

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

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EXTRA CREDIT

*Somerset
Principal is
in Studying
to Become
a Pastor*

STORY ON PAGE 5



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

**Bishop Paula has resigned, and an
Interim Bishop has been named **INSIDE****



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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Articles for the Letter should be about 300
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Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Who are Vicars?

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

When we held our Synod Assem-
bly in June, we received some com-
ments and questions regarding the
people who are serving as Vicars in
our Synod.



Bishop Paula

Several years ago, when more peo-
ple were selected for the Theological Education for
Emerging Ministries (TEEM) program through the
Candidacy process, our Synod began using the term
"Vicar" for the student-candidates who were studying
for the Certificate in Theological Studies through a
seminary.

The Office of the Bishop understood that term to
mean a person who is studying to be a pastor or dea-
con. In the past, people who were studying to be a
pastor or deacon were referred to as seminarians.
With an increase in people who were chosen for the
certificate program, a distinction needed to be made
between those who were strictly studying to become
a pastor as a resident student or part-time commut-
er student, and those in the certificate program who
were studying and serving a congregation at the same
time. The term Vicar was chosen.

Vicars are people serving one or more congregations
each week while completing coursework in the Certifi-
cate of Theological Studies program through a semi-
nary. Vicars serve the same congregation for the time
they are learning and completing coursework at sem-
inary. The hope is that when their education is com-
plete, they will be called to that same congregation
and continue serving in a new way — as pastor.

(See BISHOP, Page 12)

An important message from the Bishop, Page 10

Scene of the Edition



Hundreds of residents lined the streets of Somerset on July 26 for the town's annual summer parade. More on the event in the "Before You Go ..." section.

Photo by Rick Kazmer

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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

Olanta Lutheran,
Olanta, and Salem, New Milport

Week 2

Mt. Olive Lutheran,
Fairhope

Week 3

Trinity Lutheran,
Altoona

Week 4

Faith Lutheran,
Somerset



Submitted photos

Some scenes from snuffle mat knot work, and of some key volunteers who are proud of the project.

Snydertown Youth Helping out PAWS Dogs

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

The youth service group at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Snydertown — called Service and Snacks — started putting together snuffle mats that will go to dogs at Centre County PAWS, and possibly other area shelters.

The kids were busy tying a lot of knots to complete the project, which was ongoing as of publication.

The good thing for the Snydertown community is that helping with the project is easy. You just have to know how to tie a knot.

In case you are wondering, snuffle mats are mentally stimulating toys for dogs. Treats are often hidden within the folds of the fabric, encouraging pets to sniff them out, using their God-given instincts. †

WE *are* LUTHERAN

Principal Spangler to Add Pastor to Titles

By **RICK KAZMER**

Editor

A Somerset County principal has heard God's call.

Josh Spangler, 42, said that being a pastor has always been on his heart and mind. Now he is working on bringing the call to fruition.

"When I was in middle school, Pastor Ed Ebersole was the first one to ask me if I ever thought of being a pastor," Spangler, who works for Maple Ridge Elementary in the Somerset Area School District, said.

He credits Pastor Elisa Osman for supporting him through his journey, including the Discerning Your Discipleship program.

"For the past 12 years, I got to lead worship in many congregations in our county. When our pastor, Dena Gable, and her husband, Pastor Lee Gable, took a call out west, our parishes were vacant for over a year.

"During that year, Pastor Ed Devore reached out to me asking if I had interest in the TEEM program. Over the next year, through much discerning and prayer, I entered into candidacy," Spangler said.

Spangler is a 20-year educator. He taught kindergarten for nine years before becoming a principal.

"I love teaching, and I love being a principal. As a principal, I get the best

of all worlds of working with students, teachers, families, and the community. I really enjoy being an instructional leader, helping teachers and staff become the best instructors as possible," he said.

He is now in his second year of studies at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago's TEEM program. His classes are all live on Zoom. Next year, Spangler will complete his internship.

The biggest challenge so far?

"Time. Balancing the time between being a husband, a dad, a principal, a TEEM student, and helping to lead our four-point parish is a wonderfully tough challenge.

"However, I have received an amazing amount of support from my family, my congregation, Pastor Ed Devore (my mentor), and the Synod. Every time I felt anxious about time, someone came along to help or there was an opening in my calendar and everything turned out OK," he said.

So far, Spangler has enjoyed the people he has worked with, including professors and fellow students. Working with local congregation members is what excites him most about the opportunity.

"There will always be challenges and there will always be joys. It is a privilege to be with them through it all," he said.

(See SPANGLER, Page 6)

SPANGLER

(Continued from Page 5)

The plan is for Spangler to be placed in his home congregation, which joined three other churches, forming the Laurel Mountain Lutherans.

He said he will be working with his congregation and the Synod on next steps.

For fun, Spangler enjoys books, exercise, and his family.

"I love to read, walk, ride my bike, and hang out with my kids," he said.

WE ARE LUTHERAN

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What is your earliest memory of attending a Lutheran Church?

JOSH SPANGLER: My earliest memory is dancing to "Father Abraham" as Karen Witt played the piano faster and faster for all of us in Sunday School. Out of breath from all the movement, we then sang together, prayed together, and learned together. After Sunday School, we also got to check out books from our church library. I just remember enjoying it all.

TLL: What would you tell anyone considering attending a Lutheran Church for the first time?

JS: Listen to how many times you hear the words "forgiven, grace, love, and ALL!" Going to worship for the first time in a Lutheran church can be over-

whelming. From finding pages in the hymnal, to sitting, then standing, and then sitting again, to following the liturgy, it can be a lot. These four simple words can get lost in the anxiety. So, I would encourage them to participate when they can, but take time to just listen to how forgiven and loved they are!

TLL: What are you praying for the most lately?

JS: I have been praying a lot for foster families, foster parents, children in foster care, and for grandparents who are raising grandchildren. Many children in foster care have to leave our county, which means they are taken even farther away from friends and their school. There are also a growing number of grandparents taking on the responsibility of raising grandchildren. They are trying to balance working, their own health concerns, finances, and raising a generation of children with influences like cell phones, social media, and drugs. †

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I LOVE TEACHING.

— *Josh Spangler*



Submitted photo
Josh Spangler, who as an elementary principal is no stranger to working with kids, is studying to become a pastor.

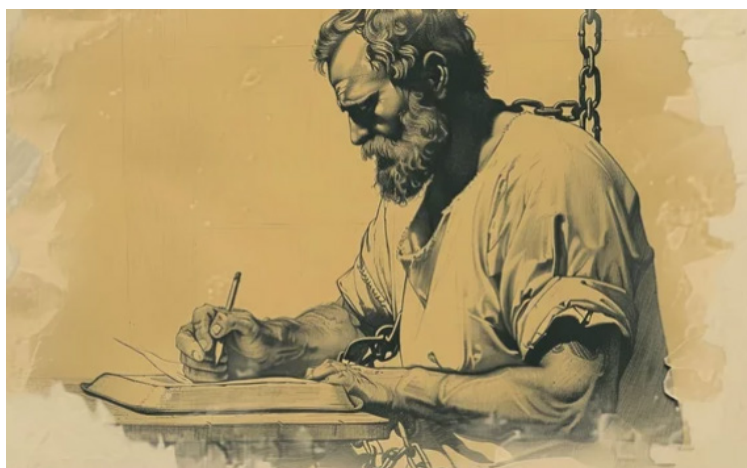
From Paul, from Prison

Paul's Message from a Cell Provides Insight on the Lord's Instruction to 'Rejoice Always'

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything ... And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:4-6a, 7)

By PASTOR GLENN FOSTER

Mountain Saints Lutheran Ministries



I must admit that I've had a long history of being troubled by this passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians, largely because I hear it often and all by itself, stripped away from its context.

From childhood, I've tended to hear "Rejoice" to mean "Be Happy!" almost in the sense of Bobby McFerrin's 1988 hit song, "Don't Worry, Be Happy."

"It's OK to be happy," I would think. But then there was that word in the passage that screams through: "Always."

And then Paul reiterates, in case you missed it or weren't paying proper attention the first time he wrote it just a sentence ago! Rejoice! And then he reminds us that "the Lord is near." So, now the Lord is watching over me all the time, too, to make sure that I am

always happy!

I think by now you can see where I'm going with this.

The next line is almost laughable in this train of thought: "Do not be anxious about anything." Excuse me, Paul, but in one verse you have sent my anxiety level through the roof! So, I have to always be happy? How is that possible? Although I consider myself a generally happy person, I'm not always! Needless to say, my interpretation is really twisted.

My root error is in equating an action, "rejoice" with a feeling, "happy." Even a cursory reading of Paul's letters shows that Paul was not always happy (cf Galatians). Paul could be quite angry sometimes.

During his ministry, Paul showed a full range of emotions.

(See PAUL Page 11)

Fed by Feeding

By SUE ELLEN SPOTTS

Director of Evangelical Mission

Is there such a thing as too much bread?

I realize that if you need to limit your carbs, the answer may be yes. Or, if you have an intolerance or allergy to the grains in the bread, even a little may be too much. But if we think of “bread” as that which feeds us and sustains us, is there such a thing as too much?

This summer, our Gospel lessons lingered for weeks in John’s sixth chapter. There was a lot of bread. Some may say there was too much bread. The stories we encountered started with the very literal feeding of bread to five thousand people. We ended with the more abstract idea of Jesus as “Bread of Life.” We saw in this chapter of John different ways in which people hunger. There were those who suffered with physical hunger. And those who were hungering for some spiritual nourishment.

Our faith communities also experience bread and hunger in these varied ways. Think of how many ministries involve food and feeding in very literal ways. We stock food pantries and distribute the food. We host meals open to the community. We provide meals to people who are sick, or who have just welcomed a child into their family, or who are grieving. We gather ourselves around food for fellowship.



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

We also attend to spiritual hunger. We offer worship, and Bible studies, and prayer groups. We gather around the communion table, and we extend the table by taking communion to those who cannot join us in person. We visit each other, sometimes just sitting in silence in a ministry of presence.

When we think of these different activities, it is likely that different faces come to mind. Some people in our congregations seem to be there for everything, faithful in worship and active in our outreach. Some people seem more vicariously connected, participating less often and possibly only as recipients of a service we offer or a name on our prayer list.

All, though, are part of our community of faith. Regardless of whether they are official “members” of our congregation. One way to explore our congregation’s vitality is to recognize that all these people are part of our community. We ask what hunger people have and identify ways we can feed the hunger, whether with bread from the pantry, or Bread of Life. And we recognize how each act of feeding enriches our whole community. We are fed by feeding. And there is never too much Bread in the Body of Christ.†

Bishop Paula Announces Resignation

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor." — Romans 12:9-10

Beloved in Christ,

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

When I was elected to serve as the bishop of the Allegheny Synod, it was quite a surprise to me. Up until the moment I was told I was elected, I was convinced another candidate would be elected. I took a deep breath and accepted your confidence.

Because life is continual discernment, an intentional listening and noticing of God's nudging and the Spirit's movement, I have been listening to God, myself, and others throughout these three years. That listening has brought me to the realization that my physical, mental, and spiritual health has suffered in this call. For me, this makes it difficult to make good decisions for my own well-being and the well-being of our Synod. It is for this reason I am tendering my resignation as bishop of the Allegheny Synod, effective Oct. 28, 2024. This decision was not an easy one to make and it is not one I make lightly. This is a necessary decision for my ongoing well-being.

I need to step away from the rigors

of this call and heal so that I can move toward the future and continue to listen for God's direction for what lies ahead. When I began this term, I had hoped that together we would rebuild trust, reconnect with each other and revive our sense of call to the hard work of loving each other and this hurting world.

I was committed to leading us forward. For a variety of reasons, this vision has been difficult to realize. I still pray this will be the future of the Allegheny Synod. Some seeds that have been planted have allowed us to make some small strides toward that vision.

One of the greatest challenges is that our Synod has well-established behaviors and practices that have made it more difficult to model, grasp, and live into the original vision.

Bridges still need built, steps toward growth and understanding still need to be made. Each of us are called to be leaders that are seeking to grow communities of faith that are vibrant and living from their giftedness.

The work ahead begins with you. I am trusting that you will prayerfully practice your own discernment. What is Christ calling you through your baptism to be for this world and how might you use your gifts to strengthen and support our Synod?

(See CALL Page 11)

CALL

(Continued from Page 10)

In these three years, we can celebrate being able to call two exceptional staff people, receiving a Lilly Endowment grant for Compelling Preaching, ordaining new, gifted leaders to serve with you and stewarding the move of the Synod office to a new location. There is more work to do. Christ is with you. You have a

dedicated and gifted staff and Synod Council that will help guide you into the future. An interim bishop will be named to help move you toward the election of a new leader. I will be cheering for you from the sidelines.

My last day in the office will be Sept. 30. I will be on vacation through Oct. 28. †

+ Bishop Paula

PAUL

(Continued from Page 8)

So, where is Paul coming from in all of this? First, we need to see that when Paul wrote these words, he was a prisoner. He literally did not know if or when he would die, that each day might be his last. And in spite of those circumstances, he writes “I will continue to rejoice” (1:18d). Even death itself, Paul does not fear. “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (1:21). If Paul is able to be non-anxious, even in the face of death, then he is truly free. The Gospel has made him so!

That is Paul’s context. It is the situation in which he finds himself when he calls upon the Philippians to “Rejoice always!” Perhaps that is what he means when he talks about “the peace of God which transcends all human understanding.” Who can comprehend it except those who put their full trust in God (i.e. those who are not anxious about anything)? On a human level, without Christ, we can’t. But that peace is what “guards our hearts and minds.”

And as such, it frees us to, like Paul, always “Rejoice in the Lord!” †

**EVEN DEATH ITSELF,
PAUL DOES NOT FEAR.**

— *Writes Pastor Foster*

BISHOP

(Continued from Page 2)

In some cases, the congregation is not able to call the Vicar and they are then eligible to enter the call process with another congregation.

Vicars are considered lay people until they are called and ordained. In order to have the title pastor in this denomination, one must successfully complete the Candidacy process, receive a call from a congregation, and be ordained. Once ordained, pastors may seek other calls as the Holy Spirit moves them. Pastors who have been ordained following the TEEM process may, if they choose, complete the Master of Divinity curriculum through a seminary of their choosing.

Vicars can serve on Synod committees. When elected, they remain lay people. If during the term in which they were elected they are ordained, their designation will change to clergy and another lay person would be sought to fill the unexpired term.

A Vicar is the pastoral leader in the congregation(s) in which they serve — even though they are still in formation. Because they are the pastoral leaders, we give them voice and vote at our Synod Assembly in the same way rostered ministers who serve

a congregation or special call have voice and vote.

Lutherans have valued Christian educational formation for a very long time. We still do.

Changes have been made in seminary education to allow for more flexibility for those who wish to continue working while earning a certificate or degree. There are many more online options offered through seminaries and lay education programs have expanded. Our Go Tell It IN The Mountains initiative is seeking to support and resource lay people as well as ordained people who sense a call to worship leadership. As we continue to explore new ways of forming leaders to serve our congregations, we also will need to examine our governance. The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church will bring a report to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly that will address some of these realities.

Together, we can continue to pray for and support our pastors, deacons, vicars, seminarians, and lay worship leaders as they strive to be faithful to the call of the Holy Spirit. †

+ Bishop Paula



Allegheny Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Photo courtesy Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries

The the Allegheny Synod office has moved to the ALSM facility in Hollidaysburg.

We moved! The Synod Office has a New Location

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

The Allegheny Synod office has moved to a new space inside The Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg. This new partnership was several months in the making.

The former location along Quail Avenue in Altoona served our Synod well for more than 25 years.

With a decrease in staff and a shift toward more online meetings and gatherings, it made sense for the staff to consider how best to steward the resources we receive from you, our Synod members.

We give thanks for the generosity of our partner, Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries, in making this space available and helping us reduce our cost to maintain an office. This new space is different and will force us to make some changes in the way we work together, but it also affords us new opportunities.

The staff is excited to see how our ministry will be enhanced through this new space. Be patient with us in these first few weeks in our new space as we learn a new phone system and other technology upgrades.

The mailing address for our new office is: 916 Hickory Street, 1st Floor, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648.

Our phone number remains the same: 814-942-1042. Our e-mails also remain the same: Michelle.Bossler@alleghenysynod.com, office@alleghenysynod.com; and Kevin.Shock@alleghenysynod.com; SueEllen.Spotts@elca.org.

If you're in the area, come visit us! †

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

These are some of the churches Bishop Paula Lebo 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.



Pastor Kevin spent a July morning in worship and fellowship with the people of Mt. Zion, Glasgow, and was honored to preside at the baptism of Vivian Marie, child of God.



The congregations of St. Luke, Centre Hall, St. John, Millheim, and Salem, Aaronsburg, gathered together at the Centre Hall Lions Club park for outdoor worship and a picnic in July. Pastor Kevin was honored to preside at worship and enjoy fellowship.



Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Karthaus made these blankets for animals at the Clearfield County SPCA. "Our furry friends love these homemade blankets! Everyone here greatly appreciates you thinking of the Clearfield County SPCA!!" The organization posted on Facebook.

Assisting One Another

Thoughts from the Assistant to the Bishop

By **PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK**

Assistant to the Bishop

"We need to run the church like a business" is an axiom that we used to hear pretty often in the church. I'm not exactly sure when that strategy emerged in the church world, but I have my theories as to why it became a popular idea.

As it became obvious that church decline was a reality, business and commerce were also seeing incredible innovation and growth. When I started working in the church back in the late 1990s, the tech industry was booming and as a result, business overall was growing.

It seemed, at least to Generation X, that the 1990s were a golden age in our nation and the world.

As business grew and more forcefully infiltrated home life, our evenings, and weekends, the church also fell into



Pastor Kevin Shock

more rapid decline.

I'm pretty sure I have already written that column.

It's no wonder that we wanted to run the church like a business. If business was booming and the church was willing to adopt business practices, then the church could also be booming.

Couldn't we benefit from some entrepreneurial spirit and "thinking outside the box?" Absolutely. In retrospect, though, there are two glaring problems with running the church, which is not a business, like a busi-

ness.

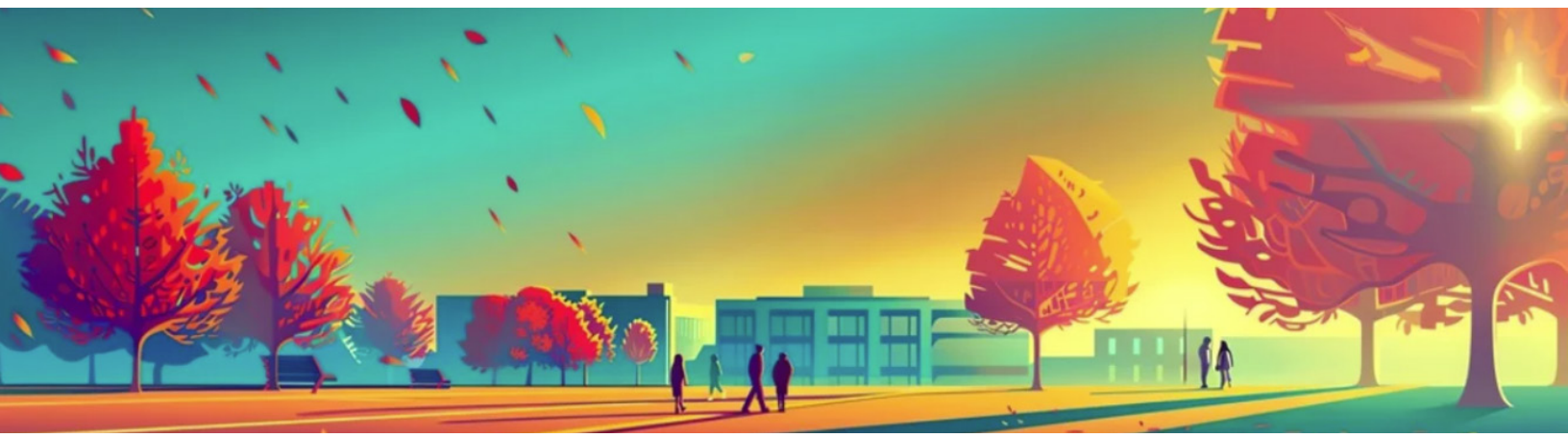
First, the bottom line of business is profit. Businesses, both large and small, live and die on how much money they make.

I certainly recognize that it takes money to do ministry, and you have heard me advocate for spending money on ministry; however, when income becomes our driving force, then we develop — and cut — ministries based not on how well they serve our neighbors and spread the good news of Jesus, but rather how cost-effective they are.

When our focus is on money and how we earn and spend it, then we also begin to see the people around us differently.

People cease being strangers to be welcomed or neighbors to be served, but rather potential sources of income.

(See SHOCK 1, Page 18)



The Return

College Ministry Prepares for First Semester

By DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON

Campus Minister with Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State

Fall is a beautiful time to walk across a college campus. At change of class, students are everywhere. Some are walking back to their dorm or apartment as they talk with friends. Others are settled onto the lawn with their computers doing assignments. Some are hurrying to class, talking with friends, or studying on the lawns.

As I write this, our campus is very quiet. Summer classes have ended, and summer commencement was last weekend. The vast majority of students are away for the final bit of summer. However, by the time you read this, campus will be filled with a wide array of students from nearby communities, from distant countries, and everywhere in between.

They will be settling into their residence halls or their apartments, realizing just how

demanding or easy each of their classes will be, figuring out how much time they will have for outside activities like sports or other clubs.

Among the first-year students, a good percentage will be homesick, struggling to adjust to the new situations and the increased expectations of college life.

Seniors will be anxious about their job search and what comes after graduation. More students than you might expect will be facing personal or family difficulties, or mental health crises. All of the students, no matter where they are in their university career, will be learning about themselves, as well as learning in their classes.

Lutheran Campus Ministry is here on campus for students. We provide pastoral care and support to help students tackle challenges in college life or family issues or questions about God.

(See RETURN, Page 17)



Photo by Alicia Anderson

Students are back in the library at Penn State.

RETURN

(Continued from Page 16)

We offer a welcoming community grounded in the teachings of Jesus, where students can come just as they are and find connection. We help students to grow as people of faith exploring scripture in worship and topics at the intersection of faith and daily life in discussions. We give students chances to serve their neighbor and the wider world in service-learning. We invite students to learn how God is calling them to follow and how God will work through them to heal and bless the world.

Lutheran Campus Ministry helps students see how deeply they are beloved by God, and how God calls us all to live out love and service to our neighbor. The insight and creativity, energy and dedication, hope and enthusiasm students bring are a rich blessing to the church and the whole world.

Please pray for Lutheran Campus Ministry and for the students we walk alongside. On Penn State's University Park Campus and at more than 200 college and university campuses across the nation, our church's presence is faithful and persistent, helping students as they grow and come to a deeper understanding about who God is and how God is present in the world.

Peace to you! †

SHOCK 1

(Continued from Page 15)

I sit in meetings talking about ministry mission and vision with congregational leadership and still often hear something like this: “We can have this program or reach out to these people and do this and that for them, and then maybe they’ll start coming to our church and contributing to the offering.”

It’s at that moment that I know the specific ministry will not be successful, if it even takes shape. Church is about so much more than maximizing income and limiting expenditures. In fact, it’s not about those things at all.

The one way that the church has refused to operate like a business is that when businesses get into irreversible economic decline, they close, which leads me to the second problem with running the church like a business.

Business is about competition, not collaboration. For years, congregations have based their worth and their ministries on keeping their buildings open and being able to support a pastor.

As an aside here, I think that having an ordained pastor or deacon available to lead every congregation is essential, as theologically trained people are particularly equipped to guide congregations away from a business mentality to a ministry focus.

Pastors and deacons are not CEOs; they are pastors and deacons. Basing congregational worth on keeping a building open to offer worship every week leads to seeing other congregations as com-

petitors. It’s easier to get irritated or angry when someone moves to another congregation instead of celebrating their time with us.

We see the holy closure of congregations as failure instead of giving thanks for how we were loved and served in that faith community.

The Office of the Bishop has traditionally — and reluctantly — supported a competition mindset by trying to meet the impossible task of sending available clergy and trained lay worship leaders to every open congregation. I’ll confess that it is easier to fill the schedule and give into the competition mindset than to try to change it.

Yet, I also imagine how joyful our gatherings could be, how robustly our voices could sing, how full our buildings could be, and how every Allegheny Synod member could regularly receive God’s abundant grace through Word and Sacrament, if we would be willing to gather together.

It means we would have to visit other buildings, but we could rotate buildings. It means we would have to be willing to drive 7 miles some Sundays instead of 2. Those are small sacrifices for what we could gain by collaborating with one another. I truly believe that trying to run the church like a business has hurt us and our ministry much more than it has helped us. I think we could really begin to see a new age in the life of the church if we would focus on running the church like the church was run when it was booming.

(See SHOCK 2, Page 19)

Meet the Interim Bishop

By **RICK KAZMER**

The Lutheran Letter Editor

The Rev. Barbara J. Collins has been appointed to serve as the Allegheny Synod's interim bishop by the Synod Council. A new bishop will be elected at the 2025 Allegheny Synod Assembly, being held May 30-31, at the Blair County Convention Center.

The decision was made after Bishop Paula Lebo announced her resignation.

Collins is bishop emerita of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, having served from 2016 to 2022. She also served as the that Synod's director of evangelical mission and as a pastor for a two-point parish. Collins was born in Johnstown and raised in Hollidaysburg, so she is no stranger to the Allegheny Synod. She is the daughter of the Rev George and Helen Nein.

She is married to John Collins, and they have two children and five grandchildren. They live in Selinsgrove, and are members of Sharon Lutheran Church.



**Interim Bishop
Barbara J. Collins**

Her term in the Allegheny Synod starts on Oct. 1, concluding Aug. 31, 2025. The newly elected bishop will take office on Sept. 1, Collins said. "During this time, one task will be to

assist a transition team in preparing for the election of a new bishop at the May 2025 Synod Assembly. Other tasks will relate to the basic responsibilities of a synodical bishop and strengthening relationships across the Synod," she wrote in an email. "Focusing on God's call to mission and building relationships has always been a focal point of my calling in ministry. I will be interested in learning where the Allegheny Synod sees itself in relationship to God's mission and how that is lived out by congregations, colleagues, and lay leaders across the Synod," she added. †

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Instead of focusing on how many bottoms are in the pews and bucks are in the plates, we could focus on the following:

- How often are we gathering together to break bread with one another?
- What does our prayer life look like, not just as individuals, but also as gathered people?
- How much do we devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching?
- How willingly do we share our resources to meet the needs of our members and neighbors?

Businesses, even currently successful ones, come and go. The church of Jesus Christ remains forever. †

Day at the Curve

What do you get when 80 Lutherans from across the Allegheny Synod get together on a Sunday in August to enjoy a baseball game? Synod Night at the Curve! It was a beautiful evening at PNC Field in Altoona as attendees enjoyed camaraderie, blue skies, and even a rainbow following a brief rainfall. Thanks to all who attended; we look forward to continuing this fun tradition again next year! — *Pastor Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte*



BEFORE *you* GO

They Still Line the Streets

Parades still draw crowds.

Anyone in Somerset on July 26 likely noted (some, perhaps, with frustration) that several main thoroughfares were closed for the parade, which traveled from near UPMC Somerset Hospital, up Main Street, and to the Somerset football field.

Anyone not in a hurry to get through town got a great show. Large farm equipment, local firefighting rigs, and the regular groups of youth dancers and musicians were part of the lineup.

People lined the streets on both sides for the entire route. Most kids were eager for a piece of candy being thrown from the floats, another parade tradition.

It kicks off a mid-summer festive weekend in Somerset. The Chalk the Block Festival typically follows the parade. Artwork from chalk artists will be lining the street for weeks until they weather away.

This year, a more permanent piece was added to the former Newberry building on the Diamond — a larger-than-life-size mural based on actual photos from inside the store from the 1960s.

Even if parades aren't your thing (I was never one to get excited for them) there's something refreshing about the community spirit the processions evoke.

It's a time to celebrate hometown heroes, see the town's newest fire truck, and greet old friends.

Plus, you are nearly certain to fill a bag with candy. Check the next one out in your hometown.

Thanks for reading,

— Rick Kazmer