

# WHO WE ARE

## Conference Reports:

### **A bit of "Who We Are" as the Allegheny Synod of the ELCA:**

#### **Inviting people to love one another.**

The Allegheny Synod is one of 65 synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), made up of 97 congregations across seven counties in central Pennsylvania, stretching between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. Our communities include State College, Clearfield, Altoona, Huntingdon, Bedford, Johnstown, and Somerset, and we are organized into six conferences: Bedford, Blair-Huntingdon, Clearfield, Johnstown, Laurel Highlands, and Nittany.

Rooted in the heart of Appalachia, we are a synod of faithful and caring people who use what God has given us to share Christ's love within our communities and throughout the world. Though our region has experienced economic change—from mining, steel, and railroads to growth in education, healthcare, technology, and energy—our people remain deeply connected to the land, to one another, and to their faith.

Many of our congregations have long histories, with some pre-dating the American Revolution. We cherish these deep roots and the strong sense of loyalty and community that continue to define us—along with our shared enthusiasm for Penn State and Pittsburgh Steelers football!

While we may be smaller in size, the Allegheny Synod is rich in generosity. We are consistently among the top givers in our region, supporting ministries beyond our borders through international food programs, disaster relief, missionary support, and higher education. When there is a need—especially when people are hurting—the people of the Allegheny Synod respond, not out of abundance, but from the heart.

#### **We are the Allegheny Synod: inviting people to love one another!**

Note: The above has been adapted from the Allegheny Synod website, for more information, please go to:

<https://www.alleghenysynod.org/about>

# Bedford Conference:

The St. Clairsville Lutheran Parish is comprised of St. Peter's Lutheran Church (Osterburg) and Messiah Lutheran Church (Bedford). They are served by the Rev. David Wright. The two congregations enjoy a close relationship and do a number of things jointly such as mid-week Lenten services, several joint Worship services throughout the year, and a joint Outdoor Worship and picnic in August.

From September through March, joint Soup Socials are held on a monthly basis with the congregations taking turns hosting them. Offerings received at the Soup Socials are designated for various outreach opportunities in the community. These have included the Bedford County Humane Society, Abby's Angels, the Parish's Outreach Fund, and Lutheran Disaster Response. Both congregations participate in a Secret Santa program through Bedford County Children and Youth. In Spring and Fall, St. Peter's hosts cornhole tournaments.

St. Peter's Women's Group coordinates an annual "Undie Sunday" or "Sweats for Vets" where items are collected for the Veterans Home in Hollidaysburg. On a rotating three-year basis, the Women's Group also conducts a new / gently worn shoe drive for Funds2Orgs. Beginning at the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper and through Easter, St. Peter's "sells" various farm animals through the ELCA Good Gifts. Twice each year, St. Peter's Women bake pies for the monthly birthday parties at Pennknoll Village nursing home. They also contribute for Christmas gifts for the residents.

Zion Lutheran Church in Everett holds an 11AM service every Sunday led by Rev. Kathy Popp. Every second Sunday of the month an Open Door Service is also offered at 9:30AM. This service is somewhat shorter and a combination of traditional and contemporary liturgy and music. Two weekly Bible Studies are offered, an evening one and a morning one. Bible Studies are attended by a mixture of people from a variety of denominations.

The members provide a Bingo afternoon for the Personal Care Home in Everett multiple times of the year. Plenty of laughter and warmth are shared by all.

The congregation selected a ELCA church in the urban part of Johnstown where the needs of the local youth in the community are most evident. Five hundred dollars is yearly budgeted to provide church-led activities, materials, and transportation for these youth who are less fortunate. Zion members feel that this has been a privilege to participate as a partner with them in this project.

The congregation is pleased that 4 individuals have been accepted to participate in the Authorized Lay Worship Leadership program under the Go Tell It IN the Mountain Grant. Two registered nurses in the congregation have recently completed certification in their Faith Community Nursing from West Virginia State University and are actively engaged in the plan to bring local churches together and offer these newly honed skills throughout the Everett- Bedford communities.

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## Bedford Conference *(continued)*:

Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Buffalo Mills, services are led by congregation members. Mt. Olive Lutheran Church is located along Dividing Ridge Road, Fairhope in Somerset County. On September 8, 2024 they recognized their 200th year of ministry. Mount Olive is a small country church with attendance averaging between 15-25 members per Sunday. Some Sundays the congregation plays bells as part of our worship service, enjoyed by all. Other church activities include: monthly Coffee and Conversation, Ice Cream and Dessert Social, a summer picnic at Shawnee State Park, a picnic with dessert auction in our own pavilion, a fall harvest party and a Thanksgiving Fellowship Luncheon with a silent auction. Although a small congregation in numbers, they still see the importance of serving neighbors. Some of the projects they support are: Breezewood Trucker and Traveler- weekly, ELCA Good Gifts during the Advent season, Somerset Intouch Hospice, S.A.M. Van, flowers for the shut in, donations to ELCA World Hunger, Blanket Sunday and Harvest Home, backpack school kits, money for local families in need, Christmas Coat Project and they support two girls through Children's International. If you are interested, come and worship with us. Sunday School begins at 9AM and Church worship service begins at 10AM. Who knows you might pick a Sunday that they are playing bells and you can join in!

Christ Lutheran Church of Madley holds worship service every Sunday at 11:00 am. Sunday school during the school year begins at 9:45. Worship service is led by Aaron Browning and Communion is given on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month. They have done multiple food drives for the Hyndman food bank and have started making monthly donations to local outreach initiatives within the county in addition to just sending it to the synod. They hold Vacation Bible School. Members have prepared and served 2 meals at the Union Mission (homeless shelter) in Cumberland MD and in process of planning to do it again. They have recently had 1 baptism, 2 members confirmed, and 3 new members join their church this year. Aaron is also currently taking classes with the Go Tell It In The Mountains initiative to become a ALWL. They have two members who have been trained in home communion and who have been visiting shut ins and members of the community who do not attend church.

Mt. Zion Lutheran Church in Breezewood holds worship services every Sunday at 9 a.m. led by Rev. Judy Simonson. It is one of only two congregations remaining in the town of Breezewood. The congregation cooperates with the United Methodist Church. They worshipped at Mt. Zion for a time when they were locked out of their building when the congregation split. Mt. Zion's main ministry is done by supporting the Breezewood Trucker/Traveler ministry. In addition to monetary support, a member of the congregation serves on the board of directors. In past years that was done by member Vera Wilt. She was honored last year at the annual banquet for her many years of service. The present vacancy pastor, Judith Simonson, is now serving a second term on the board. The congregation also gives financial support to the synod on a regular basis.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Rev. Kathy Popp

# Blair-Huntingdon & Clearfield Conferences:

## **Dean's Report for Allegheny Synod Assembly 2025 Blair-Huntingdon Conference:**

Since the 2024 Assembly, the following has happened in the Blair-Huntingdon Conference:

- + Youth from the conference hosted their second annual Halloween party for the residents of the Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg.
- + St. James Lutheran Church in Huntingdon welcomed The Weekend youth event for the second year in a row; among other activities, the participants walked in the Huntingdon Christmas parade and distributed holiday themed rubber duckies to the crowd.
- + St. Matthew Martinsburg hosted Pastor Kevin Shock's training for lay eucharistic ministers to extend the table and bring the sacrament to homebound members of their congregations.
- + Evangelical Duncansville hosted the rostered leaders, ministry candidates, and lay authorized worship leaders for the Bishop's annual service of renewal, followed by a fellowship meal.
- + Pastor Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte organized Synod Day at the Curve, bringing together over 300 members, friends, and families for fellowship at the ballpark.
- + Pastor Drew McCaffery ended his call at Bethany and St. James Altoona and moved to the Delaware-Maryland Synod.
- + Pastor Amanda McCaffery ended her call at St. Luke Roaring Spring and moved to the Delaware-Maryland Synod.
- + Pastor Tiffany Marvich was called to Evangelical Duncansville, ending her call at Zion Williamsburg.
- + Pastor Sharon Erb celebrated her retirement, ending her call at First English Tyrone.
- + Pastor Peter Naschke relocated to the Synod and is serving part-time at First English Tyrone.+ Pastor John Kratz began serving as part-time transitional minister in Williamsburg.

The Conference clergy met regularly and gathered on special occasions; we thank Interim Bishop Barbara Collins for joining us several times this year as we have navigated this time of leadership transition.

This is the conclusion of my second term; thank you for allowing me to serve as dean.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Traci Marriott

Pastor, St. Matthew Martinsburg

## **Report of the Clearfield Conference of the Allegheny Synod ELCA:**

The Clearfield Conference has seen a bit of change this past year. For a little over a year now a committed Strategy Team has come together every month to learn more about each other and to do the hard work of figuring out how these congregations might be able to work together supporting each other in ministry and forming a coalition of churches with shared pastoral and administrative staff.

First Faith United Cooperative elected to call their interim pastor, the Rev. Jaime Olson, as their two-thirds time pastor. Pr. Olson was installed on August 3, 2025. St. John, Clearfield has contracted with Pr. Jaime Olson as their one-third time interim pastor. St. John is also receiving help from retired Presbyterian USA, the Rev. Mary Jo Bruinooge. St. John, Clearfield, Holy Trinity, Lanse and Shepherd of the Hills, Karthaus (served by the Rev. Vicki Beilfuss), Olanta Lutheran, Olanta and Grace, Curwensville (receiving help from retired Presbyterian Chaplain the Rev. Ed Roberts) are all continuing on with the work started by the Strategy Team last year.

They are in the process of defining an agreement for the congregation councils to approve and take to their congregations for approval. In the meantime, these five congregations are pursuing fellowship and worship opportunities together to further their sense of community in ministry together.

As of August 1, 2025, St John, Rockton and St Peter, Luthersburg, disaffiliated for the North American Lutheran Church. We wish them well. We are looking forward to what God has in store for us as we work together in a new way, serving our communities here in this place.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Vicki Beilfuss

Clearfield Conference Dean

# Johnstown Conference:

## JOHNSTOWN CONFERENCE

The Johnstown Conference clergy and vicars meet on the second Thursday of each month to discuss our ministries and to share information about upcoming events. These meetings are times of good conversation among colleagues.

Much ministry has been happening in our Conference, and the following information was reported:

- Pastor Mark Fischer, interim pastor, St. David's Lutheran Church:
  - Celebration of Bishop Emeritus Gregory Pile's 50th ordination anniversary.
  - Polka Worship Service in June
  - Learning Place Pre-school is thriving
  - Volunteers worked on multiple outreach projects, including St. Francis Caring and Sharing
- Pastor Rebecca West, Moxham Lutheran Church:
  - Moxham Lutheran and Christ Lutheran move toward creating "Living Waters Lutheran Parish," as they share midweek book studies, some joint midweek services, quarterly healing services
  - Welcomed four new members
  - New tabernacle for reserving elements and new funeral pall added
  - One member participating in Go Tell It in the Mountains working toward becoming an Authorized Lay Worship Leader in the synod
  - Pastor and one youth attended the synod's The Weekend event
- Pastor Nancy Hoover, Grace Lutheran Church:
  - Weekly Bible studies for adults continued
  - Children and youth worked on various projects, including making blankets for newborns in the congregation and 28 blankets presented to the Women's Help Center
  - Pastor and three youth attended the synod's The Weekend event
  - Food Pantry within the church and for neighbors continued
  - Three baptisms performed
  - Made various repairs and upgrades to the church building after flooding problems
  - Pastor Nancy held weekly Prayer Groups for First Lutheran Church
  - Welcomed weekly Exercise, Dance, and Tai Chi instruction sessions for members and neighborhood
- Vicar Jennifer Bobolsky, St. Paul's Mundy's Corner and St. John Summerhill Lutheran Churches
  - St. John:
    - Continued Food Pantry Ministry and partnership with Forest Hills School.
    - Performed three baptisms
  - St. Paul's:
    - Vacation Bible School with over 30 kids attending
    - Send over 30 volunteers every month to Conemaugh Valley Ministerium food pantry
    - Joint Lenten services within Ministerium
    - Angel Tree ministry with Blacklick Valley Santa Shop.
    - Back to school bash with 131 joining with us, 51 backpacks given to community
    - Soup and snack sale when hosting voting; annual yard sale



# Johnstown Conference (continued):

- Vicar Christy Harford, First Lutheran, Benscreek Lutheran
  - First
    - Began first year of Sunday School with 8 young children, with Bible lessons and ice cream at end of year
    - Mardi Gras gathering and burning of the palms
    - Held yearly Community Thanks for Giving Dinner
    - Good Neighbor Dinner resumed after couple of years hiatus, with fellowship, good German food and wonderful musical entertainment
    - Completing painting and organ updates in progress
  - Benscreek:
    - Joint Bible Study with First Lutheran
    - Lutheran Jeopardy with First Lutheran coming up
    - First joint worship service with First Lutheran visiting in Benscreek
- Vicar Claudia Plows, Sidman Lutheran Church
  - Collaborated with Forest Hills Ministerium, including 12 local churches, in serving the community
  - Held Holden Evening Prayer and soup fellowship during Lent.
  - Many service projects, including bringing Gospel bands to the area
  - Back to School Rally Day
  - Ice cream and pumpkin carving fellowship
  - Blessing of the animals
- Christ Lutheran Church
  - Pastor Rebecca West served four-month interim
  - Shared Bible Study, Lent vespers, seder meal, and Good Friday Tenebrae with Moxham Lutheran
  - Updated sound system, internet service, and remote control cameras
  - Purchased new Funeral Pall for urns, new tabernacle, new hymnals, and library air conditioner
  - Continued discussions with Moxham Lutheran regarding a parish formation

Also continuing to serve in the Johnstown Conference:

- Pastor Michael Van Dyke, Zion Lutheran Church
- Vicar Penny Koontz, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
- Vicar Christy Harford, First Lutheran Church and Benscreek Lutheran Church
- Mount Calvary Lutheran Church is currently vacant but continues ministry

We give thanks to God for the many blessings we have shared in the past year. May we continue to serve our members and our communities as we follow the call of Jesus to follow him with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the peace of God that passes all understanding.

The Rev. Nancy L. Hoover  
Dean, Johnstown Conference

# Laurel Highlands & Nittany Conferences:

## **Conference Report – Laurel Highlands Conference**

Committed to serving Christ and His Church, the ordained clergy and vicars of the Laurel Highlands Conference gather monthly to share in worship, conversation, and mutual support and upbuilding. Having these meetings hosted at the various churches within the Conference enables us to encounter the richness of sacred space within the churches, to learn about the ministries supported by our sister congregations, and to experience the presence and grace of God through various prayer and liturgical resources.

Through the leadership of Interim Bishop Barbara Collins, we are engaged and striving to enrich communication, collegiality, and overall support within the churches and Synod. These tasks are grounded in prayer, active listening, and trust in the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit and strengthened through personal interactions and synodical ministries including the Rostered Ministers' gathering, Bishop's Convocation, and the Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative.

Throughout the past year, the Conference has had opportunity to give thanks and rejoice in the candidacy approval of Vicar Christy Harford, who currently serves at Benscreek Lutheran (Hollsopple, PA) and First Lutheran (Johnstown, PA); we hold her in prayer as she enters into the call process. The Conference has also experienced congregational changes – we grieve the dissolution of the Salisbury Lutheran Parish and the disaffiliation of Graef's Lutheran (Central City, PA) from the ELCA; we give thanks for the formation of the Living Waters Lutheran Parish.

The Conference – and the Church – are truly blessed by the gifts and leadership of clergy and laity; many who serve within vacant congregations (in addition to their respective calls) and as lay worship leaders. We look forward to serving with the new Bishop of the Allegheny Synod and to witnessing to the ongoing work of God to bring joy, peace, and new life into the Church, our communities, and the world.

With prayers for our Lord's continuing guidance and blessings of the partnership of the Gospel and ministries we share, I respectfully submit this report in the Peace of Christ +

The Rev Tyler J Graham, STS  
Dean, Laurel Highlands Conference  
Pastor, Living Waters Lutheran Parish

## **Nittany Conference:**

Throughout the year, the rostered leaders of the Nittany Conference have met monthly. Most months, meetings were held in person, but winter meetings were held via zoom. These gatherings offer the opportunity for worship and prayer together, updates on happenings in the synod and conference, idea and resource sharing, and collegial support. Monthly gatherings have been well received by rostered leaders, providing time for colleagues to connect and support our congregations and ministries while navigating the challenges of ministry.

This year the Nittany Conference welcomed Pastor Ted Williams to serve Pine Hall Lutheran Church in State College and Gatesburg Lutheran Church in Warrior's Mark, initially for a limited-term call and then an open-ended call. Pastor Williams is a graduate of Luther Seminary in St Paul, Minnesota and resides in the Altoona area.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve within the Nittany Conference and thank God for the people and leaders here.

In Christ,  
Deacon Alicia Anderson  
Nittany Conference Dean  
Campus Minister with Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State