

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

Volume 16, Issue 6 • www.AlleghenySynod.org • Holidays 2021



Our SAVIOR

Messages for the Holiday Season



Photo by Courtney Kazmer

Special stories by Pastors Wald and Beilfuss inside

A Small Tree Can Bear Much Fruit

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

A small, white, two-room wooden church in Riggles Gap has a big apple project.

Salem Lutheran Church, located about 6 miles south of Altoona, gathers bushels of Apples each fall for nearby food banks.

The effort is an impressive labor for the small congregation.

It's a project that is among others the church is completing, that helps a lot of people.

(See FRUIT, Page 8)



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



TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE
is published bi-monthly by the
ALLEGHENY SYNOD OF THE ELCA

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OUR MISSION

Called by God to be one in Christ: we worship, grow in faith and serve all people.

OUR VISION

Because Christ is here... We are actively engaging in God's work and sharing the Gospel as the Holy Spirit increases the followers of Jesus 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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Reacquainted

By BISHOP PAULA SCHMITT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It's been a wonderfully full first two months in the Office of the Bishop. I am enjoying getting reacquainted with many of you as I travel around our Synod. Thank you for all the kind words of support. They are appreciated. Hearing about your faithful ministry in the midst of the challenges we have faced has been an inspiration. The gift of resilience is strong in you and something I often have spoken of to my colleagues. When the "chips are down" so-to-speak, you rise up and for that I am deeply thankful. We still have more work to do as we rebuild and move forward into a hope-filled future.

One of my favorite hymns is "Christ, Be Our Light" (ELW 715).

The first verse says, "Longing for light, we wait in darkness. Longing for truth, we turn to you. Make us your own, your holy people, light for the world to see." The refrain says, "Christ be our light! Shine in our hearts, shine through the darkness. Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gathered today."

Christ is our light, our truth and our hope. In these seasons of giving thanks and waiting with anticipation for the celebration of Christ's birth, where are you perceiving light? How are you being light for the world to see?

There are a variety of ways in which you can be light for the world to see. It can be as simple as thanking the person who checks out your groceries because they are often overlooked in our busy world.

(See BISHOP 1, Page 3)

BISHOP 1

(Continued from Page 2)

You can also be light in more concrete ways, in the way you are generous with your resources. During the last few months, I have been thinking and praying on the ways in which this Synod reflects the light of Christ and wondering whether we need a reminder. Your generous and faithful giving supports ministry that matters not only in our Synod, but around the world. When you give an offering in your congregation, it supports your local ministry work and when it's shared with the Synod, it supports our work together in ways like supporting and educating people who sense a call to ministry. When we share that abundance with the ELCA, they do ministry in places, including our part-

ner Synod, the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church, on your behalf. We are connected in this body of Christ.

I continue to be thankful for all the ways you are dreaming about and becoming Christ's light in your congregation and in our Synod.

As I have visited some of our congregations, I have given some ideas about how their generosity might be enacted in ways they may not have been thinking about. I'd like to share some of those with you and ask you to prayerfully consider both individually and as a congregation how you might become part of the growing movement toward rebuilding this Synod into one that is known for its generosity.

(See BISHOP 2, Page 13)

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Peace, Hope and Assurance

BY PASTOR EVELYN WALD

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Petersburg

We are about to enter the seasons of Advent and Christmas. Once again, questions arise: will we be able to have services in person? Will our families gather together for the holidays? Can we be creative and offer new opportunities and traditions?

Many of us are uncomfortable with uncertainty. When it comes to worship, we want to plan ahead. A virtual service, however, is quite different than gathering in the sanctuary. These days, we need to have Plans A and B.

Advent is a season of waiting, anticipating, reminding us to take time as we await

the coming of our Lord. In our hectic paced world, especially during the holidays, it is difficult for us to pause and reflect upon the Advent of our God. In these times of such uncertainty, we can be certain of God's presence and love. Emmanuel: God is with us. Whether we gather virtually, or in person, we can be sure that God is in our midst. I spend a lot of time with folks who are grieving the loss of loved ones. The holidays can be difficult no matter how or where gatherings happen. Someone they love is missing. The joy of the season doesn't speak to their sadness. Someone they love will not be at the table this year. Traditions may be changed. Things are different now.

(See WALD, Page 14)

'Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus'

BY PASTOR VICKI BEILFUSS
Holy Shepherd Parish, Karthaus and Lanse

The Advent season starts Nov. 28, marking the beginning of a new liturgical church year and a time of preparation for the entrance of Christ into the world. Unfortunately, the marketplace has hijacked Advent and Christmas. Stores and TV stations somehow believe Christmas starts in October and ends on Dec. 25. They have shifted the focus of the season from Jesus to decorating, food, family, parties and of course — lots of purchasing.

Ugh. Don't get me wrong, I love my family, decorating my house, baking, wrapping gifts, Christmas carols, gathering — the whole thing. The real focus of Advent and Christmas, however, is the in-breaking of God into this broken world.

"...(A)n angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins," Matthew 1:20-21 (NRSV)

It is important to remember Jesus does not stay a baby! He grows up to show us the depth

and breadth of God's love for the whole earth. Matthew and the old Advent hymn "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" remind us that Jesus comes with a purpose. He is our deliverer who sets us free from our captivity to sin, fear and death.

"Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; from our fears and sins, release us; let us find our rest in thee," by Charles Wesley.

Sins and fears drive wedges between us and God, each other and the rest of creation. Jesus's suffering, dying and rising saves us from ultimate death. He breaks the hold sin and fear have over us, releasing us to love God as we follow Jesus in the way of shared abundance.

We will not stop sinning or fearing — we are imperfect humans. Yet the angels proclaim, Do not be afraid. God loves us even in our imperfection and brokenness. This Advent try making time for Advent devotions to release you from the stress of the season, give space to breathe and focus on Christ.

As a child my family used to gather around the Advent wreath with a devotional every night. When we got old enough, we kids took turns lighting the candles and reading scripture.

(See ADVENT, 12)

Remember in Prayer
Join the Allegheny Synod in prayer for these congregations this issue.

NOVEMBER

Week 1: Zion Lutheran, Meyersdale

Week 2: Evangelical Lutheran, Duncansville

Week 3: Christ Lutheran, Dubois

Week 4: St. Mark Lutheran, Snyderstown

DECEMBER

Week 1: First Lutheran, Johnstown

Week 2: St. Matthew Lutheran, Martinsburg

Week 3: St. Paul Lutheran, Pine Grove Mills

Week 4: Moxham Lutheran, Johnstown

Tuesday at Noon

Recital Series Ends Season with Performance by a Founder

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

First Lutheran Church in Downtown Johnstown has culminated another season of Tuesday noon recitals.

The series receives a grant as a program recognized by the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. There are 12 programs a year with no admission fee.

On Oct. 19 a special show was enjoyed by visitors. A founder of the series, Kim Rauch, returned to play a recital.

Rauch played a program he calls "The Art of the Ornament."

No, it's not about holiday decorations.

"It... demonstrate(s) how composers take straightforward musical ideas and develop them through musical ornamentation," he said. "The Baroque period was notorious for this, and the French composers went overboard."

Examples, which were on the program, were a movement from the Second Suite by French Baroque composer Jean Adam Guillain and an ornamented setting of "Ein Feste Burg" by Dietrich Buxtehude. Also on the program were Buxtehude's Prelude and Fugue in D major. Rauch played contemporary works, "Aria on Jewels" by Dale Wood, and a prelude on the folk song "Shenandoah" by Christopher Tambling.

"I am honored to be invited back to the console of the organ at First Lutheran," he said. "Thirty years ago this series began when I was minister of music. What a plea-



Nicholas Carroll and Kim Rauch

sure it is that the series continues featuring the amazing gifts and talents of local musicians."

Rauch, who resides in Hollsopple, went on to become widely known among the region's musicians. He recently retired as the director of the Johnstown Symphony's children's choir, Inclined to Sing, which he had founded, and the Greater Johnstown Community Chorus. He had been director of the symphony chorus.

He taught music in the Richland School District and served numerous churches, most recently as minister of music at Laurel Trinity Lutheran Church, Jennerstown. He is the program director at the Grand Halle, a former church restored as a concert and reception venue in Cambria City.

Rauch has degrees from Pennsylvania State University and the Westminster Choir College. He also did doctoral work at the University of Pittsburgh and frequently played on the organ in Heinz Chapel and conducted the men's glee club.

(See RECITALS Page 12)

MILTON VALENTINE

(Editor's note: The information for this feature is from the Gettysburg College website.)

AN ABIDING PRESENCE

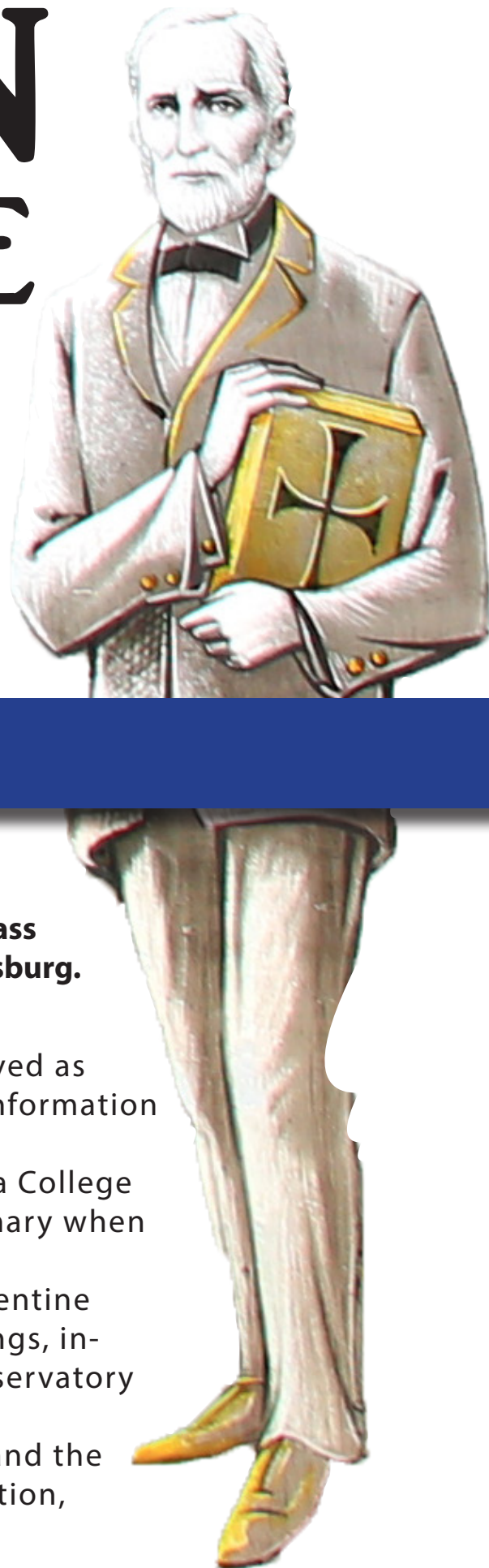
This feature is part of an ongoing series examining the people portrayed on stained-glass windows in the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg.

Milton Valentine, who lived from 1825 to 1906, served as Gettysburg College's third president, according to information on the college's website.

A Maryland native and member of the Pennsylvania College class of 1850, Valentine was a professor at the seminary when called to Gettysburg's presidency.

During his 16-year term of service (1868-1884), Valentine oversaw construction of several new campus buildings, including Stevens Hall (1868) and an astronomical observatory (1874).

As president, Valentine emphasized truth seeking and the need to adapt to changing currents in higher education, the college reports. †



FRUIT

(Continued from Page 1)

"(The) goal is to worship then work as best we can to serve God's people in the world, especially in the small part of the world where Salem stands. God has blessed this small church by keeping it open to hear His word and enabling us then to go and do," lay worship leader Nancy McCall said in an email. She has been a lay worship leader since 1986 — with the first group of lay worship leaders.

"I began leading worship at Salem Lutheran Church many years ago when it was a yoked parish with St. John's Lutheran, Juniata, the latter no longer in existence," she said.

McCall now serves Salem in that capacity full time.

The church has deep roots in Riggles Gap. It was organized in 1806. The sanctuary was built in 1867. She said the Baldwin organ was bought in 1978.

It is "still functioning!" she wrote in an email.

As evidenced by the apple project, the small congregation of 16 families, about 32 people, are able to accomplish fruitful work. There is



Submitted photo

Some of the apples donated for a local food bank by Salem Lutheran Church members.

a wide age range at Salem, from about age 2, to 62 and over.

"There also are three associate members who hold other church affiliation but fully participate in weekly worship and all activities," McCall said of the mix of faithful who take part in fellowship at Salem.

The apple project is three years in the making. On "Harvest Sunday," the sec-

ond Sunday in October, congregation members bring in apples, which are placed at the altar. McCall said that the first year about 50 pounds were donated to nearby food banks, after being prayed over. The response has grown each year.

This year more than 150 pounds of apples were received.

(See FRUIT 2, Page 10)



Submitted photos

Faithful celebrate the Grace Delivered Lutheran Mobile Ministry, and the new trailer that will make the project possible. Grace Delivered board members include: Pastor Dena Gable, Hanna Weimer, Pastor Jono Adams, Beth Thomas, Vicar Allen Stump, Nicholas Carroll and Josh Spangler.

Grace Delivers in New Project

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

People from congregations across Somerset County gathered at Faith Lutheran Church in Somerset on Oct. 10 for the launch of Grace Delivered Lutheran Mobile Ministry.

At the launch, people were able to check out the new trailer, generator and popup tents that will be available for congregations and ministry groups to use for their outreach ministries.

The faithful blessed the trailer for ministry and collected cases of drinks for volunteer fire companies in the county.

There were 70 cases of water and 20 cases of Gatorade collected.

Any member of an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America congregation can lead a project that utilizes the Grace Delivered equipment by filling out an



application form and returning it to the church's board. The board will also plan service activities that provide volunteer opportunities.

"We are very excited about the creative possibilities this new ministry will provide to get out into our communities to connect with and serve new people," Lavansville-Bakersville Lutheran Parish Pastor Dena Gable said. †

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

David Pencek has been called and ordained as minister in the church of Christ. David was called to serve St. Mark's in Snydertown. He was ordained at St. Mark's in Pleasant Gap. "We thank God for the newest pastor in Christ church," was the message on the Allegheny Synod's Facebook page.



Photo from the Allegheny Synod Facebook page

FRUIT 2

(Continued from Page 8)

"The apples are of various kinds purchased from grocery stores and nearby Amish fruit stands and farms," she said.

McCall said the call to do God's work is answered naturally by the people at Salem. "This group of people determines several benevolent projects each year. For this year's God's Work, Our Hands Sunday, members baked cookies, which enabled two large, restaurant-size plastic containers being given to each of the two fire company personnel serving the Riggles Gap and Bellwood areas. Two other recent projects were monetary contributions to victims of a devastating fire in Tyrone and to families who lost employment when the Roaring Spring paper mill closed." †

2022 ELCA Youth Gathering Update

After prayer and conversation, Gathering leadership has decided to require full COVID-19 vaccination, or proof of a negative test result (likely 72 hours before arrival), to attend the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering, MYLE and the tAble.

As of now, leadership has not decided on any additional safety measures.

They said they are committed to continued transparency in the decision-making process and will release information as it becomes available regarding additional safety measures or adjustments to key dates. Any updates will be communicated via Gathering social media, gNews and the synod website.

For a list of updated Frequently Asked Questions, go to elca.org/YouthGathering/COVID19. The Gathering is set for July 24-28, 2022 in Minneapolis. †



Photos by Courtney Kazmer



Above, the birdhouses and materials before the holiday project. At left, the finished crafts.

A Low-Cost Christmas Craft

BY COURTNEY KAZMER

Home & Garden Editor

. . . Four calling birds, three French hens — two Christmas birdhouses with pine and berries! . . .

My latest crafting project was to deck out these two cute little birdhouses with some Christmas cheer.

I purchased the already-made birdhouses from Walmart for 98 cents each some time ago. With the help of some craft paint and a few sprigs of pine and berries, my birdhouses now have a holiday theme. I already had some of the paint, brushes and the hot glue and gun needed to complete the work.

It's an easy winter craft, especially one to do with children.

The entire project totaled about \$10. I made these for my mom to display around her Christmas tree this year. I hope she can enjoy them for years to come.

Have a merry (crafting) Christmas! †

ICYMI (continued)



Submitted photo

Pastor Marty Jo Stellabotte has been called to serve the Geeseytown Newry Lutheran Parish. Congratulations to the new pastor and to her parish.

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“Thirty years ago this series began when I was minister of music. What a pleasure it is that the series continues featuring the amazing gifts and talents of local musicians.”

— *Kim Rauch*

RECITAL

(Continued from Page 6)

Rauch dedicated two of the pieces in the noon recital to his father, who died a year ago, in October.

A musician who leads music for a Somerset County congregation was also featured in a recital.

Nicholas Carroll has been playing the piano since he was 6. It is his life's work.

The best part, he said, is sharing his talent, which he did on Oct. 28 when he played Mozart's "Sonata No. 8" in a Tuesday Noon Recital.

Carroll has been director of music at Trinity Lutheran Church, Somerset, for more than a decade. He also owns and operates a piano studio in Somerset. He has written numerous compositions for piano and for organ.

In 2018 he released a piano album, "Christmas in Somerset," featuring his original compositions and arrangements.

Carroll was valedictorian of his class at Somerset Area High School and graduated from Seton Hill University, where he studied music education, piano performance, composition and sacred music.

He has taught more than 100 students, some of whom are pursuing music careers at universities.

He is a gifted improviser and often uses this skill in worship, according to a press release on the series. Carroll lives in Windber with his wife, Stephanie, and a pet tortoise, Lidiya. †

ADVENT

(Continued from Page 5)

Another tradition, the Jesse Tree, is particularly good for young families. I used a combination of both the Advent wreath and the Jesse Tree with my children. Worshiping together at home, they learned what Advent and Christmas are really about.

Faithward.org has excellent sugges-

tions for scriptures and prayers to use with the wreath (faithward.org/advent-candle-lighting-readings/) and it also has downloadable ornaments for the Jesse Tree (faithward.org/jesse-tree/)

May you know the blessing of spending time with God in praise and prayer this Advent. †

"FRIENDS, THE LIGHT OF CHRIST IS ALL AROUND US. IN THIS SEASON OF GIVING, GIVE OTHERS THE GIFT OF NOTICING THIS LIGHT, HOPE AND PEACE THAT IS OURS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST."

— *From the Bishop*

BISHOP 2

(Continued from Page 3)

Some of you have heard me say that no matter the size of the gift, it is useful, welcome and appreciated — and that is true!

This season as you are thinking about ways to be generous and giving gifts, I invite you to consider these options: a gift to the Allegheny Synod Seminarian Support Fund will help students with books, transportation, food and housing; a gift to the Leadership Fund will allow us to host events and continuing education for your leaders; a gift toward Mission Grants will allow us to “spread the wealth” so-to-speak with our congregations who are being inspired to do new things, but may need a little boost; a gift to Gloria De Dios — our Synod’s new mission start — would support the purchase of Spanish-language worship materials.

I have been asked about my vision for the Synod and a strategy to move forward. It is a work in progress, but one of my dreams is a Bishop’s Mission Fund, which would give grants to congregations in our

Synod in which new ideas are being sparked. I have sat in several meetings in my short time in this office and listened to stories of meaningful, hope-filled ministry taking place in other Synods and thought, “What’s stopping us from dreaming and making those dreams a reality?” Very often, a lack of funds dampens our enthusiasm to fan the flame of that tiny spark of a dream. Don’t get me wrong, we have some wonderful new things beginning and I am hearing about even more things bubbling up. I am confident that we will rise to the occasion when given the opportunity because that’s who we are — a generous, giving people who live our identity as God’s people.

Friends, the light of Christ is all around us. In this season of giving, give others the gift of noticing this light, hope and peace that is ours through Jesus Christ.

I pray that you will have a safe and happy Thanksgiving, a blessed Christmas and a joyful New Year. †

— Bishop Paula

During this
season of
WONDERING and
waiting, take
time to focus on
LOVE...

WALD

(Continued from Page 4)

Again, in the midst of loss and uncertainty for the future Emmanuel comes. No matter what happens in our lives, our world, God is with us. St. Paul writes: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39, NRSV)

During this season of wondering and waiting, take time to focus on love, the love we have for one another here or gone, in person or in our hearts. And know that no matter what, God loves us. God has one plan, that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to us.

May you find peace and hope, assurance and love as we await the coming of our Lord, the celebration of certainty. †

BEFORE *you* **GO**

We did it.

At least we decided to, as long as everyone sticks to the plan.

My wife, my parents and her parents are celebrating this Christmas season without a gift exchange.

There are no grandkids, or nieces or nephews yet to spoil (though my brother-in-law just got engaged, so some may soon be pending.) So this Christmas seems like a perfect time to skip gifts and focus on what matters most, Jesus and family. And you know, the feedback so far has mostly been relief from all corners. No anxiety on what to buy who, no pressure to get to the stores to find the perfect gifts. Add to that the uncertainty about product availability this year, and those worries are increased for many people.

I understand if you think this seems miserly on our part. At first I wasn't entirely sold, either. It's sort of like when Tim Allen's character decided to skip Christmas on "Christmas with the Kranks."

But make no mistake — we are not skipping Christmas. Rather, we are focusing on the reason for the season, hopefully more than we have in seasons past.

This isn't a permanent decision, but I think it's a timely one. We might find it to make for a more enjoyable holiday.

— Rick Kazmer

What makes MIF Term Investments notable? Even non-investors see a return.



Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis, Minnesota

Used an MIF loan to remodel the low-income apartments the church rents to Togolese refugees, thus making their new homes a whole lot homier.

The Mission Investment Fund offers a wide range of investments for individuals and congregations, including Fixed- and Adjustable-rate Term Investments with a choice of terms. What's more, when you invest with MIF, your investment finances loans to ELCA congregations like Christ the Redeemer. To learn more about our investments and loans, contact us at mif.elca.org or **877.886.3522**.



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