

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

Volume 20, Issue 5 • www.AlleghenySynod.org • Autumn 2025

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A New Bishop will be Elected

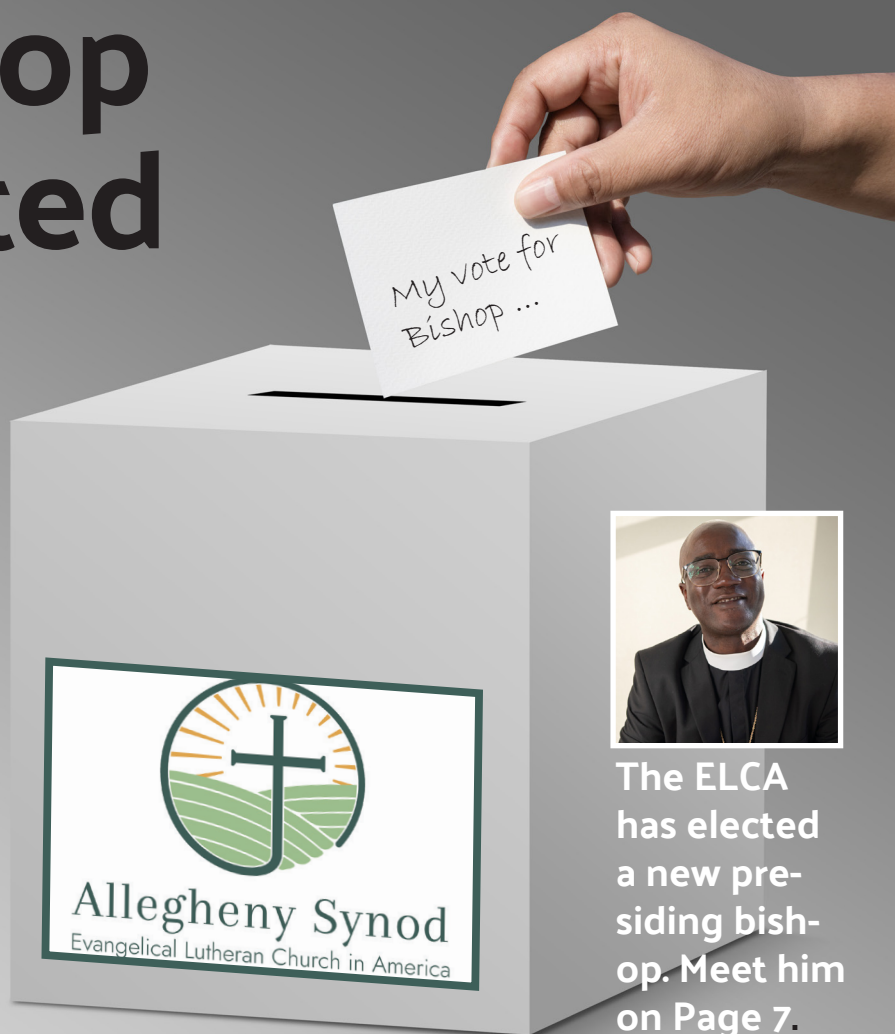
Here's what to Expect
Throughout the Process

By **DEBBIE GARRITANO**
Synod Assembly Chair

The 37th Assembly of the Allegheny Synod will be held from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 31, and from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 1., at the Blair County Convention Center.

The theme of the event is "On the Way Together with a Renewing Spirit."

(See ELECT, Page 6)



The ELCA has elected a new pre-siding bishop. Meet him on Page 7.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

An Autumn Devotional – Page 18

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

is published bi-monthly by the
ALLEGHENY SYNOD OF THE ELCA

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OUR VISION

All creation living in harmony with Christ.

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Articles for the Letter should be about 300 words or less and include applicable website or contact information.

Images should be as high resolution as possible, ideally 300 ppi at 3x5 inches (900x1500 pixels.)

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Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Final Assembly Prep

We are just two months away from our Oct. 31/Nov. 1 Synod Assembly. Are we ready? Just about! Now, all of the typical pre-assembly tasks are underway.



Interim Bishop
Barbara J. Collins

Assembly Registration: We need every congregation to register their voting members, which can be done through the synod's website. You can locate synod assembly information under the [RESOURCE](#) heading on the main page. If a congregation is in need of financial assistance for a voting member to attend the assembly, contact the synod office.

Elections: The election slate for the assembly has been provided. We ask folks to prayerfully consider placing their name in nomination for a position for which they have gifts. The nomination form is available on the synod's website (see above) and we ask for those nominations to be submitted by Sept. 15.

The Bulletin of Reports is in production as I write this. It, too, will be available with the synod assembly materials. This resource is made available ahead of time so that voting members can read what our ministries have accomplished during this past year and to better prepare for conversations taking place during the assembly. Memorials and Resolutions are also being submitted for assembly consideration.

All of those are the pre-assembly basics, of which you may be familiar.

There are two more important steps on the calendar this month for our assembly preparation. The first one is for our rostered leaders and candidacy candidates. The second one is for all of our voting members to the synod assembly.

(See BISHOP 1, Page 20)



Photo by Interim Bishop Barbar J. Collins

Scene of the Edition

Horner Lutheran Church in Stoystown was founded in 1835. The current building was built in 1873. "It has wonderful acoustics," Pastor Regina Holliday wrote in an email.

Lutheran Letter Patrons

Thanks to these individuals and groups for their generous donations, which helped to make this issue of The Lutheran Letter possible.

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A 21st Century Update



Submitted photos

The remodeled bunk room. Another photo, featuring the ceiling, is on Page 8.

Friedens Lutheran Church Remodels Their Sequanota Cabin

By PASTOR ED DEVORE

While the cold winds of winter were blowing, the Mission Team and Friends at Friedens Lutheran Church started a remodeling project on their stone cabin at Sequanota.

The cabin was built in the late 1940s and had been remodeled a number of times through the years by various generations of folks from Friedens. During that time, hundreds of youth during the summer and winter called that cabin their “home away from home.” Mementos from times gone by were found written on the studs and under the paneling from past campers.

After the cabin was gutted to the studs and all of the old insulation, plumbing, heating, etc. was discarded, then it was time to put things back together.

(See CABIN, Page 5)

**KEY
FACT**

The Friedens Lutheran Church has been maintaining the cabin at Camp Sequanota for decades. It was built in the 1940s.

CABIN

(Continued from Page 4)

Work days were held throughout the winter and into the spring to get the cabin ready for the return of campers from across the synod.

An up-to-date heating system was installed with new insulation, and a beautiful tongue-and-groove, stained-wood ceiling was nailed into place.

Two new individual shower stalls and separate toilet facilities were plumbed. Matching curtains and shower curtains with woodland creatures were hung. The project finished up just in time for the first week of camp! It turned out beautifully and was a huge success.

Rick Barron was the lead coordinating contractor for the project, but well over 15 folks from Friedens were part of the remodeling crew.

The funds for the job came from the congregation. Friedens has had a solid history of support from the beginning for the vitally important Christian ministry that happens at our synod's church camp – Sequanota.

We pray that God's blessings will continue to be poured down onto Sequanota and that Frieden's cabin will serve generations of young men and women who come to that place of "many waters" to learn about God's creation and God's love in Christ Jesus! †



ELECT

(Continued from Page 1)

This year will be the election of a new bishop for the Allegheny Synod. This is very important in the life of the synod. The bishop is one who will lead, minister, and guide the congregations. Please consider becoming a voting member and be a part of this important decision in the life of the church.

The assembly is usually held in June. However, it was decided to give the congregations more time to prepare for the election of a new bishop. The Transition Team has been working for the past nine months, meeting with people from across the synod to identify the gifts and abilities they are hoping for in the one who serves as bishop.

The people of the synod pray for a bishop who is a faithful servant of Christ, grounded in a Lutheran identity, feels called to lead others in God's mission and brings:

- Knowledge of and commitment to the people, congregations, and ministries
- Strong leadership skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Loving, positive
- Gift and desire to build relationships

A new step in the bishop's election process is that members from across the synod were invited to raise up the names of people who they believe have the potential to serve as bishop. Those nominations have been received.

We also sent out a call to congregations to nominate devoted Lutherans for election at the assembly to serve as synod vice president, synod council members, or on committees. Serving in one of

these capacities is a great opportunity to support the synod and God's work in our community.

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

The assembly will open a 9 a.m. Friday, Oct. 31, with worship at the convention center. The voting process is done through VPoll (electronic voting). All voting members must have their own personal device, laptop, tablet, or smartphone and access to their individual email to participate in the voting process.

Importantly, the deadline to register for the Assembly is Sept. 15. Grants are available to help cover the cost. Contact the synod office for details. Don't miss this opportunity to be a voting member for your congregation. Watch for more information on the Allegheny Synod website.

I want to thank all the members of the Assembly Committee for their dedication and commitment to organizing this event. Being my first year as chair, I had a lot to learn and couldn't have done it without their help. This has been very rewarding and educational for me and I am thankful to have this opportunity. †

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Curry Elected Presiding Bishop

By THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Rev. Yehiel Curry was elected July 30 to serve a six-year term as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The election took place during the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, held July 28-Aug. 2 at the Phoenix Convention Center.

Curry was elected on the fifth ballot. There were 799 votes cast, with 400 votes needed for an election. Curry received 562 votes, and the Rev. Kevin Strickland, bishop of the ELCA South-eastern Synod, received 237 votes. Curry is the first Black presiding bishop of the ELCA.

Speaking to the assembly after his election, Curry reflected on his membership at Shekinah Chapel in Riverdale, Illinois, where he eventually became a lay mission developer while he participated in the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries program, which prepares individuals for ordained ministry in the ELCA, with a focus on emerging ministry contexts like ethnic-specific, multicultural, rural and inner-city settings.

He spoke to the assembly about his initial hesitation in accepting that first ministry role.

“Perhaps I’m out there in one of you,” Curry said.

(See CURRY, Page 8)

The VPs



Submitted photo

Allegheny Synod Vice President Ann Ferry is front and center for this photo of synod vice presidents at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, held July 28-Aug. 2.



Submitted photo

ELCA Presiding Bishop, The Rev. Yehiel Curry.

CURRY

(Continued from Page 7)

“I never saw myself as good enough, so for two years, I said no. I finally said yes. When I said yes, your support, this church’s support, of that ministry meant everything. So if you want to know what your benevolence dollars look like, it looks like me, and I want to say thank you. Thank you for your investment.”

Curry has served as bishop of the ELCA Metropolitan Chicago Synod since 2019. He previously served as mission developer (2009-2012) and pastor (2012-2019) of Shekinah.

He received a Bachelor of Arts from Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, in 1995 and a Master of Divinity from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) in 2013. LSTC is one of seven ELCA seminaries.

The churchwide assembly, the chief legislative authority of the ELCA, met under the theme “For the Life of the World.” The assembly participated in plenary discussions to make decisions about the work of this church. They also spent time in worship and engaged in various ways of theological reflection. †

Synod Hunger Team Forms

By **SUE ELLEN SPOTTS**

Director of Evangelical Mission

Feeding our neighbors is one of the most common outreach ministries we offer as Christ's people.

It is a ministry, which comes naturally in many respects; we identify so readily with the need and with the value of being fed and sharing in a meal.

Our hearts break at stories and pictures of people with no food. We may have personal experiences of not having enough food and want to help others in need.

In sharing food, we not only meet a physical need for the body, but we feed spirits and create community.

A few months ago, I invited you to share the ways in which your congregation is involved in feeding ministry. The responses varied to include ministries such as food pantries, food distributions, and dinner church. Some common themes also emerged.

For example, many reported increased need and requests for food, while at the same time sources for food are diminishing.

One of the programs of the ELCA is a World Hunger Network. This ministry is a resource to synods, congregations, and individuals concerned with responding to the cry, "when I was hungry, you gave me food."



**Sue Ellen Spotts,
Director of
Evangelical
Mission**

To connect with this churchwide effort and, more importantly, to be strengthened across this synod in our efforts, we have launched the Allegheny Synod Hunger Team.

The Hunger Team will have several areas of concern:

- Provide a roundtable for those involved in feeding ministries to share stories, struggles, and strategies.
- Raise awareness and offer education in the synod on hunger issues and action as people of faith.
- Encourage discussion and advocacy on issues related to hunger and access to food.

The Hunger Team is open to anyone who feels called to work with us in any or all of these areas. If you would like to join the Hunger Team, email me (sueellen.spotts@elca.org) and I will be sure to include you in our communications.

Watch Facebook and the Allegheny Synod website for announcement of the next meeting of the Allegheny Synod Hunger Team. †

How Do I Resist Evil?

Powerful Series Coming to Trinity Lutheran

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Trinity Lutheran Church in Somerset is bringing a program to the community that has been experienced by millions of people worldwide.

Alpha equips churches and individuals to help others develop a relationship with Jesus. It's centered on creating a space for honest conversations about some of life's biggest questions – all centered on Jesus, according to the program.

Alpha started at Holy Trinity Brompton in London in 1977. It has grown internationally since then, with conferences and even an original film series.

"The Alpha talks have been repackaged for today's audience in the Alpha Film Series, and the Alpha Youth Series was created to reach a younger generation with the Gospel. Even as times have changed, Alpha has continued to be used by the Church as an effective tool to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ," according to the program's website.

It's billed as an opportunity to find purpose, meaning, peace, belonging, and Jesus. Sessions, which run from Sept. 11 through Nov. 20, include topics such as "who is Jesus and why did he die?" "how do I resist evil?" and "does Jesus heal today?" It culminates with a celebration dinner. Most of the sessions are being held at Trinity Lutheran. †

ALPHA SCHEDULE

- Thursday, Sept. 11: Who is Jesus? Trinity Lutheran (TL)
- Thursday, Sept. 18: Why Did Jesus Die? TL
- Thursday, Sept. 25: How Can I Have Faith? TL
- Thursday, Oct. 2: Why and How Do I Pray? TL
- Thursday, Oct. 9: Why and How Should I Read the Bible? TL
- Thursday, Oct. 16: How Does God Guide Us? TL
- Thursday, Oct. 23: How Can I Resist Evil? TL
- Friday, Oct. 24: Introduction to the Weekend - Who is the Holy Spirit TL
- Saturday, Oct. 25: What Does the Holy Spirit Do? How Can I be Filled with the Holy Spirit? How Can I Make the Most of the Rest of my Life? Greater Johnstown Christian Fellowship
- Thursday, Oct. 30: Why and How Should I Tell Others? TL

- Thursday, Nov. 6: What About the Church? TL
- Monday, Nov. 10: Does God Heal Today? St. Benedict Church
- Thursday, Nov. 20: Celebration Dinner - Is There More to Life Than This? TL

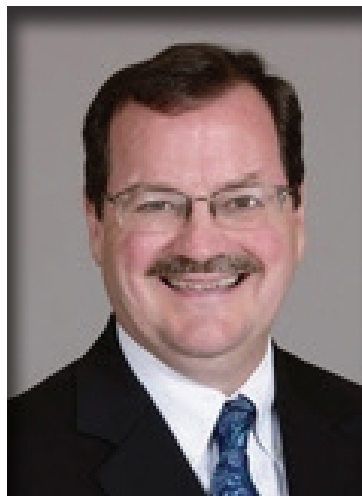


**Scan here to
register**

Trinity Lutheran is located at 918 Tayman Ave., Somerset

Go Tell It Initiative Key Dates

By PASTOR
JOHN H. KRATZ
Initiative Director



Pastor
John H. Kratz

Popular social media leaders share that people can only deal with information in limited amounts at a time.

We are to create communication “nuggets” or “bite-sized blurbs”.

Well, I am completely ignoring that and giving you an entire communications buffet!

The Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative has the following tools and resources for every preacher, and thus, every congregation in the Allegheny Synod.

The Mission Insite tool is open to every congregation to use to understand their local community better. Email me at director@alleghenysynod.com and I will send you a direct link to engage this tool.

Small group (eight or less) preaching cohorts are available beginning in October.

All preachers in the synod have been contacted with this information. Contact me for the full listing of these preaching cohorts.

A large group preaching cohort led by the esteemed Dilip Abayasekara begins in September.

All our preachers, ELCA, USS, UMC, Presbyterian, etc. are welcomed. [Go here to sign up.](#)

A one-hour special preaching training is being held from 10-11 a.m. Nov. 8. It's a Q&A with Bishop Craig Satterlee. The easiest way to register, either on-site or Zoom, is through Kindling Faith at United Seminary.

Our next quarterly pericope study with the Rev. Dr. Allison DeForest is from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 12 at the Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg.

This on-site training, with lunch provided, is an excellent review of the upcoming scriptures for the next quarter.

[Use this link to sign up.](#)

To keep up-to-date with Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative resources, sign up for our email list by contacting me by email.

Together, we proclaim the Gospel, through our speaking and through our living. †



WE are LUTHERAN

A Journey from Camp to Seminary

By RICK KAZMER

Editor

A vicar from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod is enjoying her time at Camp Sequanota. In fact, it was her time there that helped the speech therapist to pursue seminary.

Lindsie Struth, 32, is a member of Faith Lutheran Church in Upper St. Clair.

“I felt most authentic, happy, and valuable when I was working at camp. Thus, I determined I was going to run away and get a job at a camp somewhere! But then a friend of mine reminded me that I had quite a bit of student loan debt and recommended that I might try to pay some of that off before I got a job that paid the bare minimum. I agreed, which allowed me to slow down and do some more discerning. I started to consider theological education, maybe to become a deacon that specialized in outdoor ministry, but I refused to even consider becoming a pastor,” she said.

After hearing the call off-and-on throughout life, she didn’t act on God’s nudging until 2019. During a summer working as a camp coordinator, Struth said preparing a children’s message that stuck with the pastor, stuck with her. He mentioned a portion of it in a sermon, and it really hit home with her. She first worked at camp in 2015.

“It was a nice little ego boost ... It was in that very moment that the Holy Spirit became clear to me: I am meant to be a pastor! I had a mini anxiety attack for the rest of the sermon, but by the end of that church service, I was pretty much at peace with this new revelation. It was further solidified two days later when our former bishop asked me if I had ever considered going to seminary,” Struth said.

God put the entire plan together for her, providing income opportunities as a speech therapist while still serving at camp. She met her husband, Dan, and the two moved to Pittsburgh, where Struth is attending seminary online. Since many classmates are from around the country, the online learning can make it hard to connect.

“The biggest reward of seminary has been realizing that I actually enjoy preaching! I was terrified for my first preaching class, since I’ve always been shy and actively avoided public speaking. By the end of that week-long intensive class, I realized that I enjoyed the entire preaching process more than I thought I would, and that I have a talent for it,” she said.

In her free time, she likes being outside, camping, and hiking. Struth can also play multiple instruments. She plays violin for the Washington Symphony Orchestra.

(See STRUTH, Page 13)

STRUTH

(Continued from Page 12)

She said camp can be a refuge from an overwhelming world.

“In a society where we prioritize individuality and elevate this idea that you need to be able to do everything for yourself, camp offers a much-needed counter to that by promoting relationship, teamwork, and living in community,” she said. “Camp is somewhere to get away from all that. It allows campers to disconnect from their phones and the constant bombardment of messages. Instead, they get a chance to focus on their personal growth and being in close relationship with others.



Lindsie Struth

WE ARE LUTHERAN

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What’s your first memory of attending a Lutheran Church?

LINDSIE STRUTH: I grew up in ELCA churches, so it’s hard to think of my very first memory. But one that stands out: I didn’t understand why I wasn’t allowed to have the snack like everyone else, and I asked my mom when I would be able to have a snack. Turns out the “snack” was communion, and it would be a few more years before I had my first communion.

LL: What would you tell someone considering attending a Lutheran church for the first time?

LS: We are a denomination built on grace. We are human beings who mess up, but I have found the Lutheran church to be one where grace abounds. We strive to forgive, help one another, build community, and worship our Loving Creator; and when we get it wrong, we know that grace is at the center of all we do. So, we learn and try again to do God’s work in the world.

LL: What are you praying for the most lately?

LS: I am praying most for our leaders – government, local, church, etc. I pray that they are making decisions that work toward the good of all people, rooted in love of neighbor. †

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

Some news and photos from around the synod



Submitted photo

The Allegheny Synod Council at the annual retreat at Camp Sequanota this summer. Pictured are Bishop Barbara Collins, Pastor Tyler Graham, Michele Peese, synod Treasurer Paula Nihoff, Terry Koch, Pastor Marty Jo Irvin Stellabotte, synod Vice President Ann Ferry, Margaret Thatcher, Timothy Albright, and Pastor Ralph Hamer.



Pastor Jaime Olson was installed on Aug. 3 as pastor of the Co-operative of First Lutheran, Philipsburg, and Faith Lutheran, Houtzdale. He will also serve as the interim pastor for St. John, Clearfield. The picture was taken at a joint service at Faith. The group also celebrated Olson's 25th year of ordination. Olson, and Interim Bishop Barbara J. Collins, are pictured at far right.

Photo by Interim Bishop Barbara J. Collins

Assisting One Another

Thoughts from the Assistant to the Bishop

By **PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK**

Assistant to the Bishop

I confess that I was a little less than thrilled going into Churchwide Assembly last month.

I was focused on potential travel headaches, all the work I would have to catch up on when I returned, and a schedule full of meetings, meetings, meetings.

Let me be clear that there were travel headaches, lots of work to catch up on, and days filled with meetings, yet I also returned with a renewed sense of connection to our wider church and hope for our future in this part of the body of Christ.

I know that we can feel overlooked by the Churchwide organization in a rural synod like Allegheny. Some congregations have even told me that they think Churchwide is more an adversary than support



Pastor Kevin Shock

network.

Despite my efforts to show several congregations formerly connected to our Synod that the wider church is not interested in taking away congregational autonomy or in seizing their buildings and property, they have disaffiliated from the ELCA and gone to other church bodies, which they think will either hear their concerns more attentively, or perhaps just leave them alone to do their own thing.

What I witnessed at Churchwide Assembly is an organization,

a body of people, that wants to see ministry thrive from every congregation and in every region. People in our Churchwide offices, elected by people from every synod in the church body, care as much about the Lutheran witness to Christ being present in the Allegheny Synod, as they care about how the Lutheran witness is shared in Chicago or Philadelphia.

I learned that in our own perspectives and understandings, we can make assumptions about the state of the church elsewhere.

During that week in Phoenix, I reconnected with several friends from seminary and other wider church activities. One of them serves a congregation part time and as an Assistant to the Bishop part time in the Pacifica Synod.

(See CHURCHWIDE 1 Page 21)

Penn State Ministry Prepares for Busy Time

Fall Invites Students to Begin Anew, Writes Deacon Alicia Anderson

By **ALICIA ANDERSON**

Campus Minister, Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State

Fall brings so many changes to life on the university campus. All through the summer months, there is less activity. While summer classes draw a mix of older students and first-year students getting their feet wet before the fall, their numbers are only a fraction of fall enrollment. We see regular waves of incoming students and their parents for a couple days with New Student Orientation, and school-aged kids involved in a wide array of summer camps. There are also plenty of alumni who visit and reminisce. Even so, most of the summer, Penn State's University Park campus is relatively quiet.

Most students spent summer away from campus. Many were learning through internships or online classes. Some were traveling or doing study abroad. Most worked summer jobs to learn skills and earn money for the rest of the year. Students may have been at home, in other cities, or at different college campuses. Many enjoyed more time with family and friends, taking a break from the demands of the past school year and getting ready for the next.

Fall invites students to begin anew. Some students are beginning their first semester on campus with a flood of new experiences from living in residence halls and eating meals in a dining hall, meeting roommates and new classmates, finding their way around so many campus buildings and classrooms, managing their own schedules and deadlines away from home and family.

Other students are returning to campus and though they know what to expect from the routine and demands of university life, they will find new challenges, too. They will be tackling classes that delve deeper into their field of study, moving into leadership positions in activities or jobs, and navigating changes and challenges with old friends while making new friends. Students nearing graduation will be looking for jobs or applying to graduate school.

As the school year begins, Lutheran Campus Ministry is here to walk with students through the unique challenges and joys college life brings, whether this is their first semester or their last. Finding their way through the early weeks of college is a huge undertaking, especially for students who have not lived away from home before.

Returning to campus and dealing with harder classes and changes in routines or relationships is challenging for students in their second or third year of college, too. Preparing for the end of college and looking toward what is next can be overwhelming along with coursework and daily life.

Please pray for students at Penn State and elsewhere.

- Pray that those who are new to campus will find good grounding and have confidence in their ability to manage coursework, schedules, and social life. Pray that they find friends, mentors, and groups that support and nurture them. Pray that they have good judgment and make good choices.

(See PSU, Page 17)



Pray that they all notice God's presence in the world and in their lives. Pray that they each are reminded regularly that they are God's beloved child, and that they are a gift to the world."

– Deacon Alicia Anderson

PSU

(Continued from Page 16)

- Pray that they learn about themselves and how they can bless the world.
- Pray that those who are returning to campus notice how much they have grown since last year and find strength and confidence in the knowledge. Pray that they find professors, mentors, and friends who help them continue to grow and expand their worldview and their self-understanding.
- Pray for those who are nearing graduation. Pray that they have courage and hope in their job or school search. Pray that they present themselves well in interviews and find the next best step for their lives.
- Pray for all students to be part of communities that care for them and support them. Pray that they find friends and mentors who truly see and value them. Pray that each student has people to trust, laugh with, rely on in a crisis, and who will tell them what they need to hear. Pray that they all notice God's presence in the world and in their lives. Pray that they each are reminded regularly that they are God's beloved child, and that they are a gift to the world. †





Autumn: Nature's Way of Letting Go

By **PASTOR REBECCA WEST**

Moxham Lutheran Church, Johnstown

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens ... a time to keep and a time to throw away.”

—Ecclesiastes 3:1, 6b (NIV)

The trees don't argue with the season. Nor do they try to preserve their summer grandeur by clinging desperately to every leaf.

Instead, they release what is no longer needed.

And in that surrender, something astounding happens: the leaves catch the light, then turn brilliant shades of red, yellow, and orange ... and autumn arrives.

The Creator God who designed the turning of the seasons also speaks gently to us: There is a time for everything – a time to hold on, and a time to let go.

Letting go doesn't always come easily. We hold tightly to routines, relationships, and expectations that once gave us comfort or purpose.

But just as the falling leaves make way for creation's rest and renewal, so too our willingness to release what no longer serves us opens the way for spiritual renewal.

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes reminds us that God works in seasons.

There is a time for building, yes – but also for dismantling. A time for planting, and a time for uprooting.

We resist this truth sometimes, wishing life could be perpetual spring or endless summer.

But in God's design, even endings carry purpose.

This season invites a sacred question: What is God calling you to release?

- A resentment that's been quietly stealing your joy.
- A vision of how life “should have been.”
- Guilt over something long forgiven.
- The need to control someone else's journey.
- Fear of what lies ahead.

(See SEASONS, Page 19)



Reflection Question

What is one thing – large or small – that God might be asking you to lay down in this season? Can you trust God with the space that opens in its place?

Prayer

God of all seasons, help me to trust your timing. Teach me to release what no longer gives life, so that I may receive what is yet to come. Amen.

SEASONS

(Continued from Page 18)

Letting go does not mean losing yourself. It means trusting that the God who holds all seasons is also holding you steady as you take your next step.

The trees do not fear the loss of their leaves. They trust the deeper rhythm of the seasons. Underground, the roots remain alive – drinking

deeply, resting, and preparing for the next season of fruitfulness. Likewise, when we surrender in faith, we are not falling into emptiness – we are falling into the hands of God.

In John 15, Jesus speaks of pruning – the careful cutting away of branches to make room for new growth. That, too, is a form of letting go. It is not

punishment – it is preparation.

As we move through this autumn season, may you pay close attention to what God may be inviting you to release – not because it is bad or useless, but because its season has passed.

Trust that there is beauty in letting go. And trust in the One who remains – unchanging, faithful, and present in every season. †

BISHOP 1

(Continued from Page 2)

Bishop's Convocation: This gathering will take place at Camp Sequanota on Sept. 15-17. We will have guests from LAMPa, Portico, and the ELCA Foundation; a panel discussion with our voting members to the Churchwide Assembly; the availability of synod staff for conversation; and, most importantly, a time for conversations related specifically to the call of a bishop, our growing relationships, and time of discernment. There will also be free time available for colleagues to breathe and find respite. My hope is that we have a "full house" for these conversations together. Registration for this event is through the camp, [here](#).

Conference Assemblies: All voting members to the synod assembly are asked to be in attendance to their specific conference assembly. Three of our conferences will be electing a new dean (as noted below). We will have conversations about the proposed budget, nominations, use of the election app and the bishop's election process. In the spring of this year, we had wonderful attendance. I pray for the same response, if not better, for these gatherings. The schedule is:

- Sept. 18 – Johnstown and Laurel Highlands at St. David's, Davidsville – Laurel Highlands will be electing a dean.
- Sept. 22 – Clearfield at St. John, Clearfield.
- Sept. 23 – Nittany at New Hope, Spring Mills – Nittany will be electing a dean.
- Sept. 24 – Blair-Huntingdon at the Hollidaysburg Lutheran Home –



Submitted photo

The Allegheny Synod Churchwide Assembly voting members. Pictured from left are Pastor Tyler Graham; Synod Vice President Ann Ferry; Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Kevin Shock; Pastor MJ Irvin-Stellabotte; Ben Hoffman; and Vicar Christy Harford.

Blair-Huntingdon will be electing a dean.

- Sept. 25 – Bedford at St. Peter, Osterburg

I truly appreciate everyone's participation in our steps of preparation these past 11 months. I believe we have heard the "voice of our synod" through the many conversations that have taken place. As we come to these last two months before assembly, I ask that everyone hold the synod in prayer. Pray for this time of discernment. Pray for those who will represent congregations as voting members to the assembly. Pray for those placing their names in nomination to serve. Pray for our rostered leaders who may be asked to be open to the call of bishop. And pray for our relationships with one another as siblings in Christ in the Allegheny Synod! Let it be so. Amen. †

CHURCHWIDE 1

(Continued from Page 15)

It's easy to assume that the Allegheny Synod has nothing in common with the synod that includes Hawaii, San Diego, Orange County, and part of Los Angeles County.

Yet I heard my friend lament their struggles. Congregations find it difficult to support a full-time, or even a part-time, pastor. Some have had to make difficult decisions about their futures or talk about collaborating with others. Pastors and deacons are hesitant to move there, because the cost of living is high and the congregations that can afford to pay them justly still can only pay minimum compensation, and maybe only for a couple of years. During our conversation, I heard him say many things about Pacifica that I have said about Allegheny. I was surprised to learn how much we had in common, and therefore, how much we can learn from and support one another.

I also was reminded how the Churchwide organization seeks to listen to the views and opinions of people from all across the church. There is great care and attention that goes into developing resources like our social statements and teaching documents. Much more than instructions of how "they" want us to do things or what "they" want us to believe, social statements are documents that reflect a diversity of thought and conviction throughout the church. They are documents worthy of study,

in order to bolster our own ministry, even as we have some of our beliefs confirmed and as we learn from other viewpoints that challenge our own. The new social statement adopted by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, Civic Faith and Life, gives helpful direction for us to be a unified body in such a divided political climate. It's my opinion that every congregation in the Allegheny Synod should read and discuss it.

Finally, I found hope in our leadership moving into the future.

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Deacon Secretary Sue Rothmeyer have served this church faithfully and well. There was ample opportunity at the assembly to celebrate them, as they both move into retirement. We engaged in a prayerful process to elect a new presiding bishop and secretary, and I find much to celebrate in the people who will be serving and leading us next.

Bishop-Elect Yehiel Curry comes to the Office of the Presiding Bishop from the Office of the Bishop in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod. The Rev. CeCee Mills, our Secretary-Elect, currently serves as an Assistant to the Bishop in the North Carolina Synod.

It's easy for us in Allegheny to look at people who come from larger Synods, who are persons of color, and wonder what they could possibly understand about our ministry here.

(See CHURCHWIDE 2, Page 23)

Annual Synod Curve Outing



Submitted photos



It was a beautiful sunny evening on Aug. 24 at the Altoona Curve stadium for Faith Night, and 319 folks from around the Allegheny Synod came out to enjoy a time of fun, food, and fellowship together at the ballpark. Although rain cut the game a few innings short, it was still a great evening.





Churchwide Assembly has reminded me that assisting one another is not just about sharing what we have in resources or ideas with others, but also about being humble enough to remember that we have much to learn from others. I pray we are able to be open and better connected moving forward.”

– Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock

CHURCHWIDE 2

(Continued from Page 21)

Yet, both Bishop-Elect Curry and Secretary-Elect Mills are products of the TEEM process of candidacy.

They have that in common with a majority of our newer pastors and candidates for ministry. They have both worked in mission development, meaning that they have served congregations that were looking to focus and grow their ministry, which is something that many among us have either talked about or need to consider. I think they will have much to offer the whole church. I also think that they will have more to offer synods like Allegheny than we currently realize.

I left Churchwide Assembly with a sense of connection and hope. I also realized that we have some work to do in connecting ourselves with the wider church in our communities, across the synod, and throughout the ELCA.

There are many opportunities that can assist us in ministry. Churchwide Assembly has reminded me that assisting one another is not just about sharing what we have in resources or ideas with others, but also about being humble enough to remember that we have much to learn from others. I pray we are able to be open and better connected moving forward. †

BEFORE YOU GO

Preseason

As you are reading this, the NFL season is about to kick off. It's one of my favorite times of the year, and Nora (our 17-month-old daughter) is ready to go with her shirt that says "Run the dang ball!".

The hard-core football fans among us find joy in even preseason football. These three games often don't include starters. For their part, the Steelers didn't play many of their stars during the games this year.

Many people find preseason to be a boring prelude to the much more exciting regular season.

But the preseason is also a proving ground. It's the time when future stars get their first chance. For most of the players, it's among the first and last times they will play for an NFL team. But simply making it to that point is an exceptional accomplishment.

In her devotional in this issue, Pastor Rebecca West wrote that the fall is nature's way of letting go. All those dried leaves that drop from the trees and witnessed the summer can be sad to see, especially for folks who don't particularly enjoy winter.

But the season is a needed part of the process. Without it, nothing else would be quite right.

That's sort of like preseason football. It may not be as fun for the fans, but for many of the athletes, it's a bittersweet moment. It's the only time they will ever realize their dream, before moving on to more practical occupations.

When the preseason ends, many of them have to make the choice to let go, to move on from a life-long goal.

But as with trees, leaves, and even preseason football, God has prepared us for the seasons of life. He is opening another door.

And, of course, next spring is never really that far off.

See you in the next edition,
– Rick