ministry Committee

### Easter Message From Bishop Martin

I can still remember the pound of my heart to this day. It was Good Friday in the year 1995. I was working at Lutherdale Bible Camp as a year round staff and my task that day was to dismantle the several hundred foot zipline. It was a warm spring day, but I still experienced the wind that caused the tree that I was attached to to sway far more than I wanted it to. The tree

itself was dying and thus it could no longer serve as the anchor of the zipline where the platform was. It was on that platform where youth and staff alike would find themselves transferring the rabbit ears attached to their harness to the zipline that would lead to the ensuing rush of emotions. As I stood on that platform, connected to a couple of tree staples with my own rabbit ears, I loosened the hardware that secured the zipline cable to the tree, bolt by bolt. It was quite a surreal experience.

As I loosened the final bolt, that cable released about a foot away from my face, causing my heart to beat in a way it has never beaten before or since. The sound haunted me for those few seconds as the cable fell to the ground about 40 feet below. Once I collected myself, all I could think about was how appropriate it was to watch the death of the zipline on Good Friday. That element was always the climax on the high ropes course. It was the final adventure for countless youth as they experienced the challenges of that course. Just step off the platform, trust, and fly!

I was saddened to see that zipline fall. But then I was overjoyed to see it rebuilt in a new and more secure location! It reminds me of that great Easter spiritual that states, "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming." It's the reminder that we call it Good Friday only because as Christian believers, we know that Easter is coming. Without Easter Sunday, Friday would have been even more devastating as it already was. Jesus' followers were

lost, confused, and in deep sorrow. Those emotions resulted from the trauma that they were experiencing. But Easter reversed the pain of that trauma and turned it into a joyous chorus of "Alleluias" where we can now see God's almighty power being revealed! We can see how God has power over death itself and not just for Jesus. God's power to give life to all believers in all times and in all places through the death and resurrection of Jesus is what brings us joy, hope, comfort, and faith itself! God's power to renew our lives each and every day through the gift of forgiveness cannot be understated. God's desire to heal our broken relationship because of our sinfulness indicates the depth of that love, knowing that God so desperately desires to be with us forever.

That old zipline was a source of joy for so many people. But when contrasted with the joy we can experience daily, it simply pales in comparison. Friends, live into that joy of the resurrection. Remember the gift that Jesus embodies that is truly the greatest gift we've ever had - the gift of God's unconditional love. Despite the various losses that we grieve each year, some that appear to be quite unbearable at the time, remember the gift of Jesus. We are a resurrection church. We are a forgiven and forgiving people. And we bask in the glory of God's amazing grace.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!  
Alleluia!

Bishop Martin