

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

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Autumn Edition

Final thoughts from BISHOP RHYNE



Submitted photo

Bishop Michael Rhyme's term ended on Aug. 31. On Sept. 1, Paula Schmitt took over as bishop of the Allegheny Synod, after being elected in June.

Rhyme answered a few questions about his time as bishop, reflecting on some of the events that happened during his term. **Read the feature on Page 6.**

Pretty in Pink

Zion Using Flamingos in Unique Way

BY PASTOR DAVID BOWMAN

Zion Lutheran Church, Hollidaysburg

When you drive around Hollidaysburg this summer, there is a fair chance of spotting a flock of plastic flamingos in some poor person's front yard.

For years members of Zion have had their houses "flocked" by dozens of gaudy, pink lawn decorations.

The sheer number of birds, along with the accompanying signs, make it clear that this is a prank/fundraiser — for no one in their right mind would ever decorate their yard this way. After a few days and a small donation to our National Youth Gathering fund, the birds migrate to another member's home.

(See PINK, Page 14)



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



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your comments and story ideas. We look
forward to hearing from you.

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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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'Terricited'

By BISHOP PAULA SCHMITT

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

During the last two months as I made the tran-
sition from serving Trinity Evangelical Lutheran
Church in Latrobe as an intentional interim pastor
to turning toward serving as your bishop, I found
myself using the term “terrificited” quite often. Of
course, it’s a made-up term from two words, ter-
rified and excited. That’s how I have felt on most
days.

On the days when I have been more “terri” than
“cited” a dear friend of mine reminds me to “trust
the Spirit” — three words I am leaning into in these
days.

During the synod assembly, you heard me say
three other words: rebuild, reunite and revive.
Those three words kept coming to me while I
spent time praying and discerning. They are words
you will hear me use often in these next several
months as I believe the Spirit is leading us into a
time of rebirth and renewal.

When your synod council met in retreat in July,
I urged those leaders to keep looking forward.
When we are traveling to a destination, we need
to keep our eyes on the road, if we constantly look
in the rear-view mirror, we are going to miss our
exit or a fork in the road or even our hoped-for
destination.

While I believe we can learn from our past by oc-
casional looking back, my hope is that we want
to move forward into this new thing Jesus is doing
in our synod. In order to move forward, we need to
keep our eyes, heart and minds open to what the
Spirit is doing and saying to us.

(See BISHOP 1, Page 12)



A Walk Through The Sunflowers On Page 11

ARE YOU A NEW PASTOR, OR HAVE A NEW CALL?

If you would like to talk about your new call for a story in The Lutheran Letter Digital, email Editor Rick Kazmer at r9remzak@hotmail.com.

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IN MEMORY OF: Jeff McCready by Mary Jane McCready

Pastor Becca Ehrlich, Bishop Michael Rhyne, synod office manager Michelle Bossler and Bishop-Elect Paula Schmitt, who will be starting her term on Sept. 1.



Submitted photo

Pastor Becca's Farewell

(Editor's note: Pastor Becca has received a call to serve as the associate dean for community life at General Theological Seminary {Episcopal} in New York City. She started her new post in August.)

By PASTOR BECCA EHRLICH

Interim Director of Evangelical Mission

When I started as your interim director for evangelical mission on Jan. 2, 2020, none of us had any idea of how the world would change in just a few short months. I began the DEM work with you all, thinking that I would serve for eight months, since we planned to elect a new Bishop that June.

Instead, as we dealt with a devastating global pandemic, I continued to serve as we extended both Bishop Rhyne and the synod staff's

roles through to the next year. In addition to my DEM work, following synod staff transitions in August of 2020, I became full-time and took on mobility, candidacy and first call roles as well.

A lot has happened in the last year and a half. We have had to find creative ways to continue call processes at multiple congregations throughout the synod during this pandemic, we have had candidates for rostered ministry continue their seminary educations and candidacy processes in different ways. We have had our first new start since 1968 — Gloria De Dios, geared toward the Latinx community in Centre County — become approved by ELCA Churchwide, first as an exploration and now as a full SAWC, starting officially on July 1.

(See BECCA, Page 5)

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, Geeseytown and Evangelical Lutheran, Newry

Week 4: Grace Lutheran, Bellwood

OCTOBER

Week 1: Yeager Memorial Lutheran, Bedford

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

BECCA

(Continued from Page 4)

We saw the formation and ministry of two new synod teams: the Stewardship Table and the Mission Table.

We have done all of this together in the face of uncertainty and struggle as we all figured out how to do ministry in the shifting sands of a pandemic that seemed never-ending.

In all of this, God was with us and guided us. I am amazed at how creative you all have been during the last year and a half, ready to jump in and do ministry in ways we never pictured or expected.

As we now move to a future in which we can see less of a risk around COVID-19 due to vaccinations, we are able to be open and creative as we continue doing ministry in a new era.

It is often assumed that calling synod staff to serve in transition time is at best, for maintaining only, and at worst, pointless.

I'm thrilled that even more than just maintaining has happened during my time here, and things have moved forward as I've served you all.

That couldn't have happened without you —you all were willing to dive in even when things were difficult.

And none of this, of course, could have happened without God leading and sustaining us.

Thank you for listening to God and for following God's voice with me, even when the future looked foggy.

Serving as your Interim DEM/assistant to the bishop for the last year and a half has been an honor, privilege and blessing. I will miss you all very much.

Thank you for your deep faith in Jesus and your sharing of God's all-encompassing love with your communities and the world. My hope and prayer is that you will continue all of this good work, and more — with God's help and guidance.

God's peace. †

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.” (2 Thessalonians 3:16)

Rhyne's Reflections

A look back on the last seven years



Bishop Michael Rhyne's term started on Sept. 1, 2014.

THE LUTHERAN LETTER:

What are you going to miss most about your time as bishop?

BISHOP MICHAEL RHYNE:

There are two things I will miss. The first is I will miss the people of the Allegheny Synod. The second is I will miss how, when working in

the synod office, you get to see the many ways that God and the power of the Holy Spirit are at work across our seven counties and 114 congregations.

We have amazing people in the Allegheny Synod. It has been such a blessing to travel to meet them, to worship with them, to walk with them in good times and in more difficult times. I am blessed to have been able to meet people through this call, that I simply would not encounter if I were serving as a parish pastor. These are people who have blessed and touched my life. I can't imagine not having had the chance to get to know them. I will miss this great family of witnesses that I have been blessed to journey with these last seven years.

It is through our people who love our Lord Jesus, and give of themselves in service to others that we see the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Spirit. When I was a parish pastor I would occasionally have those "Wow!" moments where we

would be amazed at what God was doing. When you have 114 congregations you see over and over again the way God is working and moving in our midst.

The Spirit is at work in raising up leaders, leading us to care for each other and neighbors, reshaping people's hearts and turning them to God, sometimes bringing about health and healing, and sometimes using us to bless others more than we can imagine. From the synod office we got to see the very many ways God was at work in our congregations.

TLL: What was the biggest challenge during your term?

BMR: Had you asked me before 2020 I would have said dealing with the pastoral misconduct situations we encountered. These are situations where a pastor breaks their vow to be a shepherd to God's people and abuses their power and trust. These can be sexual misconduct, financial misconduct or other abuses, which violate the law.

(See RHYNE 1, Page 8)

MELANCHTHON

A FRIEND OF MARTIN LUTHER'S

(Editor's note: The information for this feature is from Encyclopedia Britannica online.)

Philipp Melanchthon lived from 1497 to 1560 and was the German author of the Augsburg Confession of the Lutheran Church.

The Encyclopedia Britannica online describes him as a hu-

manist, reformer, theologian and educator.

"He was a friend of Martin Luther and defended his views. In 1521 Melanchthon published the Loci communes, the first systematic treatment of the new Wittenberg theology developed by Luther. Because of his academic expertise, he was asked to help in founding

schools, and he played an important role in reforming public schools in Germany," the online report states.

Melanchthon was pious, a trait he inherited from his parents. He was a friend of Martin Luther.

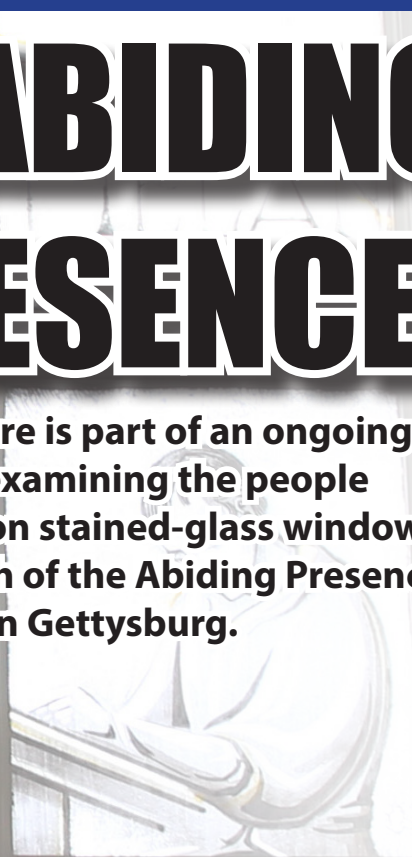
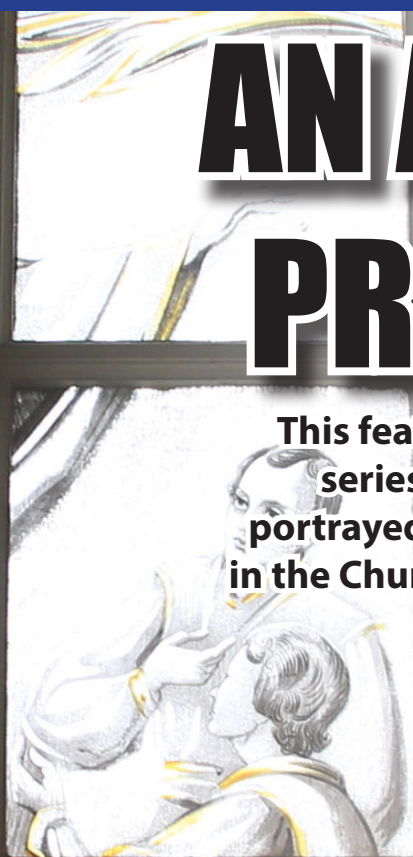
He was dedicated to the Protestant Reformation.

(See PHILIPP, Page 15)



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.



RHYNE 1

(Continued from Page 6)

It is very difficult to tell someone who has been a colleague for years that they can no longer be a minister of the gospel because of their choices and actions. The times I had to do that broke my heart. But, dealing with difficult issues is the bishop's job.

I think COVID-19 and the subsequent pandemic were the most difficult part of my ministry as bishop. At the time of this writing it looks like we are slowly starting to come out of this pandemic. For this we say, "Thanks be to God!" We pray that those who are not vaccinated will take the steps to protect themselves from the virus.

But in April and May of 2020, no one knew what lay before us. People were concerned and scared for the welfare of their family and communities, and they worried if the pandemic would put the future of their congregation at risk.

The amazing thing was that the pandemic caused us all to adapt. We had to change to meet the challenge of the moment. Our pastors discovered new ways to minister to

their people. Services went online, and when possible, outdoors.

The collective energy of our Synod, and I believe the entire Body of Christ, was focused on how we maintain community when we are not able to be physically together. The amazing thing is that we all figured it out. As I have seen our people do over and over again they did what they had to do and made it work.

But that was hard. In late spring of 2020 it seemed like we were having to change how we did things almost every week, because information from the state and public health organizations kept evolving.

I think after a while all of us got very tired. There was an initial energy as we thought that COVID might last for a few months, but when we realized it was a marathon and not a sprint, it began to grind on all of us.

I thank God for our leaders and the way they faithfully responded to this crisis and did all they could to care for God's people.

TLL: What was the biggest success story of your term?

BMR: Any success we had in

this ministry is because of the guidance and power of the Spirit working through us. So in all things I give thanks to God. But there are some things I am very proud to have been a part of.

When I began my call as bishop, I was in many ways a cheerleader for our congregations. I felt I needed to do that because many of our churches were generally down on themselves and didn't think much of what God could do with them. Early in my ministry I would go to meetings and often hear a list of how the congregation doesn't have as many people as it used to, "we don't have any money, we are all getting older," and some variation on how "we are just a little church."

In most cases these observations were true. In many of our congregations there were fewer people, there were fewer children, there was probably less money than there was 20 or 30 years ago.

However, just because things have changed in the last 30 years, doesn't mean that the mission and ministry of Christ was done.

(See RHYNE 2, Page 9)

RHYNE 2

(Continued from Page 8)

Jesus Christ is alive and the Holy Spirit still moves in our congregations. What was needed was to help people see that.

The problem was that everyone was comparing themselves to either how it used to be or to what "that other church" is doing. We got into the trap of thinking that if we weren't as "successful" by the worldly standards, then we were not doing something right.

In reality God is still at work here in the heart of Pennsylvania. We were able to lift up and celebrate what our congregations were able to do. We have congregations that care for the hungry, make quilts for those in need, support domestic and international disaster relief, care for those in need in their community and continue to be a place to worship our Lord Jesus.

These congregations do the work of Jesus.

I believe that during the past seven years we have helped people to understand that point. I believe there is much more openness to asking the question, "What might Jesus

be inviting us into?" — rather than thinking we simply can't do anything. Christ is with these congregations, and I believe we have helped them to understand that.

TLL: Is there a particular sermon, or message that you have given that you will always remember (as a pastor or bishop in the synod)?

BMR: I was blessed to be invited to preach at the Saturday night worship for our Synod Youth Gathering in November 2019. Members of the synod will remember that the Allegheny Synod had a long tradition of having middle school and high school youth events. These gatherings came to a conclusion around 2010.

In 2019 a group of pastors and congregational leaders worked together to host this youth gathering event at Grace Lutheran in State College. We had more than 150 young people come for the weekend from all over the synod. It was a wonderful event, which happened because of the tireless work of those who brought it together.

I have had a few oppor-

tunities to speak to large numbers of our youth at events like the National Youth Gathering, or at Camp Sequanota. But in those situations, I am usually trying to support the theme or agenda of the overarching program. At this gathering the Spirit led me to think about what these young people needed. Or, more specifically, what message I needed to hear when I was 13, or 15, or 17 years old.

I talked with them about how hard being a teenager can be. I admitted it was hard for me, and invited them to talk with their leaders, parents or other trusted adult who would probably tell them the same thing. I tried to remind them that they were not alone. I recognized that this can feel like the hardest time of our lives, because we are trying to learn who we are. I also reminded them that no matter what, they are loved and cherished by God more than they can ever know.

My hope was that our young people heard that they are not alone, and it is OK to not have everything figured out.

(See RHYNE 3, Page 10)

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

Pastor Lauretta Dietrich was installed at the Spring Mills Lutheran Parish. She is pictured with Bishop Michael Rhyne and Pastor Becca Ehrlich.



Photos from the Allegheny Synod Facebook page



Congratulations to Pastor Ruth Jensen and Trinity Lutheran in Somerset. Jensen was called on July 18 to serve as senior pastor there. She begins her new call in September.



Below, — a shoutout to all the vacation Bible schools in the synod this summer. The New Centerville Lutheran Parish and the Lavansville-Bakersville Lutheran Parish partnered together at the Bakersville Grove.

RHYNE 3

(Continued from Page 9)

My hope is that they heard that even in the most difficult of times God puts people in our path to help us carry the burdens of this life. We don't have to do this alone.

That is a message we all need to hear, but I was honored to share that with our young people that night.

TLL: What's your final message to the Allegheny Synod faithful:

BMR: Anyone who

knows me knows that I am going to tell them that, "Jesus Loves You." You matter to God and are known and cherished by the Lord who made heaven and earth. You are much more than you think you are, because God has made you and the power of the Holy Spirit is leading and guiding you. As you move forward I will continue to pray that you will be buoyed by the presence of Christ. Remember that we

are in the world, but our citizenship is in heaven. We have been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we get to be people who show this world what love, mercy, grace and true justice look like. Because he first

loved us we get to go forth and share Christ's love with this world. You all get to be better than you expect because you belong to Jesus. So go out there and show this world the difference that Jesus Christ makes. †

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Photos by Courtney Kazmer

Some more photos of the sunflower maze in Somerset County.

Heaven on Earth

By COURTNEY KAZMER
Home & Garden Editor

Rick and I recently had the pleasure of walking through a sunflower maze, located in Somerset County.

A local farm began the unique endeavor this year. The maze consisted of a path through many different species of sunflowers, including ones of various shapes, sizes and colors. We were surrounded by flowers standing taller than us as we began our walk to the end.

It was a magical experience. Bees were buzzing about the sunflowers, but no worries, as they leave visitors alone. They are focused entirely on

the big blooms that are full of pollen.

Sunflowers are my favorite flower. Being surrounded by the red, burgundy, yellow and burnt orange petals as I walked through the maze was something I will never forget. I hope to make the flowerful walk a yearly tradition.

It was amazing to see all the sunflowers standing tall and proud in all the beauty and grace God gave them -- their beautiful petals turned upward toward the sun.

It is a metaphor for how I want to live my life, which is to stand tall and proud with my face toward the Son.

As I write this, it is the middle of August and by the time you

are reading these words the sunflowers will be gone for the year, but we always have changing seasons for which to look forward. Next year, as summer starts to wind down, I will again get to see my favorite flower blooming again.

I took more than 100 photos while in the maze.

Here are a few of my favorites. Imagine yourself walking through the maze, surrounded by nothing but sunflowers and bees swarming around you, content and focused on their natural purpose.

You can feel the lush, green petals brushing your arms and cheeks.

It's a little slice of heaven on earth. †

BISHOP 1

(Continued from Page 2)

And, as my friend says, we need to trust the Spirit, which can be quite terrifying because you may know from experience, the Spirit often asks us to do things that we would rather not do or that we feel ill-equipped to handle.

In every instance in the Bible when someone is asked to do something for which they feel afraid, they are either given a helper or sent an angel to calm their fears.

As we move forward, we will not be alone. Jesus is with us to guide us, calm our fears and open the path to a hope-filled future. I wish I could say I knew exactly what that future looked like, but I will be as surprised as you are when we see what the Spirit is up to here in the Allegheny Synod.

I am “terrificated” to be part of this journey with you and look forward to the ways in which we will rebuild, reunite and revive our synod.

I want to offer a few updates as I begin this term:

STAFF PERSON

Many of you have asked about a new staff person in the Office of the Bishop. A team of people from the synod and the ELCA are collaborating on the interview process. My hope is to be able to make an announcement in early fall. In the meantime, please pray for whomever the Spirit has chosen to be in ministry together with us.

BISHOP’S INSTALLATION

Because of the changing circumstances with COVID-19 and its variants, the Bishop’s Installation will be attended in-person by invited guests only. The Installation will be live-streamed on the synod Facebook page on Sunday, Sept. 19 beginning at 2:40 p.m. In the days following the Installation, you are invited to attend smaller in-person gatherings throughout the synod. The following dates and locations are open to anyone who wishes to greet the new bishop in person. I am respectfully requesting those who attend these in-person gatherings to wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status.

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- 6 p.m. Sept. 20 at Grace Lutheran Church, State College, in the narthex and upper commons
- 6 p.m. Sept. 21 at Evangelical Lutheran Church, Duncansville, in the social hall
- 6 p.m. Sept. 22 at Friedens Lutheran Church, Friedens, in the friendship hall.
- 6 p.m. Sept. 23 at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Lanse, in the narthex.

Even as I write this, I know adjustments will need to be made to these plans. Please know that my greatest concern is for your safety in these uncertain days.

While I would love to have everyone together in one place, that is not wise given the new information about transmission rates of the COVID-19 variants. When adjustments to the plans are made, they will be announced on the synod Facebook page, via e-mail, and on the synod website.

(See BISHOP 2, Page 13)

BISHOP 2

(Continued from Page 12)

INVITING THE BISHOP

If you wish to invite me to your congregation, please call or email the synod office at 814-942-1042.

I want to be available to you for worship, meetings, anniversaries or other events, but I also know the limitations I will have given the new staff configuration.

I will work closely with Michelle Bossler at the office to honor as many requests as I am able.

WHAT'S NEW?

My time serving as an interim pastor afforded me the opportunity to try some new things.

I hope to bring some of those experiences to you as well.

Look for a video series on the synod Facebook page titled "Two Minutes on a Tuesday" where I will talk about all kinds of ministry related topics and may even have a special guest or two.

Other ideas are percolating and will be announced soon.

I am going to be utilizing our conference deans in different ways as we move forward. I am thankful for the gifts of our deans and look forward to building a strong partnership for the benefit of our synod.

Finally, I'm new. While I have worked with many of you in a different capacity, I am new at this.

In my time as the assistant to the bishop, I experienced your grace and mercy when things didn't go as we hoped.

It is my hope that in this new role, we will afford each other that same grace as

we work together to rebuild, reunite and revive our synod.

To close this edition, I want to share the first and last stanza of a prayer written by Pastor Emily Swan titled "A Prayer For The Church" as it appears in the book "A Rhythm of Prayer" edited by Sarah Bessey:

"Spirit of Jesus —

Come with fire that refines,

Water that refreshes,

Wind that topples,

Breath that fills.

**Show us what you're doing,
so we can work together.**

**Move where you will, when you
will, in whatever way you will.**

**Come, Holy Spirit, and restore
your Church.**

Amen."

May you know the peace and presence of Christ. †

+Bishop Paula



Submitted photos

Some of the pink flamingos that members of Zion Lutheran used as a fundraiser, and as a path to evangelism, in Hollidaysburg.

PINK

(Continued from Page 1)

It's all done in good fun, and an opt-out option exists, but that list is always empty. Call it fundraising, call it extortion (it's both of those things), but in my eyes the best attribute of flocking is the invitation to evangelism.

A giant mass of colorful plastic birds is both intriguing and disarming. When members share their experience of being flocked, there is always a story or two about interactions with a neighbor, or about a stranger who wants to know what this nonsense is all about.

I can hardly think of a better opportunity to witness to God's presence in our lives than when people are curious and asking you questions. Quite often our biggest hurdle for sharing the story of our faith is the courage to speak the words out loud. An intrigued and disarmed neighbor asking questions helps to dissipate our anxieties.

I don't mean to suggest that we need a gimmick to tell people about God. I mean to suggest that evangelism is possible, even for a bunch of Lutherans who are woefully out of practice.

When pressed by a neighbor about a flock of flamingos, members of the church are happy to respond and share. The Spirit gives us words to speak! However, we don't always have lawn ornaments to grease the gospel skids for a faith-filled conversation.

Can we go out in good courage and share how God is important in our lives? Can we be a witness to why our faith matters? Can we find openings in our conversations to share this important piece of ourselves?

If "yes" is not the answer to those questions then our faith and our future are in trouble. For generations we have answered the call of Christ that "anyone with ears to hear listen." Now we must pivot and answer the command to "go therefore and make disciples." †

“Melanchthon’s literary facility, clear thought, and elegant style of expression made him the scribe of the Reformation.”

— *Encyclopedia Britannica*

PHILIPP

(Continued from Page 7)

He attended Wittenberg, studying theology, and published several books, according to the encyclopedia. In 1520 he married Katherine Krapp. They had four children together.

“Melanchthon’s literary facility, clear thought, and elegant style of expression made him the scribe of the Reformation and the representative of the Evangelicals at numerous colloquies. He never attained entire independence of Luther, though he gradually modified some of his positions. These modifications centered on the Eucharist, the human role in conversion, and the place of good works,” according to the Encyclopedia.

He died in 1560. He was buried in Wittenberg beside Luther. †

BEFORE *you* GO

I am writing this immediately following a camping trip that was cut short by the coastal storm Fred.

In fact, most of the camping trip was rainy.

And, as I was backing up the truck to hook up the camper, I accidentally went too far, putting a small dent in my bumper.

The trip overall might be considered a bummer. And, to be truthful, I let it affect my mood. But it's important to take a step back and assess any situation from a distance.

As I am sitting here now, the sun is shining and Fred has moved north.

The dent in my bumper is barely noticeable, unless you go looking for it.

Maybe now when I see it, it will be a reminder not to let little things mess up my existence in the big picture.

There are a lot worse things going on in the world right now.

Most people would feel blessed to only have a dent in the bumper.

I know, this is advice that is as old as the hills. You might say that everyone handles adversity differently, and this advice doesn't work. Sometimes you can't let things go.

But we can all benefit from clarity and perspective. The next time you dent your bumper, take a walk and consider the big picture. It might help more than you think. †

— 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.

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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