

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

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**'IT IS
SOLVED BY
WALKING'**

Grace Continuing Hiking Ministry

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Happy Valley Hikers was born out of a new pastor who likes to hike, hoping to meet

people in her congregation and to learn the area in the shared joy of celebrating God's creation.

(See HIKE, Page 8)

In his book, “Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World — and Our Preaching — Is Changing,” the Rev. Dr. David J. Lose asserts the data-driven conclusion that a person is subjected to more new information in one day than someone in the Middle Ages received in their lifetime. ¶ It’s overwhelming to consider, and I can’t help but think that it’s too much information for us to process with either our brains or our hearts. (See NEWS, Page 4)



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

BY PASTOR KEVIN
SHOCK
St. Mark Lutheran
Church, Pleasant Gap

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE
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Called by God to be one in Christ: we worship,
grow in faith and serve all people.

OUR VISION

Because Christ is here... We are actively engaging
in God's work and sharing the Gospel as the Holy
Spirit increases the followers of Jesus Christ.

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Images should be as high
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The Holy Spirit will Guide Us

To the Saints of the Allegheny Synod,
May God's grace and peace be with you.

As we move into May we are doing the final preparations for our 2021 Allegheny Synod Assembly. Our assembly is being held June 4-5 and will be for the first time completely online. We will be gathering voting members through Zoom, and using the online voting system, E-ballot, to handle our election of the bishop and positions in the synod. It is a new thing for all of us.

Thankfully we are not the first synod to conduct an online assembly, or to have a bishop's election online. Due to COVID-19, 13 Synods held their 2020 assemblies online and 11 elected bishops. We are following best practices that those synods identified through their online assemblies. We have had numerous conversations with members of those synods to answer questions that have arisen for us along the way. We are very grateful for the help we have received from those who have already negotiated the online assembly. They have been very generous with their time.

We also are fortunate that our ELCA visitor for this assembly is ELCA Secretary Deacon Sue Rothmeyer. Rothmeyer presided over five online bishop elections this past year. She is literally the person with the most experience in our church on conducting this type of election. We are fortunate to have her with us. At this time, all but one of the 65 synods in the ELCA are conducting their 2021 assemblies online.

We are in a good position, and we feel ready to take on this challenge. Though we are ready to go, I know a lot of people wonder how we will be able to call a bishop through these unusual circumstances. All we do as we prepare for our assembly, and for the call of our next bishop, is being led by the Holy Spirit. The 200-plus voting members will gather on June 4-5, but the Spirit is the one who is guiding our deliberations, filling our hearts and showing us the way that God would have us go.

(See BISHOP 1, Page 3)

BISHOP 1

(Continued from Page 2)

God already knows who the next bishop of the Allegheny Synod will be. When we come together in our assembly, we are not there to just vote who we think is the best person. Each of us is invited to prayerfully listen to where the Spirit is leading and guiding us. I can personally witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in my own call to this office.

I was pretty clear throughout 2013 and

2014 leading up to our assembly that I was not going to be open to this call. At the time my daughters were 11, 5 and 2.

I thought they were simply too young for me to even be considering this office. I knew this was a busy call. I knew that it would put me on the road and take me away from home much more than I was at the time. It didn't seem like the right thing for my family right then. I also re-

ally liked being a parish pastor. I loved my churches and I loved the people that I was in

ministry with. I was really happy.

(See BISHOP 2, Page 6)

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A Season of Sights, Smells and Sounds

COURTNEY KAZMER

Home & Garden Editor

Birds, flowers and bees -- three of my favorite spring things.

This year I am hoping to increase the number of all three in my backyard through several projects.

Because I love flowers, I will be planting more, which will bring more bees. I have ordered some special bee-inviting plants, which I hope will work.

For my feathered friends, I plan to make my backyard a safe haven for them. We have lost several trees in the neighborhood in recent years, due to rot and overgrowth.

The wildlife needs a place to live, too.

The plan is to add more birdfeeders, birdbaths and birdhouses.

We plan to build an archway and trellis to help the plan. This will also provide us with some privacy, with the help of some viney plants.

If the vision comes to fruition, there should be a lot of buzzing, some wonderful fragrances and the sound of many birds emanating from our backyard.

Be(e) sure to take the time this summer to smell the flowers, listen to the birds and watch the tiny little wings on the bees. I promise you won't regret it.

They are all part of God's creation that we sometimes take for granted. †

NEWS

(Continued from Page 1)

That assertion has caused me to consider the information I expose myself to, to be discerning and critical in choosing what to read and in processing what I read.

I think about how others might benefit from the same kind of critical consumption when I hear Christian people echoing more fear from the news cycle into the world than proclaiming hope from the gospel.

I'm not saying that we should shield ourselves entirely from the news, but when we feel overloaded and anxious about the information we receive, there remains a trustworthy source of hope and peace in which we can turn.

A daily interaction with scripture can steady our spirits and counter-balance the worry and tension, which the news stirs in us. Something as simple as memorizing a meaningful verse to repeat to ourselves or re-reading the lessons from last Sunday's service or singing a favorite hymn has the potential to give us a new outlook on the world around us. Whatever it is that we read or listen to, or repeat from scripture, we know that these words are rooted in truth and love and grace with a vision for a future full of promise. Even if we have grave concern about the state of the world, God in Christ reminds us that "by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope." (Romans 15:4) †

Details on Assembly

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

The 2021 Allegheny Synod Assembly will be a digital event held online June 4-5.

The theme this year is “For All The Faithful Women.” On the schedule is the election of a new bishop, as Bishop Michael Rhyne is not seeking another term.

Voting members are expected to attend on Zoom with this meeting link, <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84048137506>.

The Bible study leader is Bishop April Larson. Larson was the first female bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

She served the La Crosse Area Synod for 16 years until 2008. She will be leading a scriptural reflection on women in the Bible.

More information will be emailed to registered participants. FAQs on the bishop election:

Q: Who can vote? All rostered leaders of the Allegheny Synod, retired rostered leaders of the Allegheny Synod, synod council members and voting members of the assembly will vote in the election. Voting members must be registered and present to take part in the vote. There is no absentee voting in this process.

Q: Who is eligible for the call of bishop? All ELCA rostered pastors in good standing can be nominated to serve as bishop whether they be on leave from call, part-time, retired or a pastor in another synod.

Q: How are pastors nominated? Nominations are made by the voting members on the first ballot, which will be held Friday morning. Should you choose to nominate someone who is not attending the assembly, please contact them beforehand to be certain they are open to the call of bishop.

Q: How do I remove my name from the balloting process? Pastors nominated have the option to remove their name one time only after the first ballot. Otherwise, their name will be on the ballot through the conclusion of the election. To remove your name, text Synod Secretary David Finney at 814-525-0930. †

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

BISHOP 2

(Continued from Page 3)

I liked where I was and I liked what I was doing.

But God had other ideas. In March of 2014 I began to get what I can only describe as a “stirring” feeling. I felt that as crazy as it seemed, maybe I should be open to the call. I didn’t think there was any way I would be called to serve, but I felt like I was supposed to be open. I quickly dismissed this idea because I had made my mind up.

The Holy Spirit will not let you go. I continued to have these thoughts that maybe I should keep myself open. I kept saying that this was crazy and I wasn’t going to do it. So, I did the thing that never goes the way you plan it, I made a deal with Jesus. I told our Lord that I wasn’t, not going to be open to serve as bishop. I told Jesus that if he wanted me to be open, he was going to have to give me a sign. I didn’t need the ceiling to rip off the building and the angels to descend, but I needed something from Jesus to tell me that I was supposed to keep my name in. Also, I told Jesus that if he really wanted me to keep my name in, then he needed someone to tell me that I was to stay in. After a made my “deal” I had a sense of peace. I was sure there was no way my conditions would be met and I would be essentially off the hook.

(See BISHOP 3, Page 12)



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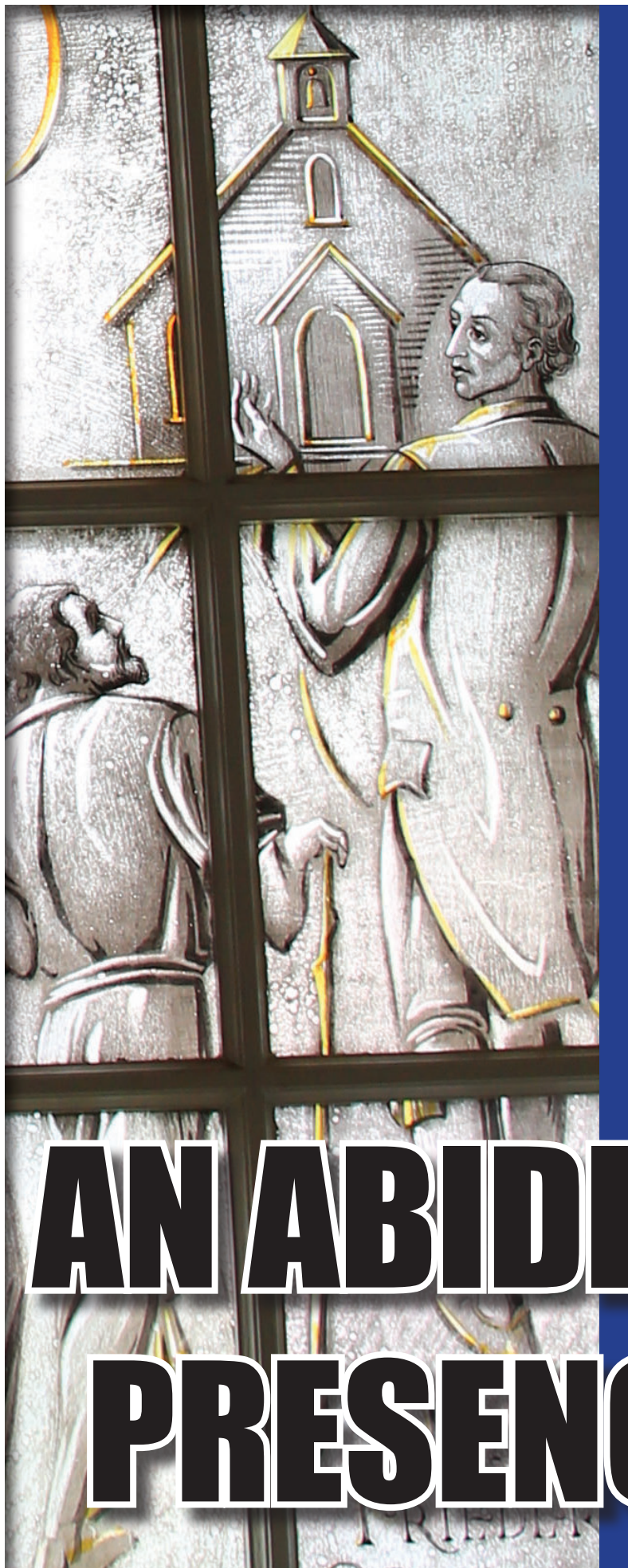
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(Editor's note: The information for this feature was summarized from a report from Encyclopedia Britannica online. It's part of a periodical feature examining the people portrayed on the stained-glass windows in the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg.)

Johann Friedrich Oberlin was born on Aug. 31, 1740, in Strasbourg, France.

He was a Lutheran pastor and philanthropist who transformed poor parishes in the Vosges region of France into flourishing communities. Oberlin was raised by a middle-class family. He studied theology and graduated from the University of Strasbourg in 1758. He was a teacher until he became a pastor in 1767 at the Vosges village of Waldersbach, which became the center of his life's work, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica online.

Seeking to raise his parishioners' living standards, Oberlin provided village schools and began one of the first systems for supervising and instructing young children while their parents were working.

His teaching methods related instruction closely to practical needs and in many ways foreshadowed the work of the German educator, Friedrich Froebel, the originator of kindergarten, according to the Encyclopedia's report.

"Oberlin's methods won him the respect of adults, who also came to him for instruction. Among them he found men to build roads and bridges to end the isolation of their region.

(See PRESENCE, Page 10)

HIKE

(Continued from Page 1)

Pastor Carolyn Hetrick, of Grace Lutheran in State College, became a dedicated hiker after her husband's successful open-heart surgery when they decided hiking would be both good for health and an activity for both of them to decompress from work. Time in creation, to marvel at the enormity of creation and even the tiniest organisms is grounding and restoring.

"Be still and know that I am God" is a recurring theme. The Hetricks have hiked the major national parks in the Southwest, and most recently, Europe's largest glacier in Iceland before the pandemic. Hetrick began organizing once-a-month hikes, based upon recommendations from parishioners, as well as her own research. She mixes up challenging or longer hikes with shorter ones, and coordinates "after work" local walks at the Arboretum in Penn State and trails close to town, of which the area has an abundance. Some trails have been new to most, or not visited recently. Others are familiar, including trekking Mount Nittany. Hetrick often offers a prayer from the psalms to begin, and sometimes contemplative focus along the way. On occasion, the group has shared in a brief outdoor communion service under a cathedral of trees. At a stop on a hilltop after climbing the Thousand Steps, a stranger nearby approached the prayer time and tearfully indicated it was just what he needed. People of all ages and some canine companions have come along for the journey.

As important as being grounded in a Scripture passage can be, equally important is the camaraderie that forms among hikers. Given Grace's size, people may not have met before hiking. Laughter is often the best medicine, especially in this pandemic, and fellow trekkers receive understanding, consolation, shared prayer concerns and updates in their lives while experienc-

ing the enjoyment of companions. Some have also shared their love of photography along the way.

Hetrick also offers "walking office hours" and some hikers have taken that opportunity to walk and talk. As St. Augustine wrote, "solvitur ambulando" — it is solved by walking. She plans to resume the walking office hours this year.

After a "virtual" pilgrimage retreat through Holy Cross Monastery during the pandemic, Hetrick created an audio podcast to accompany a hike so that wherever people hiked, they could be "together in spirit." That episode of the podcast she produces, "Pocketful of Grace," has been one of the most downloaded episodes. You can visit "Pocketful of Grace" at www.buzzsprout.com/1110440, or find it via Spotify, Apple Podcasts and other podcasting apps.

This season, Hetrick hopes to incorporate "All Creation Sings," the new Lutheran worship resource. "Happy Valley Hikers SC" is the dedicated Facebook page for the group. Hikes and treks are posted there, and in Grace's newsletter, but Hetrick also has a list of emails for people who prefer to not engage with social media. Information about hikes includes the level of difficulty, directions and whether it is child or pet friendly. Under current precautions, hikers meet at the trailhead, and hike masked. While winter hiking took on a new importance this year, as spring is beginning, the official first hike of "normal" weather is near.

Happy Valley Hikers will make their first hike on May 1. They will be hiking a loop of Lonberger Path to Tussey Mountain to Laurel Run in Rothrock State Forest. It is a 7.2-mile loop of moderate difficulty. To join in, just show up at 9 a.m. Details for the meet-up spot will be posted on Happy Valley Hikers SC Facebook page, and emailed. †

These Women 'Love Being Busy'

Clearfield Quilters Continuing Long Tradition

(Editor's note: The Allegheny Synod Stewardship Table provided a series called "The Church is Here!" in which congregations and ministries around the Synod shared stories and photos or videos of how stewardship has made ministry possible during the pandemic. This is a story that was shared on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page.)

PASTOR VICKI BEILFUS

Holy Shepherd Parish in Lanse and Karthaus

The church is here, in the Quilt Ministry of Holy Shepherd Parish!

The Holy Shepherd Parish Quilters (of the Clearfield Conference) started around 40 years ago with a number of women from Shepherd of the Hills, Karthaus, and then later when they formed a two-point parish with Holy Trinity, Lanse, both congregations got involved.

This group has both global and local goals. Globally, the goal is 100-plus quilts sent to Lutheran World Relief to be shipped to places like Syria, Palestine and Tanzania. Locally, about 40 to 45 quilts for children are made for the Clearfield County Salvation Army; and 10 to 15 baby quilts for another local organization that helps pregnant and new mothers.

During the pandemic, they were not able to meet together, except in February. Most of the work was done in shifts or at home. But COVID-19 did not slow them down! They were still able to make 110 Lutheran

World Relief quilts, 45 kids quilts and 10 baby quilts. On top of that, several women made 700 face masks for our local hospital.

One member of the team, who is a friend of the congregation, decided to bring her two young daughters with her to do the knotting. The girls have been inspired to make 100 doll quilts themselves to put in shoe box projects for children. These women and girls are absolutely amazing.

They started gearing up for 2021 in November and December. With generous yearly grants from Thrivent and a few donors, Marge and Wendy shopped the sales for new print flannel for the kids quilts. Much of the 4-ounce polyester batting for all the quilts is also purchased from a local surplus store. The fabric for the quilts comes almost totally from donations — Facebook, yard sales and simply word of mouth seems to keep the donations flowing from church, family and friends. Throughout the year, there are dedicated people who make it their mission to keep their eye out for, and donate, gently used or new bed sheets for the quilt backs.

These women are busy and they love it. When asked why she likes being part of this ministry, Helen said that part of it was knowing what a difference these quilts make in the lives of the recipients, and part of it made her feel good to ease someone's burdens.

(See BUSY, Page 10)

BUSY

(Continued from Page 9)

One year Lutheran World Relief forwarded a picture and letter from a child, who gushed about how she looks forward to getting a new quilt after she wears one out. It brought the quilters tears of joy.

Normally, in late October, all of the quilts are blessed in worship, before the quilts are boxed and shipped to the New Windsor Distribution Center. They are draped over the backs of the pews. As we pray over these quilts, everyone touches one. Being the “Year of COVID,” we could not do it that way. This year, a number

of quilts were piled in the sanctuary to represent all of them. We raised our hands out to them as we prayed. It was sad to not have that physical connection, but we made do.

“As with any successful project, desire, willingness to learn and leadership are very important. Our leadership starts with long-time member, Nina Johnson. She is surely an inspiration to all of us with her many years of sewing experience. The rest of our success comes from the dedicated volunteers we have that commit their time and skills to provide love, warmth and comfort throughout the world,” Marge, a volunteer for the project, said. †

PRESENCE

(Continued from Page 7)

To promote better crop production, he encouraged experiments in improving crops and started regular meetings for the exchange of agricultural information.

He also made possible the purchase of modern farm implements, bought in bulk and sold at cost, and financed their purchase through a bank that he founded. After subsidizing young men to learn crafts in Strasbourg, he established factories for local industries,” the Encyclopedia reports.

Oberlin welcomed Calvinists and Roman Catholics to his communion services. His admiration of the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg was reflected in his sermons, which combined rationalism with mysticism.

His humanism was expressed in his en-

thusiastic welcome of the French Revolution, and he was honored by both revolutionary and imperial governments of France.

Oberlin’s name was given to a town and to Oberlin College in Ohio, as well as to the Oberlinhaus, a German center for treatment of the deaf and blind.

He died June 1, 1826, in France, the report states. †

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Youth Gathering Update

THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Tri-annual ELCA Youth Gathering organizers have released updated information on the event, which has been impacted by COVID-19. The tentative dates are July 24-28, 2022, in Minneapolis. The Gathering is a massive organization of Lutheran youth where tens of thousands of participants worship, enjoy fellowship and complete charity projects.

“Gathering leadership continues to monitor the COVID-19 pandemic and how it may impact the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering, MYLE & the tAble. Many of those impacts remain unknown this far in advance of the event dates,” organizers said in a statement. “We plan to provide an update on the Gathering’s viability later this summer (before registration opens) and again in late November/early December. We will continue sharing updates through Gathering communication as we learn more about the projected state of the virus in July 2022. Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work through these details with an ever-changing virus.” †

BEFORE you GO

Joy and fear. Relief and anxiety.

Seldom do these feelings share the same moment. Recently I received my second dose of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine and experienced the gambit of emotions.

I felt excitement that I was on my way to seeing friends and relatives again with less fear. Eating at restaurants and enjoying more aspects of society are on the horizon.

But I am not numb to fears about the vaccine. How long will immunity last? How effective are they? How sick will I get after the shots?

On the latter point, I felt sick for about a day.

Some people broke down into tears when they were vaccinated, because they have given up so much during the last year. It's an odd scene I'd never thought I'd witness in my lifetime.

I was vaccinated at a clinic staffed mostly by volunteers. This may be a global problem, but local people are crucial to the solution.

Those volunteers have seen people filled with all sorts of emotions come for a vaccine. Hope is likely the greatest one of all. †

-- Rick Kazmer

BISHOP 3

(Continued from Page 6)

We got to assembly 2014 and we started with the nominating ballot. The first ballot for bishop is a write-in. Any ELCA pastor in good standing can be nominated for bishop. When the results came back, I was in seventh place. Seven is a number of completion and perfection in the Bible. Somewhere deep inside of me I knew that was my sign. If I had been in fourth, sixth or 14th I think I would have been out of there. But I knew at that moment that the seventh place was showing me that I was supposed to stay in. It may sound crazy, but it is what happened. I began to sweat. I was completely overwhelmed and didn't know what to do. I was sitting at our Assembly table with my head in my hands praying and asking God what I was supposed to do. While I was doing that, three people came up to me and said, "I know this may sound crazy, but I really think you need to keep your name in." I couldn't help but think that I told Jesus that I was taking my name out unless I got a sign and people told me that I didn't need to take my name out. You may hear all of that and think it was just a coincidence. But, I can say that in spite of all I planned to do, I was overcome with this feeling that I was not supposed to take my name out. I had a deep, down-in-my-bones certainty that I was supposed to stay open to this. I just didn't want to stay open to it. Looking back I think I was scared of the enormity of what the call meant.

I stepped out to call my wife and tell her what was going on. She talked me down from a rather excited place. We agreed that if I was supposed to be in the running, then that was what I needed to do. She reminded me that God has brought us this far and God wasn't going to let us go. She didn't want me to be the bishop, but she reminded me that we always tried to trust where God was leading us. So, I left my name in. When they tallied all the withdrawals, I went from seventh to third place. On Saturday

after the question-and-answer period, I moved into first place and was later called to serve as Bishop of the Allegheny Synod.

Though I wasn't expecting it or looking for it, I have been blessed by the experience of serving with you and walking with the Allegheny Synod these last seven years. I have been amazed at the way God works through our congregations and the way the Holy Spirit continues to move through God's people here in the heart of Pennsylvania. I am telling you this to say that whether we are online or in-person, this call is in God's hands. The process of how we call the bishop has not changed. It is just that the medium through which we conduct the election is different this year. But we need to remember that no matter what, God will raise up and call the person who is supposed to serve in this position. God will get us who we need for what is before us.

For me, having this election and assembly online is just one more way for God to work. God's will shall be done, no matter what medium we use to accomplish it. Before the assembly in 2013-14, I would have said there was no way I would serve in this office. But God did something unexpected and called me to this service. If God can do that, God can easily bring forth that person we need through Zoom, e-ballot and the internet.

To all our friends who are voting members, I invite you to pray. I invite you to ask God to keep you open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pray that God will make it clear who our next shepherd of the Allegheny Synod is to be.

To all our friends who are members of the Allegheny Synod, but who won't be voting in this election, I invite you to pray the same thing.

May God be with you. May we all prayerfully wait to see what God is going to do among us. We look forward to seeing who God will raise up for us.

In Christ, Bishop Michael †

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