

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

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Sunset worship at Siesta Beach.

THE FLORIDA MISSION TRIP REPORT

Story and Photos Start on Page 4

Pastor Louder Reflects on 50 Years of Ministry

By RICK KAZMER
The Lutheran Letter Editor

At age 75, Pastor Larry Louder jokes that he can remember "when dirt was invented."

While that's an exaggeration, the ordained pastor of 50 years can likely recall a lot of firsts in the Lutheran church. He started his work

for God not long after Elizabeth Platz became the first ordained pastor in the Lutheran church in 1970, for example.

(See LOUDER 1, Page 5)



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

INSIDE: Meet the Hoffmans from Karthuas



The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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Inviting people to love one another.

OUR VISION

All creation living in harmony with Christ.

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Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

An Invitation

A Message from Bishop Paula Schmitt

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

During the last several weeks, I have been asked on more than one occasion why people aren't coming to church or coming back to church. I joked in one congregation that if I had the answer to that question, I could retire today! The fact is, there isn't one answer to the question — there are many answers to the question. One article I read indicated that a resistance to anything institutional is a major cause.

I suppose I could agree with that to a point. I have heard other reasons, such as a prolonged illness, change in work schedule, the worship time is no longer a good fit for life changes, apathy, priorities have shifted, and you have probably heard at least one or two other reasons. It's an uphill battle and we are not the only ones in this battle.

When I speak with my peers in other denominations, they are feeling the same pinch. Their congregations are getting smaller, they are having trouble finding leadership and suggested changes are ignored.

The world has changed. People have changed. The church has not kept up with the changes in a way that has been helpful. While I agree that the church should be different from the world, the church also has a responsibility to be responsive to changes in order to continue to live.



Bishop Paula Schmitt

(See BISHOP 1, Page 18)

Scene of the Edition



Bishop Paula Schmitt volunteered at the Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries golf tournament at Scotch Valley Country Club on July 31. "It was a beautiful day for golf," she posted with the photo on Facebook.

Photo by Bishop Paula Schmitt

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The Report from Sarasota

By **PASTOR DREW McCAFFERY**

Bethany Lutheran Church, Altoona

During the first week of July, 25 individuals (17 youth and eight adults) traveled to Sarasota, Florida, to complete assorted hurricane relief projects in the Sarasota to Fort Myers area.

Some of our projects included doing restoration work at Faith Lutheran-Lehigh Acres, helping stock and sort food at a local food pantry, helping distribute food at Faith Lutheran-Sarasota's local feeding day, and helping to stock backpacks at the All Saints Food Bank, which serves Sarasota and DeSoto counties.

We spent an afternoon at St. Peter's Lutheran-Fort Myers Beach to see the aftermath of Hurricane Ian, which swept through the area a year ago.

During our time in Florida, we learned about hunger and the impact a natural disaster can have on a community.

All Saints Food Bank has been serving the communities of Sarasota and DeSoto for years through their warehouse. The bank continues to grow, because the need has continued. This is set to be the fourth year in a row of serving more than 20 million pounds of food (they had been serving 17-18 million before the pandemic).



Submitted photo

Youth painting during the mission trip in Florida.

As a result, the organizers will be expanding their building again.

They have also started focusing on reasons that lead to individuals coming to food banks. In partnership with their parent organization, Feeding America, they are going to look at some of those causes, and create additional programs for individuals, such as financial planning, mental health education, and others, to help fight against hunger.

A high-impact day for our group was visiting St. Peter's in Fort Myers and seeing the impact Hurricane Ian had for this congregation. The church is located 100 yards from the beach, and the waves not only surged through their fellowship hall, but up through their sanctuary.

(See TRIP, Page 8)

Remember in Prayer

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

September

Week 1: Good Shepherd Lutheran, Windber

Week 2: Christ Lutheran, Madley

Week 3: Geeseytown-Newry Lutheran Parish: Geeseytown Lutheran; and Evangelical Lutheran, Newry

Week 4: Grace Lutheran, Bellwood

October

Week 1: Moxham Lutheran, Johnstown

Week 2: New Centerville Lutheran Parish: St. Paul Lutheran, Barronvale; Samuels Lutheran, Somerset; and

Messiah Lutheran, New Centerville

Week 3: Trinity Lutheran, Altoona

Week 4: Faith Lutheran, Somerset

LOUDER 1

(Continued from Page 1)

"People don't care what you know until they know how much you care," Louder wrote in an email, describing his pastoral journey. That was in answer to a question about the advice he'd give to people considering becoming ordained.

It's a journey he first considered when he was in junior high, but it took a while for God's call to be clear. He first thought he'd like to be a high school teacher

"It wasn't until the summer of my senior year in college that I decided that was what I was supposed to do," he said of his decision to go to seminary school.

He was newly married to Linda as he embarked on the journey, a fulfillment of God's work that started during his childhood. His youth was filled with Sunday Schools and choir practices with his two younger brothers.

"(A)ll these experiences were sinking into his bones," he wrote about himself, as part of a reflection on his life penned for another project.

Music was an important part of the way Louder

came to know the church. He grew up during times when choirs were robust parts of the service.

During the years he has served four congregations (the latest at Grace Lutheran in State College), and did a seven-year stint on the Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries (ALSM) staff.

A unique tour of duty was being the pastor to a Lutheran church among the Amish in Lancaster. He held that post for 16 years. During that time he and his wife, Linda, had two children, Casey and Amanda.

From there he served a huge, 3,500-member congregation in Sliver Spring Maryland — St. Luke's Lutheran Church. Pastor Platz (the first ordained woman in the ELCA) is now a teaching pastor there.

In 1988 Louder came back to the hills and valleys of Pennsylvania to be the pastor at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Duncansville, where his regional leadership expanded with various posts, including with ALSM. He retired from his last call at Grace, State College, in 2015.

(See LOUDER 2, Page 7)

WE *are* LUTHERAN

Karthaus Family Growing Faith in Rural Congregation

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Ben and Jessica Hoffman are members of a church that is similar to many in the Allegheny Synod. Shepherd of the Hills in Karthaus is a small congregation.

When something needs done, it's "all hands on deck," Ben, 36, said. He is active on the congregation council, preschool board, and is part of the effort to renew some projects that went dormant during the pandemic, including a lunch brunch.

"I very much enjoy all aspects of keeping our congregation running," he said.

Ben and Jessica, 34, have three kids. A fourth is due in October. There's also a whole herd of wildlife in the Hoffman family, including two dogs, seven sheep, 40 beef cattle and various chickens and turkeys.

Jessica said she spends her ministry time with her children as they grow up in the church.

"While I don't feel called to children's ministry, I think these formative experiences are important. With only a few children in our congregation, it's important

to me to do this work even if it's not otherwise my calling. I also enjoy more administrative aspects of any volunteer position, so I have found my niche helping with outreach committee writing and strategic planning, and enjoy things like Synod assembly," she said.

"I've started coordinating a back-to-school supply drive for our public elementary with both congregations."

Shepherd in the Hills is in a parish with Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in nearby Lanse. Ben said the two congregations work well together, maximizing the strengths of each church. For this reason, he is excited about the future, despite challenges small congregations face.

(See HOFFMAN, Page 14)

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Duncansville Congregation Celebrates RIC Status

Derek Detrich is the service minister and vice president of the church council at Duncansville Evangelical Lutheran Church. The church recently obtained Reconciling in Christ status, a unique designation. Detrich shared some information about what this means in Duncansville.

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What is RIC status?

DEREK DETRICH: RIC status stands for "Reconciling in Christ" status. It is a recognition granted to churches and faith communities within certain denominations that publicly welcome and affirm individuals of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, as well as a commitment to racial equity and anti-racism.

(See RIC 1, Page 13)

LOUDER 2

(Continued from Page 5)

Louder "found these twilight years of his career extremely rewarding and satisfying," he wrote.

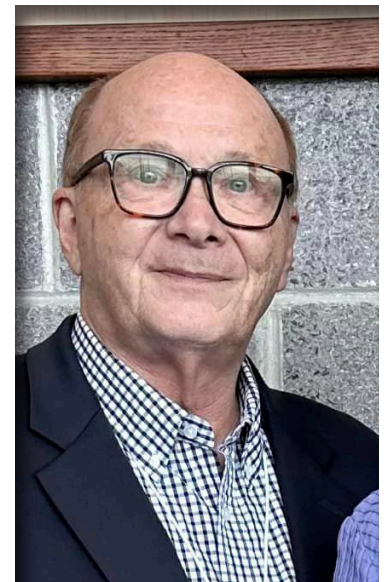
But, Louder can still be found behind the pulpit. He sometimes provides a sermon at Grace, or takes part in some other church tasks that pop up.

He has noticed changes since the pandemic. As a result, congregation life is different, with new challenges, according to Louder.

"I think, since the pandemic, there has been a shift in the way parish ministry is seen and practiced. Pastors today are facing issues, which I never even thought of," he said.

But, a key part of the job remains — sharing God's Good News. It's also Louder's favorite aspect of his calling.

"I feel exceptionally blessed to have had the opportunity to be engaged with such a wide variety of members of God's family. Each interaction has, in some way, been enriching," he said. †



Pastor Larry Louder



Pastor Sharon Taylor shares what the community of St. Peter's is doing since the hurricane, when the water was coming up from under the floor, into the sanctuary.

Submitted photo

TRIP

(Continued from Page 4)

From what Pastor Sharon (the outgoing pastor of St. Peter's) informed us, their fellowship hall will be torn down because of the damage.

The fellowship hall looked like it was already demolished when our group was there. The sanctuary, which was on 8-foot risers, had a car underneath and water was shooting up from the middle of the sanctuary. Pastor Sharon was uncertain if the sanctuary would be salvageable because of the carnage, the political landscape of Fort Myers Beach, and other factors.

Since many other churches have been severely damaged and may not be able to rebuild, the assorted congregations are in conversation and discernment about possibly creating a multi-denominational Christian center for the community.

The youth had a lot to unpack from the St. Peter's visit as they saw for the first time terrible hurricane damage in person.

It was moments like this that not only strengthened our sense of community, but also helped build a bond with the youth group from Montana (the group was working with the Allegheny Synod team) throughout the week. It was a wonderful sight to see a group of 40 kids build such a sense of community with our short time together. It is encounters like this that show us how the community of Christ can bring us together and leave a lasting impact on our journey of faith.

We are grateful for a variety of sponsors and individuals who not only helped to raise funds for this event, but also made it a possibility. If you would like to see photos and video, you are welcome to check the synod's Facebook Page, or search "Allegheny Synod Youth SWFL Relief Trip-Highlight Reel" on Youtube. †

More Photos from Florida



Submitted photos
The disaster relief team (above). The team at work (surrounding photos).



Dealing With Trauma

By **PASTOR JAIME OLSON**

Duncansville Evangelical Lutheran Church

With more than 20 years studying the impact of trauma and how it impacts our lives, I recently had the privilege of offering a workshop at the Rostered Leaders Gathering in Phoenix, Arizona from July 17-20.

During my presentation, I was able to offer information based on research that suggests that our five senses play a significant role in processing trauma information, which we carry with us throughout our story. For instance, a child who has been abused may often exhibit childlike behaviors long into their adult years because they have never moved beyond the moment the abuse happened.

A smell, sight, taste, sound, or touch of an object may trigger the moment the abuse occurred and the person relives the trauma. For you, the smell of baking bread may take you to fond memories of eating fresh-baked buttered bread from grandma's kitchen, while for the abused person, it may remind them of being wrongly touched by a cousin behind the kitchen as the smells wafted from the open



Pastor Jaime Olson

window.

As much as the five senses are forever connected to good and bad moments, learning that they are part of the story can help when a person is reminded to stop what they are

doing and remember that the event is past and to seek safe grounding in the moment. That brings us to grounding in five steps: Focus on five things that you can see. Focus on four things you can touch. Focus on three things you can hear. Focus on two things you can smell. Focus on one thing you can taste.

So, as much as the five senses are connected to our past stories, good or bad, the five senses can also be used to help us find safety in the moment. Trained professionals are the best source of help when dealing with past traumas and the care of self through rest, proper nutrition, exercise, trained helpers and healthy relationships are key in moving beyond the trauma that occurs in our lives.

(See TRAUMA Page 20)

The Director's Take

News of Note from the Director of Evangelical Mission

By **PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK**

Assistant to the Bishop & Director of Evangelical Mission

Your Allegheny Synod Council has been engaged in a process during the past several months to discern our identity and ministry.

Some pieces of that process included talking about our treasures, our challenges, and our passions; taking a survey about perceptions of our shared ministry and discussing the results; and compiling a list of active words to drive our ministry. At our Allegheny Synod Assembly on June 17, Synod Council brought a list of 19 action words. The gathered Assembly was tasked with choosing the top seven words to guide us in ministry. They then took a second vote to narrow the list down to three words. The action words they chose are:

LOVE

INVITE

ACCEPT

The words that made the first cut, but not the second cut are:

EMPOWER

EDUCATE

CONNECT

COLLABORATE

The council then met at the end



Pastor Kevin Shock

of July at Camp Sequanota to engage in the next steps of our process. Although we planned for three more steps, we left room for more discussion and prayerful editing, in order to not rush the important work of discernment. We were happy with completing the next two steps, instead of three, and even more happy with the depth of conversation and the enriching experience we had thinking about and discussing ministry. By the end of our retreat we had a mission statement for the Allegheny Synod:

INVITING PEOPLE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

And a vision statement:

ALL CREATION LIVING IN HARMONY WITH CHRIST.

For the purposes of this process, a mission statement is defined as a short, memorable phrase that guides us to live into who we are even more than what we do. A vision statement is defined as what we see the world becoming when we live out our mission well.

(See DEM Page 21)

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

These are some of the churches Bishop Paula Schmitt and Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock visited during the past two months, along with some other news of note from around the Synod.

The Allegheny Synod Candidacy Committee has announced that Claudia Plows has received a positive entrance decision. Entrance is the first step in the candidacy process and means that Claudia may now begin to take classes at seminary toward the goal of becoming a rostered minister.



Trinity Lutheran, Sidman



Bishop Paula Schmitt, center facing camera, during worship on June 11 at First Lutheran in Altoona, before the Allegheny Synod Assembly .



St. Paul's, Stoystown

RIC 1

(Continued from Page 7)

The Duncansville Evangelical Lutheran Church has recently been acknowledged as the most recent Reconciling in Christ congregation in Pennsylvania.

TLL: What will this allow for your church to accomplish?

DD: Obtaining RIC status allows Duncansville ... to create an inclusive and welcoming environment where all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, feel loved, accepted, and supported in their faith journey. This recognition emphasizes the church's commitment to celebrating and supporting every person's unique journey, fostering an open community that embraces diversity and provides outreach opportunities.

TLL: Why is it important?

DD: The RIC status is important because it reflects the church's core values of love, acceptance, and belonging for all people, which align with the teachings of Jesus. By adopting a public statement of welcome and affirming individuals of diverse backgrounds, the church can be a beacon of hope and demonstrate its dedication to social ministry and reconciliation.

TLL: Why are you excited about it?

DD: As the vice president of council, service ministry, I am excited about achieving RIC status because it signifies a meaningful opportunity for outreach and inclusion. It allows us to expand our community, demonstrating our commitment to embracing all of God's children and creating an authentic welcome experience tailored to the specific needs of each individual.

TLL: What was the biggest challenge during the process?

DD: During the process of obtaining RIC status, our congregation didn't encounter any challenges as we have always been a welcoming and inclusive community. Our commitment to embracing diversity and affirming the worth of every individual has been a cornerstone of our church's values for years. As a result, adopting a public statement of welcome for individuals of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions, as well as committing to racial equity and anti-racism, was a natural progression for us. Our church community has long been dedicated to embodying the teachings of Jesus and living out the message of love and acceptance for all.

(See RIC 2, Page 16)

HOFFMAN

(Continued from Page 6)

"We are planning and executing ministries in our community that matter to the people that access them," he said. "All of this gives me hope that God has a plan for the future of our little corner of the world — and that gives me hope!"

Attracting growing families to the church is important for sustainable growth. Jess said she works with the Outreach and Stewardship Committee to find ways to reach young families.

"(A)nd help them feel welcome and included in ministries even if they aren't going to attend Sunday services," Jessica said.

"So, successful events that get this goal right make me excited, like a recent community parade we participated in and our ecumenical Vacation Bible School with four other parishes/churches where 60-plus kids spend the week together."

The farm keeps the Hoffmans busy.

But when they get some down time, they enjoy going camping.

They want to eventually spend a night in every Pennsylvania state park. They also enjoy cooking and culinary adventures.

"Yes, camping has been a wonderful addition to our family life," Jessica added. "The kids



Submitted photo
Ben and Jessica Hoffman, with children Jacob, 7, Ruth, 5, and Jane, 2.

keep me pretty busy (and the farm keeps Ben busy, as he said), but I love to hike, too, and when I am not pregnant, I have been dragging Ben and sometimes the kids to all sorts of trails. We do love food and I'm excited to be turning the kids into pseudo-foodies." †

(Faith Matters is on the next page)

FAITH MATTERS

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What have you been praying for the most lately?

BEN HOFFMAN: Common ground and mutual respect and understanding. Our world is so unnecessarily fractured — politically, socially, etc., that people seem to just talk past each other instead of talking to each other. So many folks feel hopeless, and I think some of it stems from the lack of progress that is made due to our division.

JESSICA HOFFMAN: The patience and true unconditional love necessary to be the parent I need to be. It's a humbling season of life to be the parent of young kids, but it's also important. It's been striking to me how much my focus has shifted to them at this time.

TLL: What's your first memory of experiencing the Lutheran faith?

BH: I grew up in the Lutheran Church (in the same church I attend today). I remember Sunday school classes, the excitement of Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday Services, and singing in the choir.

JH: When Ben and I were deciding to get married, I believe after we were engaged, I started going to church with him. I grew up locally and was confirmed United Methodist as a teen. I never felt connected to the church itself during my teen and young adult years. During college, I suspected I was agnostic. I do like to tell people to try various Protestant denominations because the Lutheran worship/Mass style and the liturgy feed my soul much more than the church of my childhood. Many people see them as similar, but I don't. I have always thought that was a gift from God that I found a spiritual home in my husband's home church and denominational tradition.

TLL: What's one message you have for anyone considering attending a Lutheran church?

BH: Be open-minded and don't be intimidated! Attending a church with a liturgical tradition (like Lutheranism) can be a daunting experience — trying to follow along, all of the call and response, etc. I would tell folks not to get too caught up in it — if you lose your place, don't say all of the words right, etc. you can still get a lot out of the service, and no one will judge you for it. We're happy to have you here, and if you are coming to a Lutheran church, odds are there will be something to eat after the service! †

'THROUGH THIS JOURNEY, WE STRIVE TO BE A POSITIVE FORCE IN OUR COMMUNITY AND BEYOND.'

RIC 2

(Continued from Page 13)

From the outset, we have fostered an environment where everyone feels loved, accepted, and supported in their faith journey. This harmonious process of obtaining RIC status serves as an inspiring example of our ongoing work and dedication to creating a safe and inclusive space that celebrates diversity and extends a sincere welcome to all. We are excited to be recognized by Reconciling Works as the most recent Reconciling in Christ congregation in Pennsylvania, and we continue to seek ways to deepen our commitment to inclusivity and advocacy. Our church's values remain firmly rooted in embracing all of God's children, actively working toward reconciliation and growth within the church, and ensuring that everyone experiences a lived reality of love, acceptance, and belonging. Through this journey, we strive to be a positive force in our community and beyond, as we live out the Love of God, embrace the teachings of Jesus, and honor the Holy Spirit's guidance.

TLL: Any advice for other churches thinking about this?

DD: For other churches considering pursuing RIC status or similar affirming designations, I would advise starting with open conversations within the congregation. Engage in education and support for LGBTQIA+ individuals, racial equity, and anti-racist efforts. Seek guidance from organizations like Reconciling Works to tailor an authentic welcome experience that reflects the church's values and specific community needs.

TLL: What do you hope to accomplish next?

DD: With RIC status achieved, our church's next goal is to continue deepening our commitment to inclusivity and advocacy. We want to actively work toward reconciliation and growth within the church, allowing all of God's Beloveds to experience a lived reality of love, acceptance, and belonging. We will strive to be a positive force in our community, celebrating diversity and promoting racial equity as we continue to live out the Love of God, embrace the teachings of Jesus, and honor the Holy Spirit's guidance. †

It's Going to Be a Big Weekend

By PASTOR TRACI A. MARRIOTT

St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Martinsburg

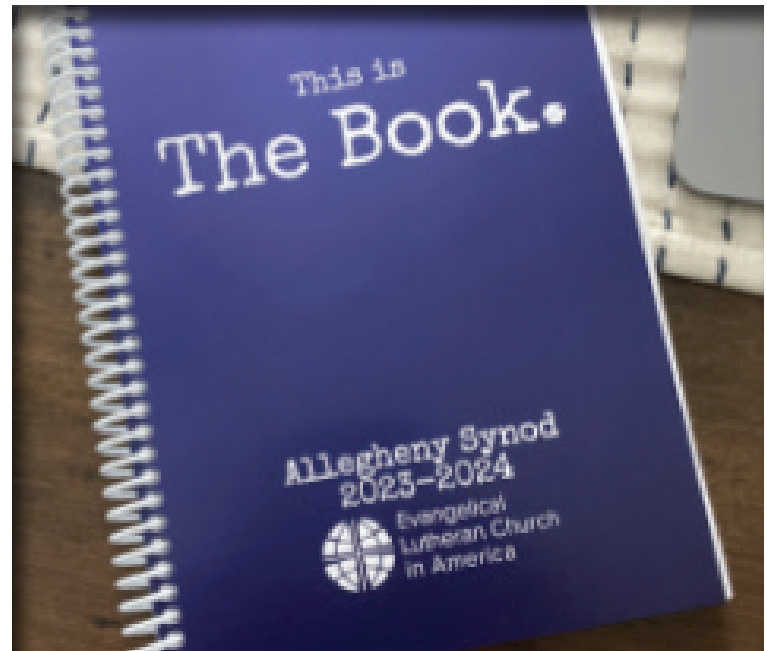
The Weekend, the Allegheny Synod's junior/senior high retreat, returns this Dec. 8-10 to Huntingdon.

Open to sixth through 12th graders, The Weekend combines fellowship, education, recreation, music, and worship planned specifically for our area youth. Pastors and lay leaders are invited to bring their young members (and members' friends) to reconnect with youth from the wider church.

Although the Synod sponsored service and learning trips for youth in both the summers of 2022 and 2023, this is the first Synod youth retreat since 2019. As schedules have filled back to overflowing since the pandemic, The Weekend is planned with intentional time for respite and the opportunity for youth to choose from a number of recreational options to make The Weekend their own.

St. James Lutheran Church in Huntingdon has graciously offered to host the event. Participants will be housed a short walk away at the Comfort Inn.

Members of the planning team have had the pleasure of working with many of the Synod's youth in our congregations, at Camp Sequanota, and through trips and other cooperative ministries. In recent



Submitted photo

"The Book"

years, we have found it more difficult to estimate who and how many folks will be interested in church events — youth or adults — as the pandemic seems to have changed the way people think about long-range planning. However, we hope that the youth who have been engaged in these recent Allegheny Synod activities will welcome another chance to gather again in intentional community.

The planning team also worked together to write "The Book" as a resource for youth to prepare for and extend their experience after The Weekend.

"The Book," which was funded by the generosity of several congregations and the Synod Council, is available at the Synod office in Altoona. †

BISHOP 1

(Continued from Page 2)

We've worshiped pretty much in the same way for as long as I can remember — and probably for as long as many of you can remember. We have learned new hymns, adapted to new liturgy settings and sometimes incorporated more contemporary styles of worship. All of that has been good and helpful. But, as we have seen, it's not enough.

I think in a past issue of The Lutheran Letter I said there are no longer boats of people coming to the United States from Europe to fill our church pews and it is no longer the norm for individuals or families to get up on Sunday and go to church.

All of this might sound a bit doom-and-gloom. It's not meant to sound that way. These are realities we must face and find ways to address. There are congregations in our Synod that are meeting these realities head-on and in some cases, are beginning to thrive once again. Both Pastor Kevin and I have been to one congregation that does not have a regularly called pastor, and yet there have been a number of baptisms of adults and children alike, a steady, strong presence in worship and outreach ministries that support those in need in their community.

Recently, Pastor Kevin asked some of the leaders, "What are you doing that is inspiring this?"

The answer was, "I don't think we are doing anything special. We are

inviting people to worship and we are praying for them." A recent statistic about church attendance indicated that more than 60% of people who started going to church more regularly did so because someone invited them.

If you've been following along with some of the outcomes from our Synod Assembly, you know that voting members chose words from a list made by your Synod Council so that we could discern a new mission statement. One of the words that made it to the top was invite.

The Synod Council has come up with a new mission statement. Read Pastor Kevin's article in this issue to learn more about our mission and vision statement.

Inviting people and praying for them is pretty special. I often tell people who ask me about the situation we face in church that people want to feel as though they belong in a community, as though they matter and fit in. If I knew people in a congregation were praying for me, I would feel a certain sense of connection to that community and want to be part of it. I am very fortunate to have that in the congregation I attend. Even though I am not there very often because I am on the road, when I am there, I feel connected to the community because I know they are praying for me and I have been made to feel as though I am part of who they are in the body of Christ.

(See BISHOP 2, Page 19)

BISHOP 2

(Continued from Page 18)

You might say that's just because I am the bishop. I don't think that's true — and I have seen that it isn't, because new people have come to that congregation, too.

Inviting is not a strong point for most Lutherans. I believe it's because for a long time, we didn't have to invite people. People were coming to the United States and settling in our towns and villages and going to church. That's no longer the case. And, we live in a different time. People's lives get consumed with other things and church gets lower on the priority list. Chances are, people "want" to come to church, but since they may not have been there in a while, they feel awkward, wonder if they'll know anyone, and aren't sure they will feel welcome. A simple invitation could push someone who has been thinking about returning, to do so. And, the invitation, if it is to carry some weight, should be in-person. It's great to send a card or have a "you're invited" in the newsletter, but nothing beats a personal invitation from a friend, family member, or neighbor. You have no idea what it means to someone to know that they are missed, valued and cared about — even when they are not participating in the same way. And, you never know what's going on with someone. There may have had an angry word spoken to them, which is making it hard to return, there may be a memory of a loved one who has died that is keeping someone away, there may be any number of reasons that

someone stops coming to church. Our responsibility is not to judge that reason, but to be praying for those people and when we see them, inviting them. When we do invite people, we need to be ready for them to attend; make sure they are greeted when they arrive; introduce them to others and have the coffee on.

Invite someone. They may not take you up on the offer the first time you do it. But, don't give up. Next time you see them, let them know your church is having an event or there'll be fresh coffee and cookies, or you'll save them a seat. And, most importantly, pray for them. Pray for the people who aren't there. Pray for their families. Pray for yourselves, too, because it takes courage to invite others. God's Work. Our Hands. Sunday is a good opportunity to invite people who haven't been there for a while. A community service project could be a re-entry point for someone who has been trying to find a reason to come back. Your project doesn't have to be complicated: writing notes to people in a nursing home; packaging cookies for first responders; assembling school kits; making emergency kits for the local shelter, painting a neighbor's garage door; weeding an elderly couple's flower beds. The important thing is the invitation.

Friends be open to how the Holy Spirit will change you when you start inviting others into the beloved community of faith. I am cheering for you.

+Bishop Paula

A Season of Transition on Campus

By DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON

Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State

When was the last time you made a big transition? How did it go? What did you do to help manage all the change and the new situation? How long did it take to find your rhythm and feel comfortable?

Every fall, I am struck by how overwhelming the start of the school year is on campus. For most people, nearly everything is new and the initial weeks are something of a blur.

There are buildings and classrooms to find, faculty to meet and to get to know, classwork with lots of expectations and requirements, housing situations to sort out, friends and classmates to connect with, family and loved ones at home to keep in touch with, work-study to make time for ... the list is endless.

Among the things that help students (as well as faculty and staff) adjust to the new year is the fact that the whole community is going through this start-of-the-year transition together.

Everyone is getting used to a new schedule and new people and new responsibilities; there is comfort in that shared experience.

One of the gifts students find when they gather for worship and dinner and conversation together is the chance to talk about the challenges everyone is facing, to hear from others about how they are succeeding or failing to sort things out, and to be reminded that they are loved and claimed by God, who will never let them go (no matter how many times they got lost on the way to class this week).

We hear from students that they are grateful Lutheran Campus Ministry provides a safe and loving community where they are welcome as they are, where they don't need to pretend that things like the start of the school year aren't hard, where people will walk with them in the challenges and the successes of college life.

A place where they will encounter the compassion and love of God.

Please join me in praying for students at Penn State and other colleges across the nation. Pray for courage and persistence. Pray for good judgement and wise choices.

Pray that students find communities that are authentic and speak the truth in love. Pray that they hear that they are loved by God, no matter what. †

DEM

(Continued from Page 11)

Our vision is not something we will ever achieve on our own, but rather serves as an end goal, far in the distance, to look toward as we live our mission and ministry. Our mission helps us to keep focused on ministry and serves as a touchstone for all our decisions. Even as we vote on money issues or the logistical necessities of being the church, we would be well-served to ask ourselves, "Does this decision (help us to) invite people to love one another?" Imagine what our ministry might look like if we always followed the command of Jesus and encouraged one another to do the same.

I hope you can see some obvious ways that the words chosen by the Synod Assembly shine through in our mission and vision statements. I assure you that those same words guided our discussions, even if they didn't appear in the statements explicitly. As Synod Council was engaged with one another and this discernment process at our retreat, we considered that these statements would speak primarily to

our ministry as the lay and ordained leadership of the Allegheny Synod, and yet we also hoped to develop statements that would guide all of the congregations and people in the Allegheny Synod in living out the gospel in the world. In fact, we discussed that these statements could be adopted by individual congregations and ministries who might not have mission and vision statements or might feel that their current ones are outdated, irrelevant, or forgettable.

The leadership of the Allegheny Synod plans to utilize these statements often, in order to familiarize people with them and with our identity as ELCA followers of Christ in this Allegheny region. I encourage you to learn these statements by heart, to practice them in your daily living, and to let them guide you in your personal and congregational ministries. However you use these statements, we pray that your life and your ministry is about inviting people to love one another with the hope of all creation living in harmony with Christ. †

TRAUMA

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As a person of faith, our relationship to God, our faith community, and prayer partners are a blessing beyond measure when trust is gained and stories are shared. When we begin to reveal our pain in safe places, we begin to take control of the narrative and live as we are intended as children of God. †

BEFORE *you* **GO**

Time Management

I recently took on the planning role for a community project.

It's not something I have a lot of experience doing. I have led teams before, and on tight deadlines (I used to be a newspaper editor). This one is a little bit different, involving multiple groups. I have a lot of side projects, many of them are part of the way I make a living. So, it's sometimes difficult to squeeze another project into the schedule.

I think I am at capacity for now.

A message at church the other week keyed in on how much time we give to God. Are we shoe-horning him into our schedules? It's easy to shake our heads during these types of sermons, acknowledging that God should come first in our lives. But, sometimes it's hard to provide the proof that things play out that way, at least for me.

The work I do, and the community projects I take part in, are all great things that I think are good time investments, things that make the community better.

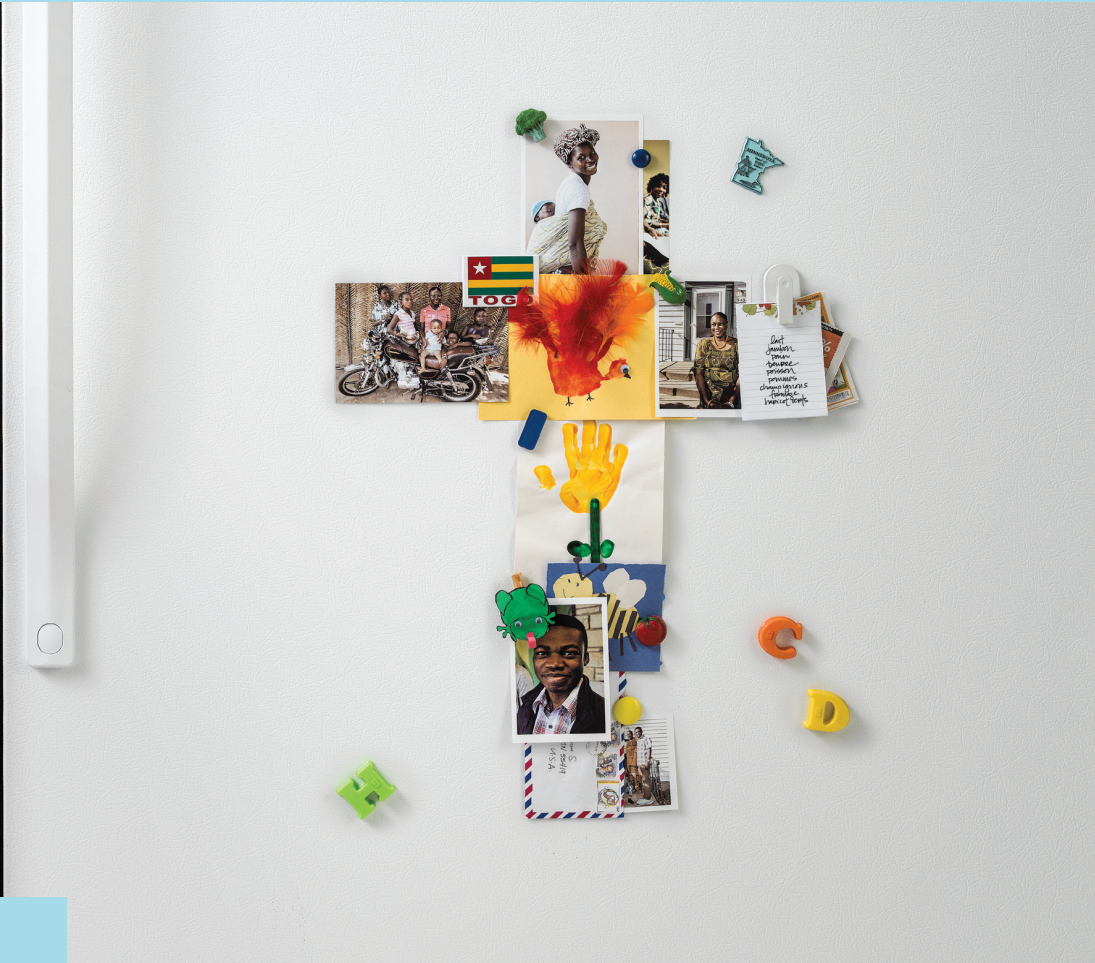
But, nothing improves lives, and communities, better than God's work. Reading about the efforts of the Synod's mission trip to Florida is a good reminder. If you missed it, be sure to read the update in this issue. The great photos that were submitted tell the story well, too.

It was a reminder for me that, while it's important to do good work in the community, it's more important to manage our time so we are doing God's work.

We'll keep highlighting great examples in The Lutheran Letter. †

— Rick Kazmer

In addition to paying interest, MIF Term Investments also pay it forward.



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.

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