

# St. Wenceslaus Parish

8500 E. Kolarik Rd., Suttons Bay, MI 49682  
(231) 271-3574

9 February, 2026

Bishop Jeffrey J. Walsh  
Office of the Bishop  
Diocese of Gaylord  
611 W. North Street,  
Gaylord, MI 49735

Dear Bishop Walsh:

Pursuant to the release of the new Diocesan plan, we have received a large volume of calls, texts, e-mails, and personal communications regarding the proposed conversion of St. Wenceslaus Parish to a limited-use church facility. Admittedly, we all were quite surprised by this decision, thinking that we have maintained a strong, vibrant, self-sustaining parish since its inception over a century ago. As Parish Council, it is our duty and responsibility to respond to these concerns to the best of our ability. Consequently, we are providing here an overview of what we believe are some of the critical services that our current parish provides.

1. The congregation of St. Wenceslaus Church has remained viable since the founding of the church. For example: Despite a 54% decrease in Catholics living in Leelanau County from 2010 to 2020, **St. Wenceslaus continues to grow**, albeit at a small rate, which reflects its rural population pool of potential members (see attached graph). *“Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide...”* (Isaiah 54:2-3)
  - St. Wenceslaus serves an estimated 12% of Leelanau County’s total Catholic population, and likely a far higher percentage of its practicing Catholics.
  - People continue to come to our church because it is the quintessential example of how a Catholic church should be. They come by choice, not because of force or parish boundaries. So many parishioners have remarked at the uniqueness of our parish. We are more than a congregation – we are a vibrant Catholic community.
  - Seasonal workers and visitors greatly expand our congregation in the summer
  - In addition, our video outreach program of streamed masses continues to gain viewers (e.g., 179 views for the Jan. 10/11 weekend masses; data not available for other January 2026 dates). Considering 44 total viewers for January 14-15, 2023, our recent data indicate a 307% increase in viewership over the past 3 years; we have estimated a roughly 616% increase in viewership since 2022!
  - For the past two years we have maintained a fully functional website, which is updated weekly. We do this at a cost averaging less than \$50 per year. All of our IT support is provided voluntarily.

*“See, I give every seed-bearing plant all over the earth  
and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food.”*

-Genesis 1:29

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## 2. We are and have always been **Financially stable**.

- Our congregation donates generously and willingly. *"... give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7)*
- St. Wenceslaus has never experienced any financial problems throughout the history of the parish.
- We currently hold over \$500K in financial cash (non-property) assets. We have no unpaid or outstanding bills.
- We have no problem being able to tithe 10% of our collections to support diverse needy programs locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. This figure routinely exceeds \$10K annually.
- Each year we provide financial support to St. Mary's Parochial School Program. This amount ranges from \$10-15,000 annually.
- We always have met/exceeded our CSA goal. In the past year, our goal was exceeded by \$8000.
- We already have processed \$9800 in pass-through funds in past 6 months alone.
- We continue to maintain our buildings in excellent condition.
- Despite acquiring extra costs associated with paying the salary of Fr. Class, we still have not gone into the red. Our parishioner support is so dedicated, that our congregation always has been willing to contribute as much as necessary to maintain our services.
- We annually raise our own funds by hosting a chicken dinner each year, which serves the greater community.
- We maintain an adjacent Rectory.
- We keep a well-maintained cemetery and grounds, for which roughly \$4000 is dedicated annually for upkeep out of the general operating fund rather than relying on our savings.

## 3. We have made great strides in **fostering support and encouragement to our local Hispanic community**, which has touted us for their warm, welcome inclusion. *"God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation."* Acts 10:34-35)

- We have welcomed and incorporated our Hispanic parishioners into various church roles including Cantor, Organist (Music Director), Parish Council membership, and Ushering. We currently have two Hispanic students preparing for Confirmation.
- We sponsored an inspirational, special Our Lady of Guadalupe celebration this past year.
- The Hispanic congregational members are truly incorporated into our parish community, and represent integral, much appreciated volunteers for our annual chicken dinner and other parish functions. Many of them have found the parish to be so welcoming, that they travel extensive distances to come here, in some cases exceeding 45 miles each way.

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4. We are **welcoming to all visitors**. We provide support systems for the grieving, lonely, etc. We bring communion to shut-ins. *“Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.”* (Romans 15:7)
  - Our congeniality is cited often as a major reason why people have joined our parish rather than other local options.
  
5. In sharp contrast to what is normally a less than 10% figure, nearly **75% of our congregation serves** in some volunteer capacity. *“Let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth.”* (1 John 3:18)
  - We maintain a full roster of choir members, ushers, eucharistic ministers, youth altar servers, etc. for two weekend masses.
  - Our many volunteers are instrumental in keeping our costs down. We have extraordinary community volunteer support for our maintenance, our liturgy, and parish events.
  - Our parish includes a diverse volunteer expertise in fields such as finances, carpentry, information technology, electrical, snow and lawn maintenance, etc.
  
6. Our Parish has deep historical ties to the local community
  - Both the church and cemetery are registered as a State of Michigan Historical site.
  - Numerous articles about our parish and its parishioners have appeared in various regional newspapers.
  - We represent a unique site that constantly attracts visitors (e.g., to see the grave of an Austrian Archduke and his wife, who are buried in our cemetery). These visitors often go on to visit our church, sometimes being enticed to attend services there, some eventually becoming parish members.
  - An extensive overview of our church history is available publicly on our website (<https://stwenceslausgp.org/History.html>)

In closing, the Eucharist (and Mass) serve to provide the cornerstones of faith in our community. Any disruption to these services would result in a large alienation of our older parishioners (who cannot travel greater distances each week, especially in our challenging winter conditions), as well as instilling a great sense of discouragement throughout our steadfast, faithful congregation. We would completely lose our internet outreach audience as well. Unlike many, smaller, rural churches, we have continued to maintain a strong, functional community, with people who look forward to attending mass each week and socializing with their Christian brothers and sisters. Surely, we are all hoping to see if there is any way for you to change your mind, and would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss with you the reasons for your decision.

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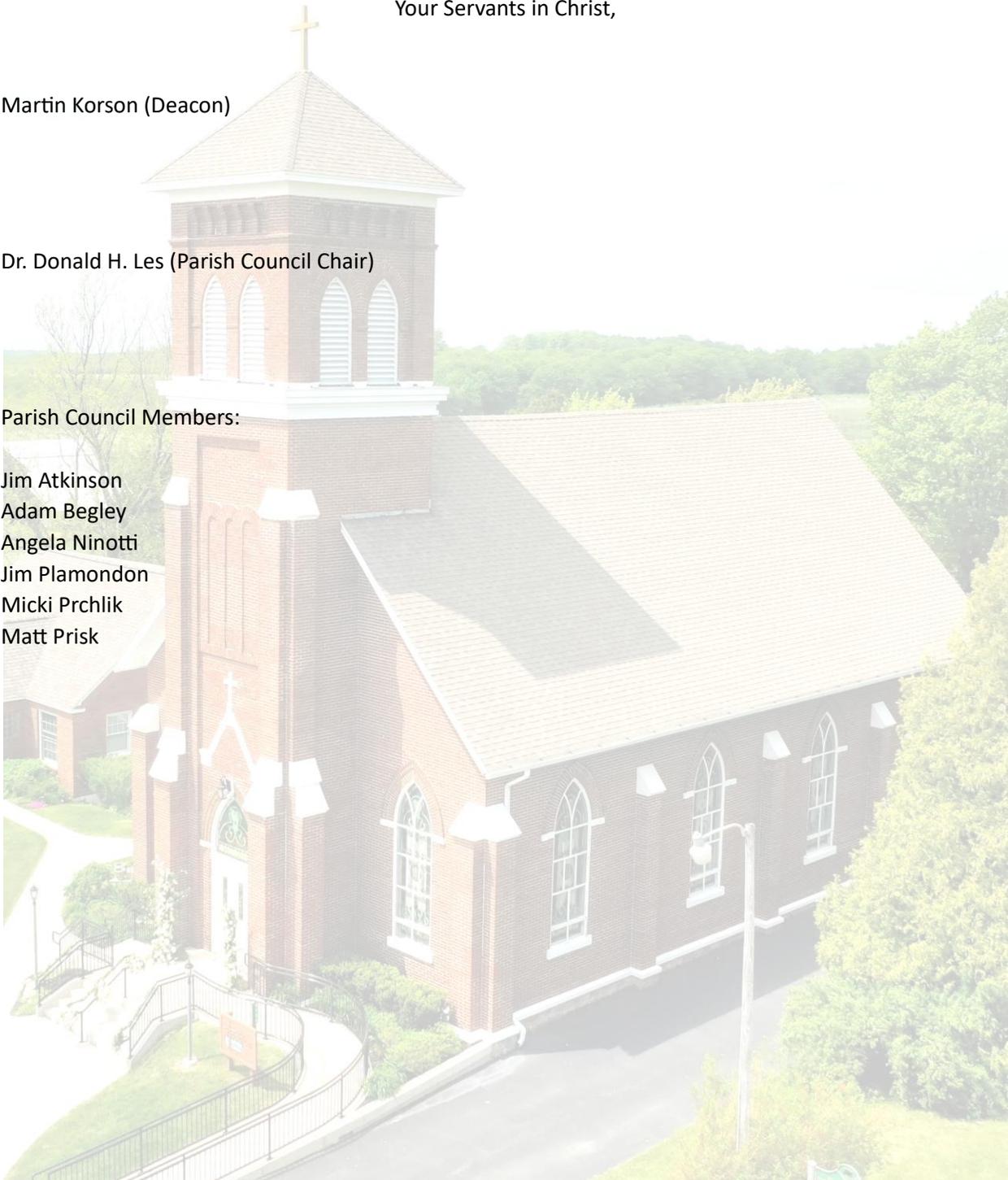
Your Servants in Christ,

Martin Korson (Deacon)

Dr. Donald H. Les (Parish Council Chair)

Parish Council Members:

Jim Atkinson  
Adam Begley  
Angela Ninotti  
Jim Plamondon  
Micki Prchlik  
Matt Prisk



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