

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

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Monasteries in Meteora perch on the top of amazing geological formations.

GREECE

In Paul's Footsteps

Stories and photos inside

Photo by Pastor Julie Holm



"The enemy of nervousness is extreme preparation."

Richard Steuernagle remembered, Page 5



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

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The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

is published bi-monthly by the
ALLEGHENY SYNOD OF THE ELCA

Bishop Paula Schmitt

701 Quail Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602-3010

Phone: 814-942-1042 • Fax: 814-941-9259

www.AlleghenySynod.org •

email: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor Rick Kazmer

Copy Editor Courtney Kazmer

Email: r9remzak@hotmail.com

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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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CONTACT US

Newsletter: r9remzak@hotmail.com

Bishop Schmitt: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

Michelle Bossler: Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com

Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock:

kevin.shock@alleghenysynod.com



Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Trusting God's Vision

A Message from Bishop Paula Schmitt

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

I hope your Easter season was full of hope and joy. As we enter Ordinary Time in the season of Pentecost, our lives together will be anything but ordinary. There are several events planned to continue your growth in faith with your friends and neighbors in our Synod.

Our Synod's Assembly will take place on Saturday, June 17, at the Blair County Convention Center. We are looking forward to a different pattern for our Assembly this year. On Sunday, June 11, at 4 p.m. we will gather at First Lutheran Church in Altoona for our opening worship. This time will allow us to celebrate together without the rush of all the other details of the Synod Assembly on our minds. The worship service is for anyone to attend — and I hope you will!

On Tuesday, June 13, at 6 p.m. and again on Thursday, June 15, two online interactive Bible studies will be led by our ELCA Church-wide Representative Kristen Opalinski. Kristen is the Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations manager for the ELCA and a native of Western Pennsylvania. She will join us via Zoom for a time of prayer and study based on our Assembly's theme, "Christ Unites Us." These studies are open to anyone and we encourage congregational voting members to attend.



Bishop Paula Schmitt

(See BISHOP, Page 23)

Scene of the Edition



The skyline March 6 in Somerset County.

Photo by Bishop Paula Schmitt

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TRAVELS TO TURKEY & GREECE

Ruins Connected by the Gospel

Story & Photos by PASTOR DAVID BOWMAN
Zion Lutheran Church, Hollidaysburg

Laodicea, Turkey: Columns of the agora (outdoor marketplace) with an unexcavated mound of earth.



This January, I traveled to Turkey and Greece with a group from United Lutheran Seminary. Professor Mark Vitalis Hoffman organized the trip and named it “In the Steps of Paul and Revelation: A New Testament Journey.” Together, during the course of 17 days, 1,700 bus miles and 11,000 air miles, we visited more than 50 sites of the ancient world.

The world of the Apostle Paul and John of Patmos came to life.

In the last decade, Turkey has spent an enormous number of resources on these sites.

I cannot count the number of times our professor said, “Oh! That wasn’t here the last time I visited!”

Even with the renewed efforts, the sites showcased a wide range of excavation and reconstruction progress.

The ruins of Colossae, a city that once had 30,000 inhabitants, remained under layers of earth.

The shape of its 5,000-seat theatre and a few marble columns that had worked their way to the surface were the only recognizable objects. Just nine miles away are the ruins of Laodicea.

This city of 50,000 has been extensively rebuilt and I found myself daydreaming of the ancient world as I got lost in its gleaming colonnaded streets.

(See TRAVEL 1, Page 12)

Remember in Prayer

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

MAY

Week 1:

Cedar Grove Lutheran, Cedar Grove

Week 2: Spring Mills Parish: New Hope Lutheran, Spring Mills; and St. John Union, Farmers Mills

Week 3: Trinity Lutheran, Sidman

Week 4: St. Luke Lutheran, Mt. Union

JUNE

Week 1:

St. Paul Lutheran, Johnstown

Week 2: St. Mark Lutheran, Pleasant Gap

Week 3: Trinity Lutheran, Johnstown

Week 4: Mountain Saints Parish: St. John, Addison; St. Paul, Fort Hill; Mt. Carmel, Meyersdale; and Mt. Tabor, Garrett

Former Bishop's Assistant Remembered by Friends

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

The Allegheny Synod lost a long-time leader in February.

Richard L. Steuernagle, who in his career had served as assistant to the bishop, died Feb. 3 at age 73 in Penn Highlands DuBois Hospital.

He had been a member of Christ Lutheran Church, where he had sung in the choir, was a catechism teacher and was a delegate to church-wide activities, according to his obituary.

Margaret Thatcher worked with Steuernagle in various leadership capacities at the synod office during the years.

"I knew Dick for over 25 years and have many, many fond memories. Never in those years did I hear him raise his voice, curse or swear . . . always was a man with few words, but, very bright and extremely thoughtful of others," Thatcher said.

She said she and Steuernagle made a commitment to each other regarding this stage of life.

"Dick and I used to tell each other, whoever dies first, they may be gone, but certainly not forgotten," she said.

He was born in DuBois in 1949, the son of the late Karl and Florence (Pifer) Steuernagle.

He worked for 20 years at Rockwell International Manufacturing as a product engineer. After his retirement from Rockwell, Steuernagle took on the leadership role at the synod office, assisting the bishop. Since 2000, he was a Synodical Authorized Minister at Grace Lutheran Church in Curwensville, Olanta and New Millport.

"I knew Dick fairly well." Grace Lutheran Church, State College, Pastor Emeritus Steve Lynn, said.



**Richard
Steuernagle**

(See RICHARD, Page 9)

WE *are* LUTHERAN

Robert 'Bob' Skelly Fulfilling God's Plan by Helping Hungry

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Robert "Bob" Skelly's Wednesdays for the past year have included a ride through Pine Grove Mills.

It's the Meals on Wheels route that he and Pastor Emeritus Steve Lynn have volunteered to take each week.

"Both Pastor Steve and I retired earlier than planned for different reasons and this opportunity to enhance food security for people in our community has fostered a renewed relevance of purpose in serving the people of God," Skelly, 70, said about the project. "It is inspiring to witness the dedication, camaraderie and organization of Meals on Wheels staff and all the volunteers who deliver, prepare and package nutritional meals and cleanup at the shift's end."

Skelly grew up on a dairy farm, so he is used to being outdoors and active. He still enjoys pulling weeds and other chores.

While delivering meals — to individuals, couples and home-bound people — the two enjoy fellowship on their Wednesday rides.

"Pastor Steve and I talk about renewal of purpose, the joy of our deepening friendship and all the



Robert "Bob" Skelly

world problems we 'solve' during our one-hour route," Skelly said.

Skelly attends Zion Lutheran Church and Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in State

College.

He is married to Alicia Anderson, who works in campus ministry at Penn State. Their children are daughter Jessa Anderson-Reitz, son-in-law Luke Hanson and daughter Mara Anderson-Skelly.

Helping the hungry has become a passion for Skelly. He has started to work with the YMCA of Centre County's anti-hunger program.

There are 16 distribution sites, one at Grace.

(See SKELLY 1, Page 14)

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Sabbatical Report Part 6:

Walking in Paul's Footsteps

(Editor's note: This is the final part in an ongoing series by Pastor Julie Holm about her three-month journey around the world investigating unique locations and faith.)

BY PASTOR JULIE HOLM
Brush Valley Fusion of Faith

Halfway through my time in Germany, I had to face the fact that I was not going to the Holy Land.

When I made my reservations in June, Israel was opening in August, and it was on my itinerary for October. But when the Delta variant of COVID arrived, Israel decided not to reopen, except for some limited tours. In mid-September, I called my airline to find out where I could go home from, instead of Tel Aviv. My best option was Athens, so instead of 10 days in Greece, I had 32.

I started in Thessaloniki, visiting their oldest churches, walking around the Roman Forum and driving out to Philippi, where I spent hours wandering in the ruins. The Octagon church, oldest and best preserved in the ruins, was founded in the fourth centu-



Submitted photo

Overlooking St. Paul's Bay (to Pastor Holm's right).

ry and was (in my imagination, at least) the natural heir to the community that Paul founded. I had an audio Bible on my phone, so I was able to listen to Paul's letters, and the sections of Acts about his visit to Macedonia as I wandered.

Then, I was re-planning the trip, and headed to the monasteries of Meteora, where I was able to go hiking staircases that sometimes exceeded 300 steps. I took a sunset tour that included a visit to the ninth century church in the town. The highlight of the trip was a new friend I met on the train, who had dinner and visited a couple of monasteries with me.

(See JOURNEY, Page 13)

Noon Recitals Start Season In Johnstown

BY GEORGE FATTMAN

First Lutheran Church, Johnstown

Henry Davis, nationally recognized performer of Gospel music, opened the Tuesday Noon Recital Series April 4 at First Lutheran Church, 415 Vine Street, in Downtown Johnstown.

The annual series features talented musicians for the community.

Davis was selected by the Smithsonian Institution to represent the Gospel segment of its "100 Years Celebration of the Development of the Piano."

Earlier, the Smithsonian commissioned him to arrange, con-



Henry Davis

duct and record Thomas Dorsey's classic, "Peace in the Valley," which won a Peabody Award and was featured in a TV movie.

Davis is director of music ministry at Peniel Drug Treatment Center in Johnstown.

The son of a Baptist minister, he began playing the piano at age 4, composed his first song at age 5 and presented his first concert at age 6.

Other musicians who visited include Zelie Eger, a Johnstown Symphony violinist who has performed at the Grand Halle and numerous other venues; a jazz band comprising students from four high schools, assembled and directed by Eric Pfeil, who is on the music faculty of Greater Johnstown High School.

All recitals will be followed by a light lunch.

There is no charge; the series relies entirely on contributions. †

The annual series at the Vine Street church features talented musicians for the community.

RICHARD

(Continued from Page 5)

Lynn said his friend once told him something that he will never forget, a piece of wisdom he has carried since.

"The enemy of nervousness is extreme preparation," Lynn said, recalling the quote.

Steuernagle held three degrees from the Pennsylvania State University. In 1971, he obtained a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, in 1973 a master's degree in engineering and in 1981 a doctorate degree in hydro dynamic engineering.

Thatcher said she remembers Steuernagle's admiration for the late Penn State football coach, Joe Paterno. He had been a Penn State football season ticketholder for 30 years, and was a member of the Penn State DuBois Alumni Association.

Bishop Emeritus Gregory Pile also recalls Steuernagle's passion for "blue and white." But it was his love for the church that was greatest.

Pile said that Steuernagle was the first vice president of the Allegheny Synod. They served together on the first synod council.

"He began serving in the office of the Bishop during Bishop Gerald Miller's tenure. When I was called to the Office of Bishop, I desired to have a second ordained person on the staff, which meant staffing changes; one of them being that Dick would have to move to a very part-time position or leave the staff altogether," Pile said. "I thought this change would be very painful for Dick, but to my surprise he said, 'No problem. In fact, I am willing to work full-time for the synod for part-time pay'; which he did for quite a few years."

In 2000, Pile asked Steuernagle to consider a pastoral leadership position for some congregations in the northern part of the synod, including Grace Lutheran in Curwensville.

"As I recall, Dick gave me one of those looks like, 'you've got to be kidding', to which I responded . . . 'well, just try it for a year.' On Sunday, Oct. 30, 2022, I visited Grace, Curwensville, to celebrate his retirement from that ministry — 22 years later! Dick rarely said no when his Lord or his Church asked him to serve."

Pile said he was always impressed when his friend was responsible for devotions.

"They were always Biblically grounded, thoughtful and insightful. I am guessing that was one of the reasons I asked him to serve as pastoral leader in the Curwensville area," he said.

According to his family, He is survived by numerous cousins and friends.

He was buried in Morningside Cemetery in DuBois. †

Expanding Learning through Service

A Trip to the U.S./Mexico Border

(Editor's note: Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America presence on campus in the territory of the Allegheny Synod. We asked Deacon Alicia Anderson, who serves as campus minister, for some updates each semester.)

BY DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON
Penn State University Campus Minister

College is a time when young adults expand their horizons.

They take on wider and deeper studies in school. They meet and begin friendships with people who are not from their hometown and are often quite different from them.

They grow and mature in the ways they communicate and the things they care about. Students grow spiritually as well, often finding a deeper sense of God's presence as they grow beyond the faith of childhood into the faith of adulthood.

Many things can lead to this kind of growth, one of which is service-learning experiences.

Service-learning often looks just like volunteering or helping with a service project, but also includes intentional reflection that leads to deeper learning. In a faith-centered context like cam-

pus ministry, service-learning offers ways for students to give of their time and their abilities while also offering ways for them to find a deeper sense of the context, the challenges and the systemic issues that are at play in the situation where they are helping.

In 2019, Lutheran Campus Ministry (in partnership with two other Penn State ministries) went to the U.S./Mexico border for service-learning with Frontera de Cristo.

Based in Douglas, Arizona, and Agua Prieta, Sonora, this ministry builds connections with other agencies and partners on both sides of the border to help support and care for migrants and others whose lives are based at the border.

We met border agents, migrants, people taking water into the desert, local officials, church leaders and others who work together to find ways to improve the challenging situation at "la frontera." We did some work there ourselves, but expanding our knowledge and deepening our understanding while reflecting about what we were learning was the most impactful part of the trip.

(See LEARNING, Page 22)

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

Investment brings to mind money, accounts and portfolios.

Most synod and congregation council meetings probably include a report on the investments of the organization, whether small or large. Our commerce-driven society most often thinks of investment in a financial sense.

There are, however, other ways to think about investment. We talk about investing time or energy.

We invest in our work, our recreation, our family and our hobbies in both financial and non-financial ways.

We also invest in our life as Jesus' disciples and in the ministries of our congregations by sharing our skills, by spending time with fellow disciples and neighbors, and by focusing our energy in spreading Good News in particular ways.

In all my experience as a congregational leader, parish pastor and now as the Director for Evangelical Mission, I have witnessed decision after decision made for financial reasons. Indeed, we cannot spend money recklessly on



Pastor Kevin Shock

things that will ultimately not serve us; however, years of making ministry decisions based on money and not on the ministry itself has contributed to the issues that many congregations face.

I've heard people lament that they don't have the money to do ministry the way they used to without considering that there may be different ways to meet the needs they were meeting before. I've been told that a congregation can't afford to call a pastor when they easily could by moving some financial investments and spending some of their resources.

I've seen congregations decrease their giving to the wider church and our ministry partners while spending tens of thousands of dollars or more to renovate a rarely used part of their property. Perhaps we were given some poor and yet persistent advice decades ago when we were told that congregations should be run like businesses are operated.

(See DEM 1, Page 25)



Photo by Pastor Julie Holm

A scene at Philippi.



Photo by Pastor Julie Holm

The Acropolis overlooks Mars Hill (the Aeropagus).

TRAVEL 1

(Continued from Page 4)

The thread that connected all these ruins together was that the message of the Gospel quickly found its way into all these Mediterranean cities, oftentimes through the efforts of the Apostle Paul. The scope of his ministry and the sheer number of miles he traveled is spectacular. I gained a new appreciation for simply the physical efforts he undertook to break ground with this fledgling faith movement in a culture saturated with other options for worship.

It was also interesting that in all these places, from Corinth to Philippi to Troas to Ephesus, only the marble physically remained. People may have lived in nearby towns, but the thriving cities of tens of thousands were gone. Economic and political situations changed. Earthquakes toppled great public works. Ancient temples and church buildings disintegrated. And yet, two millennia later, the faith that these first Christians shared, and the sacred words written to them, are alive as ever.

(See TRAVEL 2, Page 15)

JOURNEY

(Continued from Page 7)

She was a young nun who helped me find icons to bring home that would resonate with my congregation.

My audio Bible came in handy in my next destination: the Isle of Patmos and its cave of the Revelation, the nearby monastery and the wildlife on the back end of the island, where I ended up getting lost hiking (and putting in more miles than any other day of the sabbatical.) Then, I headed for a trio of islands that are actually mentioned in Acts: Kos, Rhodes and Crete. I went swimming in St. Paul's Bay in Lindos, Rhodes, and visited ancient sites of the Asklepieion in Kos and Knossos on Crete. I marveled at ruins that paralleled Old Testament times, more ancient than I was able to comprehend. On Crete, an unusually violent storm caused a leak in my hostel room's roof, and I was thrilled to experience the storms of autumn, as Paul did, resulting in his ship being shipwrecked as they were blown off course in Crete, as I was unable to go to Malta.

I spent a day in Corinth. What a thrill it was to walk in Paul's footsteps, not legendary footsteps, but real footsteps, as attested to both in his letters and in the book of Acts, and to stand where he stood when he was judged in the city. The mix of Christian community

and ancient Greek ruins was amazing, and the site is impressive. I also walked up to Acrocorinth, the ancient pagan site up on the mountain that overlooks the town that Paul spent a significant time in, and visited the Corinth canal.

In the city of Nafplio, I visited ancient sites and castles, but also ran into an unexpected Christian community in a Roman Catholic Church that welcomed me as a pilgrim. It's a community of Polish and southern German expatriates in Nafplio. I attended their daily Mass. I had been missing the community aspect of my Sabbatical when I was in Greece, as the length and differences in Greek Orthodox worship made it challenging to join a community at prayer.

Finally, I finished up my Sabbatical in Athens, climbing the Areopagus, and listening to Paul's speech to the Athenians in Acts, wandering through the Forum that he certainly would have walked in, and wondering at the ancient sites that would have surrounded him, not as ruins, but as living temples and culture. It was amazing to think of Paul's courage in that context. But, it was time to head home, full of the sights and sounds and communities that have been part of our Christian heritage.

Israel is still on my bucket list, but I came home having gained so much.†

SKELLY 1

(Continued from Page 6)

The Meals on Wheels program is also housed at Grace, organized by church staff, community members and other volunteers.

"I have occasionally helped arrange the food for pick-up (at Grace), but more consistently have delivered food to households ranging from seven to two members. The response of families has been an expression of gratitude and joy and the smiles of children when they see the boxes of sugary cereal are the most heart-warming," Skelly said.

Skelly sees the work as a present-day version of the command from God to care for the poor and hungry, as read in both testaments of the Bible.

One example comes in Isaiah 58:7: "Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help."

"Feeding the poor because it is a command from Jesus does not yield an intrinsic reward, but when love is the root of reaching out to others who have needs, there is mutual benefit," Skelly said.

"It seems to me, when this happens, the spirit of Christ rejoices within all parties."

Health and mobility problems

***Share your food
with the hungry
and give shelter to
the homeless.***

— *Isaiah 58:7*

are two challenges Skelly is noticing among the people he helps. Some have caregivers, others answer the door with walkers, canes and breathing equipment.

For the food distribution, Skelly said the families are trying to make ends meet.

When people do not answer the door, they call to tell the person that a meal has been delivered, where to find it and then leave a kind message.

The kind message goes a long way, according to Skelly.

"Recipients that we have met, or never seen but answer the phone, tell us that they enjoy talking to us and they are very thankful for the meals," he said.

Skelly values the fellowship. He is also part of a group of other retirees — pastors, educators an engineer and a psychologist among them — who regularly meet for what he calls a "lunch brunch."

(See SKELLY 2, Page 16)



Photos by Pastor David Bowman

Miletus, Turkey: The theatre in Miletus could seat more than 15,000 people. Paul stopped here on his third journey to meet the elders of nearby Ephesus. Paul met them in Miletus because the Ephesians were upset with him and his presence could have caused a riot.



Ephesus, Turkey: The Library of Celsus and Gate of Mazaeus and Mythridates. The gates were built in 40 AD by two slaves freed by Emperor Augustus and tasked with maintaining Roman properties in the city. The library was built in the second century and once housed more than 12,000 scrolls.



Corinth, Greece: An ancient shop turned chapel dedicated to Paul's ministry partners Priscilla and Aquila in the foreground with the Temple of Apollo in the background.

TRAVEL 2

(Continued from Page 12)

In some strange way, this revelation is a comfort to me. The message of Christ crucified and risen took hold in these important cultural centers of the Roman Empire, the Gospel outfitted people to live with grace, love and forgiveness in their lives, and the faith moved with these people as they moved from these marbled cities to whatever was next. Untold things have crumbled in these places, but the story of God, and the story of God's people, continues. I take hope in that, for I do not know what Somerset or Johnstown or Altoona or State College will look like in the year 4,023, but I trust that the faith shared in these places will live on.†

SKELLY 2

(Continued from Page 14)

"We have a grand time in conversation, kidding each other, and again, 'solving the problems' of society, politics and religion. We also provide to each other encouragement and compassion for coping with life's ups and downs," he said.

FAITH MATTERS

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

BOB SKELLY: Prayer for me is a spontaneous response to streams of consciousness. It may be about neighbors, friends or family that I have current information regarding a challenging situation in life, or it may be people I have not seen in a long time, maybe former clients, friends and colleagues. At that moment, I lift a prayer that these people may have and know the love, presence and peace of God, and sometimes that leads to a phone call, text or email.

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

BS: I grew up in a Lutheran church near Chambersburg, and my earliest memories of worship was accidentally dropping the gum I was chewing off the balcony and my mother being horrified someone would sit in it. We never sat close to the edge again. My first salient memory of the Lutheran faith was studying Luther's Small Catechism at the parsonage after school.

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

BS: The importance of forgiveness and welcome, and the ELCA website says it well. "We are reconciled to God by God's forgiving mercy." And, "we value the richness of God's creation and offer a radical welcome to all people ... for women, people of color, minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, people who are marginalized or living in poverty and the LGBTQ community." You are forgiven and welcome in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.†

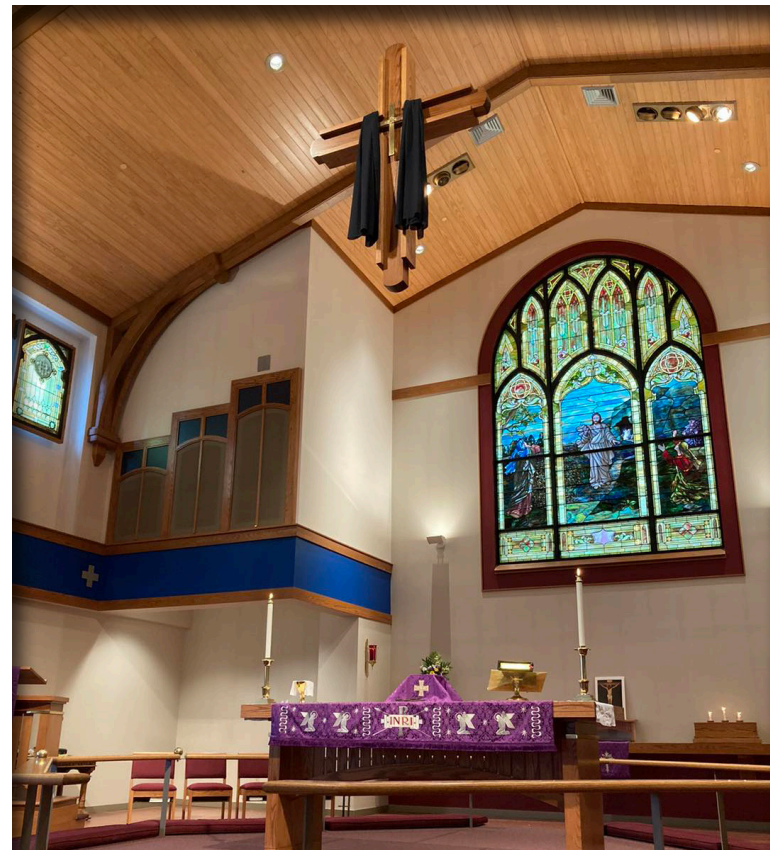


ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

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 sanctuary at Mt. Zion in Glasgow



The sanctuary at St. James in Huntingdon



The sanctuary at Trinity Lutheran in Sidman



St. Mark in Snydertown hosted kids in second through fifth grade from the Jana Marie Foundation. During the youth retreat, the kids made the mural at left. It was part of a confidence-building exercise. The mural is on display at a State College winery.

Western PA Native Returns

Opalinski is a Leader in the ELCA; She will be Speaking During Assembly

Allegheny Synod Assembly starts
June 17 - [DETAILS HERE](#)

By **KRISTEN OPALINSKI**

Manager, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations at the ELCA

Greetings from Chicago, where we are eagerly anticipating the arrival of spring. Each year, as we journey through the Lenten season toward the hope of Eastertide, I am reminded of the many ways new life springs forth — from the first chirps of spring birds to the tens of thousands of tulips throughout Downtown Chicago peeking through the still-chilled soil.

These, and other signs, remind me that no matter how long the winter may seem, or how gloomy the gray skies become — warmth, sunshine, renewal and new growth are on the horizon.

And, just like this shift in nature, we also experience seasons of renewal taking place in our churches and communities. The theme of this year's Allegheny Synod Assembly — "Christ Unites Us All" — invites us to think deeply about the ways in which we are connected in Christ so that we might serve as disciples for transformation and renewal.

I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself as we prepare for the 2023 Synod Assembly. My name is Kristen Opalinski, and I am thrilled to be



**Kristen
Opalinski**

joining you as the church-wide representative. I serve as the manager for ecumenical and inter-religious relations (EIR) on the staff of the office of the presiding bishop here at the churchwide offices in Chicago. My work includes staffing various ecumenical committees, managing EIR communication platforms for the ELCA, convening the Lutheran World Federation North America Region and deepening opportunities for ecumenical and inter-religious formation and leadership throughout the ELCA.

While I now live and work in Chicago, I grew up in your neck of the woods!

I'm a proud Western Pennsylvanian, having grown up in Latrobe (and yes, I still bleed black and gold).

My father was an ELCA pastor serving three calls in central, western and eastern Pennsylvania, and so my roots in ministry and faith formation run deep here in the Keystone state.

I'm a graduate of Augsburg University (one of our ELCA universities in Minneapolis) and the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (now United Lutheran Seminary), where I earned a Master of Arts in Religion, with specializations in public leadership and conflict transformation.

(See VISIT, Page 20)

Friedens Coffeehouse Features Talented Bluegrass Musicians

The Friedens Lutheran Church in late March hosted a coffeehouse, featuring Libby Eddy, Gary Antol and Jeff Scheller.

Eddy, Antol and Scheller are three of the busiest bluegrass and old-time players in the region.

They love to share their passion of presenting authentic, original and classic American music. Eddy's award-winning vocals and electrifying fiddle come from a family tradition of harmonies and picking.

Antol studied guitar at Duquesne University and has made a life of writing and performing. Together, they created the Weedrags and Jakob's Ferry Stragglers; describing their music as "Appalachian Bluegrass."

Scheller loves to drive songs with his big, green bass and enjoys writing original music. He performs with Antol in the country band, the Millbilllys, and has four other bands: Well Strung, Tiger Maple String Band, Midnight Rooster and The Boom Rockets.

Well Strung and Tiger Maple String Band are his bluegrass and old-time bands. Scheller played bass with several bands at the Laurel Hill Bluegrass Festival last summer.

"This is a change from the regularly scheduled entertainment,' Beth Pile, music director at the church, said before the March 31 show. "Bluegrass and Americana music are always well received by our audience." †

"CHRIST UNITES US ALL"

VISIT

(Continued from Page 18)

I was a Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) in South Africa (2009-10). From 2010-14, I served as regional communications officer for the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa (LUCSA) through a partnership with ELCA Global Mission. During my tenure with LUCSA, I also served as an interfaith delegate at COP17 (UN climate conference in Durban) and as the communications director for the Interfaith Action for Peace in Africa's (IFAPA) 2012 summit in Johannesburg.

My work in this church has taken me across many countries, continents and cultures, and continues to do so. From now through September, I'm serving at the Visual Identity Coordinator for the 13th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, which will be held in Krakow, Poland. This role is in addition to my work with the ELCA and serves as a reminder that it's a big Lutheran world out there — united in one body of Christ, one Spirit and one hope!

And, I hope to shine some light on this global understanding of our Lutheran identity through my time with you all. Part of my role in this year's Allegheny Synod Assembly will be to help lead folks from across the synod in Bible studies around the theme of what unites us in Christ. I look forward to our journey together as we survey the ways in which our unity in Christ is expressed through worship, prayer, love of neighbor and witness in the world. I hope you'll join me as we ask some big questions and allow the Holy Spirit to move us toward greater unity!

(Editor's note: Opalinski has written several articles for Living Lutheran Magazine, including reflections on her personal faith journey, women's leadership development across the global church and the Lutheran church's legacy of peacemaking. In addition to her writing, she is an artist, photographer and graphic designer. Her work has been featured by the Lutheran World Federation, Augsburg University, the (RED) Campaign, CNN, the United Nations, The Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation and Westminster John Knox Press.) †

PALM SUNDAY PARADE



Submitted photos

St. Mark in Snyderstown celebrated Palm Sunday with a parade, featuring the youngest members.



The colorful windows at Christ Lutheran in Johnstown provided a great scene for Bishop Paula's Easter morning service.

Students from Penn State at the U.S./ Mexico border during a service-learning trip.



Submitted photo

LEARNING

(Continued from Page 10)

This April, we hosted Mark Adams, from Frontera de Cristo, in State College as he traveled through Pennsylvania interpreting their work.

He talked with a group of students and community members about the vision and mission of the organization and the impact of their work on various parts of the community. He also gave us the chance to share a little about our last visit there.

For Spring Break 2024 we are planning to return to Douglas and Agua Prieta, taking another group of students for service-learning at the border.

It is exciting to look ahead to another trip to this beautiful and challenging place that is filled with opportunities to serve, as well as to deeply learn. Campus ministry works to find ways to help students expand their horizons and grow in their understanding of the challenges facing communities and people in the world. Service-learning trips like this are just one of the many ways Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State is striving to help students grow as they make the transition into adult life and faith. †

BISHOP

(Continued from Page 2)

You can read more from Kristen in this issue of The Lutheran Letter.

On Saturday, June 17, the Assembly opens at 8:30 a.m. with brief morning prayer led by Sister Marianne Brock, our ELCA Foundation regional representative. Sister Marianne will be with us throughout the day to lead us in prayer and song. We give thanks for her gifts and look forward to hearing more from the ELCA Foundation.

While the Assembly is the work we do together in this Synod, some events are being planned to allow us time to rest and play. The Synod's Faith Formation Team, along with leadership from Camp Sequanota, have been planning a festival-type event for June 23-25 at Camp Sequanota titled, "Well." This several-day event features a keynote speaker, workshops and affinity groups, music and more. It's a time to rebuild community and find faith connections for our daily lives. Registration is open. Visit the Camp Sequanota website for more information and to register. The Faith Formation Team continues planning for a Youth Mission Trip to Florida in July. This trip is open to youth, aged 14-18. The group will travel to Florida and stay at Luther Springs while they assist with clean-up from the hurricanes. Pastor Drew McCaffery is the contact person for this event. If your congregation is not sending youth to this event, consider supporting the group with a monetary

donation. You can make donations through the Allegheny Synod website. Just click the "Donate" button on the front page. Our Synod will host a Synod Youth Event, "The Weekend," in December at St. James Lutheran in Huntingdon. This weekend will focus on who we are as God's own, and learn what it means to be enough. The Faith Formation Team has been working hard on this event, and will be providing curriculum that can be used by families before the event. Voting members to the Assembly will receive a copy, and copies will be available at other events and throughout the Summer leading up to "The Weekend."

Our Synod has been blessed with gifted leaders who are called to support and encourage our youth as they figure out life. I am proud of the work they are doing and hope that you find ways to support this work and to encourage the youth in your congregation and community. The church as a whole is living into a new reality; being a community together is more important now. People are not connected to congregations in the same way. If we want to thrive into the future, we will need to embrace new ideas, new ways of doing "old" things and be open to possibility. At our Synod's Assembly, I am going to ask you to be open to yourself, your neighbor and to the Holy Spirit's guidance as we move forward into a hope-filled future.

Peace be yours,

Bishop Paula †

A Sanctuary for the Season

Pastor Jaime Olson submitted these photos from the sanctuary at Evangelical Lutheran Church in Duncansville. The new Lent/Easter background was installed, just in time for the season.

Olson designed and painted the panels. Trudy Cassada and Nancy Gibboney cut them and built the framework. Jamie Miller, Josh and Derek Detrick coordinated the lighting. It took a team of volunteers to install.

The photos below show the transition.



DEM

(Continued from Page 11)

The goals of those two entities could not be more different. A business operates in ways that will maximize profit. A congregation is about sharing Good News with our neighbors and living the life of Jesus in community. Maximized profits are not required to do that work. In fact, money is not necessarily required to do that work, yet, spending money and using resources faithfully can help us to effectively spread Good News and maximize service to our neighbors.

Earlier this year I had a conversation with a colleague as they were struggling with the financial wisdom of repeating a postcard mailing that had been done previously. If your congregation has ever done such a mailing, you know how expensive they can be. Not long before that conversation, my spouse and I worshiped in that congregation, and that morning we remarked to each other how lively and welcoming the congregation seemed to be, even more so than usual. I discovered why in the conversation with their pastor. They had sent a postcard mailing inviting people to a specific service. Visitors came, and this congregation was well-prepared to welcome people and engage them in congregational life. Out of that mailing, six new people joined the congregation. That's what my spouse and I had sensed going on when we had visited. The congregation was growing, not just in number, but more importantly in the ministry of hospitality. Was the mailing expensive, maybe even too expensive? Yes. Would they recoup every penny spent on the

mailing? Maybe not directly. Was the ministry that resulted from that mailing worth the cost? Undoubtedly. The pastor asked me, "Should we spend the money on another mailing?" My advice was, "ABSOLUTELY."

Even if the results aren't the same, it's worth trying it.

In the Gospel according to Luke (14:28) Jesus asks the crowds, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" Although Jesus uses this scenario as an example of weighing cost, he's not talking about financial decisions; he's talking about the cost of following him. If there's any question whether Jesus thinks ministry is rooted in sound financial decisions, he ends this teaching to the crowd by saying: "So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." (v. 33) Those are sobering words for our profit-driven, money-obsessed culture.

I'm not suggesting that we ignore financial health or spend money without regard or plan. I'm merely suggesting that we allow the Spirit to guide us in our hopes and strategies for ministry at least as much as we let a balance sheet guide us. If investing our money shrewdly in markets and accounts has resulted in bigger savings, less giving and emptier buildings, maybe it is time for us to invest our money, time and energy into sharing Good News and loving our neighbors in new and bold ways. Let's invest in following Jesus in our life and ministry.†

BEFORE *you* GO

It's a great time of year

Growing up, I always was an autumn person.

I enjoy the smell of the leaves, the bright colors and the changing season.

But, to tell the truth, I can't ever enjoy the fall leaves entirely. I am color blind, so when Courtney gasps at a bright orange tree, I often miss it.

Maybe that's part of the reason I am starting to appreciate spring and early summer more.

I can easily pick out the first yellow flowers sprouting from the ground. The first flowers to show in our yard are white snow drops.

They make an appearance in late February, if it gets warm enough. As I am writing, blue and pink flowers are starting to show up around town.

By the time you read this, flower gardens are likely already blooming nicely.

How can this colorful, warm season not be my favorite?

Following Palm Sunday and Easter, it's easy to see why God ordered the seasons the way he did. Jesus' resurrection and the story of renewal is at the perfect time of the year.

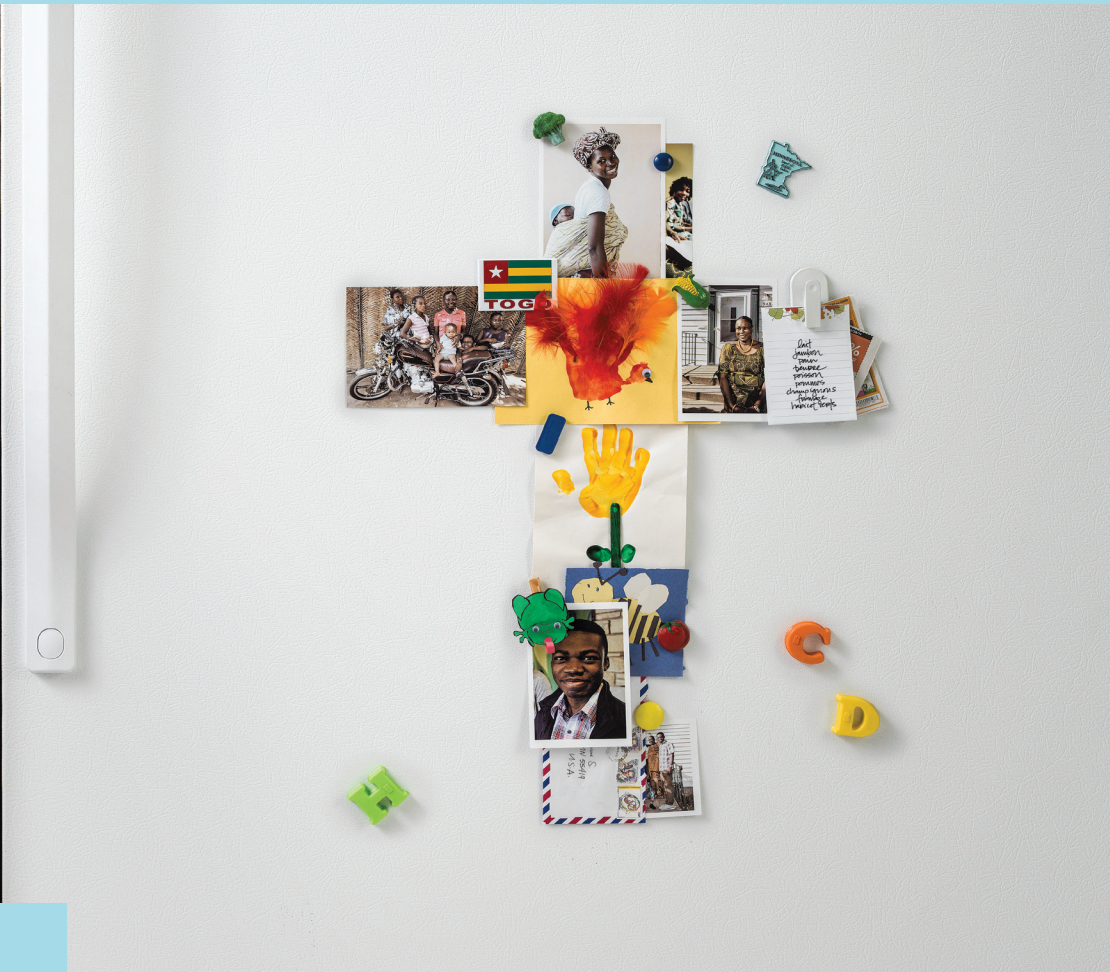
Each season has its merits. I'll still take some time to enjoy fall, and, I guess, winter as well.

But, the old saying, "stop and smell the roses" makes some sense. It's a great time of year.

Like everything else, it goes by quickly. Be sure you don't miss it.

— Rick Kazmer

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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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