

# CONFERENCE REPORTS

## Blair-Huntingdon Conference

2022

In the summer of 2021, the Blair Huntingdon Conference resumed monthly gatherings for rostered ministers, both those actively serving and retired, by taking advantage of several of our beautiful local parks to meet outside. We also endeavored to lower our covid risk by meeting for weekly text study at coffee shops and restaurants with outdoor seating during the months that the weather permitted.

Early in the fall, some of our church buildings as well as the properties of members and their neighbors suffered storm damage associated with Hurricane Ida. Thanks to the Synod's initiative of several years ago and Bethany Altoona's administration of materials, we were able provide flood buckets to assist with the clean-up efforts.

We were blessed to have Pastor Anamae Storbeck (retired) join our conference for a brief time over this past year. Anamae is originally from Morrisons Cove and spent part of this year with family here in our area before returning to Texas.

In October, we celebrated the ordination of Pastor Marty Jo Stellabotte, who was called to Geeseytown Newry Parish. Marty Jo served the Synod in a variety of roles before earning her MDiv at United Lutheran Seminary, and we were delighted to welcome her back to the area full-time in her new call.

All Saints Day marked the final service of Altoona's Simpson Temple congregation, a cooperative ministry between the Lutheran and Methodist denominations. Pastor Drew McCaffery accompanied the congregation through their discernment. The facility continues to

benefit the community through its new administrator, ArtsAltoona.

This fall representatives of several of our congregations in Huntingdon County met with area UCC congregations to explore the possibility of cooperative ministry. With a number of our conference churches lacking regular pastoral leadership, our congregations with active clergy worked together to invite our neighboring congregations to Christmas services.

In February, we gathered for a farewell party for Pastor Karen Ward who moved to Upper Susquehanna Synod to serve Trinity Lutheran Church in McAlisterville. Karen was the former dean of the Blair Huntingdon conference, Synod Council member, and vital part of the Synod's youth team; she served several churches in regular, interim, and vacancy positions in both Blair and Bedford counties.

Our conference pastors continue to meet most months to share information and concerns, and our text study group meets almost every week to consider the lectionary texts for the upcoming Sunday. Our clergy and congregations collaborate in the areas of youth programming and confirmation, community outreach, and ecumenical cooperation in local ministerium projects. We look forward to another year of service in the geographic heart of the Synod.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Traci A. Marriott  
Dean, Blair Huntingdon Conference

## Clearfield Conference

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The Clearfield Conference includes eleven congregations, nine of which are in parish partnerships. The rostered leaders are: The Reverends Amy Godshall Miller and John Miller (Christ, DuBois), The Rev Robert Way (St. John, Clearfield), The Rev Christine Roe (First Faith Lutheran Cooperative) and The Rev Vicki Beilfuss (Holy Shepherd Parish).

Bob Way also serves as the vacancy pastor for St. Peter, Luthersburg, and St. John, Rockton. The communities in Olanta, Grace and Salem, are served by Authorized Lay Minister, Richard Sternagle.

The youth groups of Christ are back in action. Pastors Amy & John Miller have rescheduled the Israel trip for a third time in the Spring of 2023. The people of Christ have continued to actively support their community through the DuBois Food Pantry. All regular worship and activities are back.

First Evangelical's All God's Animals Pet Pantry in Philipsburg celebrates their third year of its opening this summer and serves pet owners ages 55+. They have served up to 51 pets in a month's time and could always use help keeping the pantry stocked. New Creation Preschool of

Faith United reopened in September 2021 and meets four times a week with 10 students.

St. John has returned to in person worship with communion and song. Outside groups are back to using the building four nights a week. Their fundraiser for Operation Christmas Child was very successful.

The congregations of Holy Shepherd parish worship indoors and in person Christian education for all ages has returned. Worship outside with the car radio is still available and will continue to do so, so long as there are folks wanting to use this option. Shepherd of the Hills Preschool has 13 students this school year and still fills a vital need in the area. Holy Trinity will finally begin work on their new prayer garden.

We look forward to another year of continued ministry in our corner of the world and beyond.

Respectfully submitted,

Vicki Beilfuss  
Clearfield Conference Dean

## Johnstown Conference

Greetings in the name of Christ,

The Johnstown Lutheran Pastors Conference encompasses all the congregations in Cambria County and two congregations that abut Cambria County but that are in Somerset County.

Currently the conference has nine called pastors, a part-time associate pastor, one covenant pastor, one congregation with a called interim pastor, and three congregations covered by either Lay Worship Assistants or a Seminary Student. The Johnstown Conference greatly appreciates the support of the retired pastors in the area who offer their time to supply when there are vacations or other needs in the congregations.

During the fall of 2020, the months of 2021 and the first quarter of 2022:

- Pastor Mark W. Fischer of 1st Lutheran Church, Portage was chosen as the Dean of the Johnstown Conference in November of 2020 and he was elected to continue serving as Dean of the Johnstown Conference at the Spring 2022 Conference Caucus Meeting.
- The Conference celebrated the ordination of Rev. Rebecca West to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament on January 30, 2021. Pastor West serves as pastor at Moxham Lutheran Church. Pastor West's ordination was held outside in the parking lot of Moxham Lutheran Church due to COVID-19 protocols and that day was one of the coldest days in January, 2021. The members of Moxham were sitting

in the warmth of their cars while Bishop Rhyne and Pastors Ehrlich and Fischer were bundled in their vestments with sweaters, hats, scarves, and gloves.

- The Conference said good-bye to Pastor Ruth Jensen. Pastor Jensen had served as the pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Windber. She resigned her call at the end of September, 2021 to take a new call at Trinity Lutheran Church in Somerset County.
- The Conference has met most months during 2021 for pastoral conversation and support. The gatherings move around to the different churches.
- There are two Bible studies that pastors of the conference can participate. One is led by Pastor Toby Holland via ZOOM on Tuesdays. The second is hosted by Pastor Walter Startzel of First Lutheran Church, Johnstown on Wednesdays and is an in-person gathering.
- The conference welcomes Pastor Doug Knupp as Interim Pastor to Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Windber while Good Shepherd begins the process of calling a new pastor to shepherd their congregation.
- At the caucus meeting of the Johnstown Conference held March 24, 2022, Pastor Mark Fischer was elected to a 3-year term as Dean of the conference.

Respectfully submitted

Rev. Mark W. Fischer  
Dean, Johnstown Lutheran Pastors Conference

## Laurel Highlands Conference

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The ongoing pandemic has kept us from resuming all activity in full in the Laurel Highlands Conference. Our rostered leaders resumed in-person monthly gatherings for mutual support and worship. Our weekly text studies have been held on Zoom. We also resumed our tradition of gathering for an Advent party in December, which was held at Sequanota.

Faith, Somerset hosted the launch party for Grace Delivered in the fall of 2021. We gathered water to be delivered to the volunteer fire companies across our conference. The Grace Delivered board is hopeful that the conference congregations will plan events that utilize the trailer and tents that are available and that the conference will come together for board planned projects throughout the coming year.

We have collected personal care kits for Lutheran World Relief during the season of Lent 2022 to help meet the increased need due to the refugee crisis in Ukraine. The mission team from Friedens Lutheran Church is coordinating a special trip to deliver the collection to the distribution center in Maryland the week after Easter.

The conference will hold weekly prayer services for peace on Wednesdays through the season of Easter. Trinity, Somerset will host these services for any in the conference or community who wish to take time for prayer and reflection, particularly for peace in Ukraine and all nations in conflict.

We hold in prayer all of our congregations and rostered leaders who are in transition.

Since last year's report,

We bid farewell to Pastor Felicia Swartz, who received a new call in Southeastern Pennsylvania;

We bid farewell to Pastor Will Foster, who received a new call in Texas;

We welcomed Pastor Ruth Jensen to Trinity, Somerset; Pastor Doug Knupp, who had been serving as interim at Trinity, Somerset, transitioned to serving as interim at Good Shepherd, Windber;

Christ Trinity Parish welcomed Allen Stump, a student in the TEEM program, as Vicar.

The congregation of Trinity, Hooversville has made the decision to dissolve the congregation. They will hold a final worship service at the end of April 2022.

The congregation of Grace, Stoystown has begun the process of coming together with the congregation of Friedens. The work of this transition is expected to be ongoing for several months.

Submitted by Rev. Dena Gable, Dean

## Nittany Conference

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It feels to me as though COVID-19 has dictated how we operate as a conference for the last couple of years. The rostered ministers of the Nittany Conference continued to meet monthly via Zoom for prayer, support, and idea sharing as all our congregations and ministries navigated virtual and in-person worship during the pandemic.

When Pastor Paul Tomkiel's term as our Dean ended in 2020, I agreed to fill the role of Acting Dean through the Bishop transition. When I took a call in Bishop Paula's office, Deacon Alicia Anderson stepped into that role, and she was recently elected Dean at the Nittany Conference Spring Caucus.

There have been a few pastoral transitions during the pandemic. Pastor Laretta Dietrich has been serving the Spring Mills Lutheran Parish for just over a year. Pastor Curt Wingert took a new call in the Upper Susquehanna Synod. Vicar Ted Williams, who had been on internship with Trinity Lutheran in State College, is now serving as the transitional minister at St. Mark Lutheran in Pleasant Gap.

I give thanks for my colleagues in the Nittany Conference and the ministry we have shared.

In the peace of Christ,  
The Rev. Kevin Shock, Former Acting Dean