

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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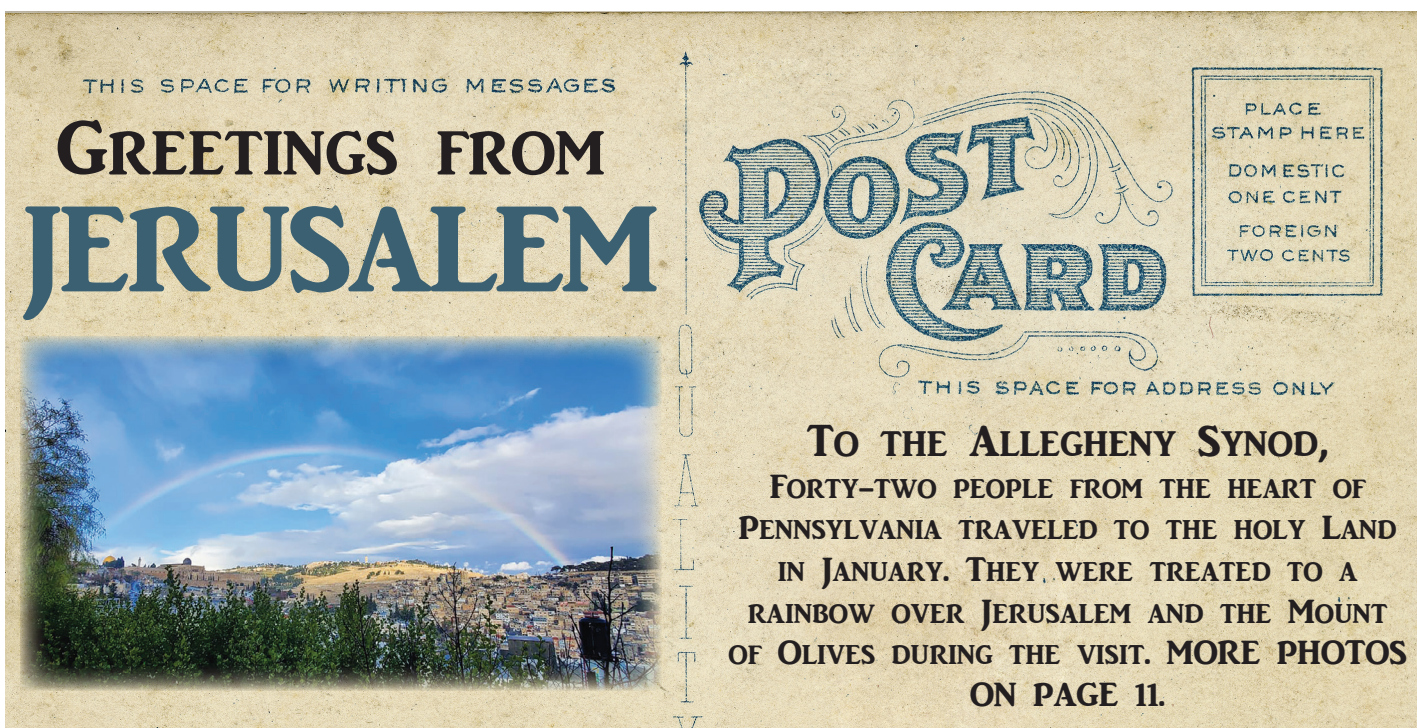
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## SEASONAL SERMONS

*Pastors Talk About Key Easter Messages*

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

There are many crucial incidents that are important to note during the Easter season. In January 42 Allegheny Synod faithful traveled to Jerusalem to visit the sites of many of Christianity's key moments.

(See MESSAGE, Page 12)

## Schmitt Reflects on Her Journey, and Platz's Influence on it

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

*(Editor's note: This is part of a year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of Pastor Elizabeth Platz's ordination in 1970.)*

Pastor Paula Schmitt didn't see a lot of female pastors until she entered seminary.

Schmitt, ordained in 2008, also serves as Bishop Michael Rhyne's assistant.

"Of course, when I entered seminary, I was surrounded by other women who

felt this same call to ministry and by then women had been serving as pastors for 30 years. And while that sounds like a long time, for a church that just turned 500 years old, it's just a blink. The obstacles still exist — even 50 years later."

(See REFLECT, Page 15)

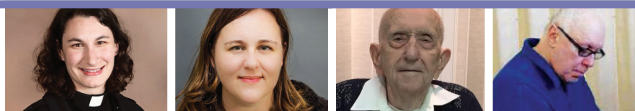
FIFTY YEARS LATER



Celebrating Female Pastors



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



**GOOD NEWS** about these folks is **INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE  
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**ALLEGHENY SYNOD OF THE ELCA**

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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  
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Spirit increases the followers of Jesus Christ.

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# A Message for the Lenten Season

Dear Friends in Christ,

The season of Lent begins with the Ash Wednesday (Feb. 26) service where we hear the Invitation to Lent:

“Friends in Christ, today with the whole church we enter the time of remembering Jesus’ Passover from death to life, and our life in Christ is renewed. We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and for God’s mercy. We are created to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. But our sinful rebellion separates us from God, our neighbors and creation, so that we do not enjoy the life our creator intended. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to a discipline that contends against evil and resists whatever leads us away from love of God and neighbor. I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent — self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love — strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these 40 days to the great Three Days of Jesus’ death and resurrection.”

Lent is a holy time. It is a unique time in the life of the church because we are invited to slow down. We are invited to take stock of our hearts and our lives. There is so much busyness in this world. During Lent we take a serious look at ourselves.

The reality is that when we stop to examine our lives (unless we are greater than the greatest of the saints) we will see that we fall short, not just of who God wants us to be, but who we want to be as children of God. We fall short because sin and temptation continually pull at us.

If that sounds like your situation, do not despair. You, and I, are not alone. St. Paul talks in Romans chapter 7 about how he wanted to do what was right. He talked about the struggle between his inner will and what he ended up doing. St. Paul writes: “For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells

in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:22 – 25)

St. Paul is speaking to the truth of our human condition. We want to follow God, we want to be the people that God and our Lord Jesus call us to be. However, we fall short time and time again. If left to his own (if we are left to our own) St. Paul would be lost. As he says in the passage, “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

The answer for St. Paul is Jesus Christ. The answer for you and for I is Jesus Christ. During Lent we are invited to look into the mirror and see ourselves and our sin. We are given this season of self-examination so that we can come face-to-face with the truth that on our own we cannot fix or save ourselves. But thanks be to God, because we are not called to save ourselves.

The good news of Lent is that though we are called to see our own shortcomings, we have a savior who walks with us now and always. Jesus tells us in the last verse of Matthew that, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus is promising that he walks with us and will never let us go. That means that as we struggle with sin and our own shortcomings, Jesus is in the battle with us.

Jesus has sent the power of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. If we look at our hearts and look at our lives and see where we still fall short, we are invited to remember that the struggle is not ours alone. This should compel us and drive us to call on Jesus and pray that he will walk with us and deliver us from those sins and temptations that plague our lives. You, me and St. Paul will never do it on our own. But Christ does not leave us on our own. I doubt my own power to defeat sin, death and the devil. But our savior Jesus has already subdued and thrown down the power of evil.

(See LENT, Page 3)



Lent

(Continued from Page 2)

The best thing we can do is turn to our Lord and pray that he will lead and guide us on this journey in life.

My word to you is that Christ is active and moving in your life. But that doesn’t mean that everything is going to be perfect. Being a Christian doesn’t mean that all your problems immediately go away. If following God meant that you would have a perfect life, Jesus, who is the living God, would not have been crucified.

We don’t have a God who snaps his fingers and makes everything wonderful. We have a God who takes our lives so seriously that he became flesh and lived among us.

He came into this world and stands with us in our suffering and promises that he will not leave, no matter how bad it gets.

At the same time, that God in Jesus Christ is working on us and in us to form us into the people who God wants us to be.

God jumps into the dirt of this world and gets in the mud where we live. Jesus promises that no matter what, he will never leave us, and Jesus will get us through to the other side.

This leads me to another thought about where we are in the life of our synod.

As I have traveled throughout the Allegheny Synod since I made the announcement that I will not seek reelection, I have noticed we are anxious and worried and at times afraid about what the future will bring. This time of transition has made us feel unsettled. I understand. I feel somewhat unsettled, too, because I don’t know what Jesus will call me to next. I do know that whatever it is, Jesus will walk with me and guide me. I believe, with all my heart, that is true for the Allegheny Synod, too.

While we don’t know who the next bishop will be, we do know that through the power and promise of the Holy Spirit, that person will be empowered to lead and guide us to whatever is next for us.

And, as hard as it is to sometimes believe, Jesus already knows who the next bishop will be and is preparing that person to be the leader you need for the next term.

I have been asked, why I am stepping away if this is such a wonderful place to be? It is a wonderful place to be and thank God for the

opportunity to be in ministry with you. You, the people of the Allegheny Synod, continue to amaze me with how you care for each other and you care for God’s people. I have been so blessed to journey with you.

But when I listen to God’s call on my life I know that it is time for me to go in a new direction. When I look at my children and see how important they are to me and realize how much I have missed in the last six years of their growing up, I know that it is time for me to step into a new chapter. It is not for lack of love for you that I step away. But that is where God is calling me.

I hope you know that Jesus has this transition in his hands. Jesus already knows who the next Bishop will be. I hope you will join me in praying that God will open our hearts to see who that person is. We may be surprised by who God calls.

But understand that our Lord Jesus will faithfully lift up our next Bishop. I pray you can join me in trusting him as we move forward.

In Christ,  
Bishop Michael †

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# Holliday Fulfilling Call She Heard as Child

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Regina Holliday felt a call to be a pastor as a young child.

But she said that she knew then that there were challenges for women to become ordained.

Pastor Elizabeth Platz, the first Lutheran Church in America female pastor, was ordained in 1970.

As a child, Holliday, 47, said that she decided to focus her spiritual gifts elsewhere.

But God called again in 2017.

“When our pastor left Christ Lutheran for another call in 2017, I felt called to serve again and began the paperwork to begin that path,” Holliday, a member of Christ Lutheran Church in Grantsville, Maryland, said.

“I feel like God is nudging me when I am



## HEEDING THE CALL

*This is part of a series of features highlighting seminarians and their journey.*



Regina Holliday

supposed to do something. I have found that it is always better to act quickly on God’s nudges,” she said.

Holliday has two children, Freddie and Isaac, and a 4-year-old lab named Akira. In her spare time she enjoys reading, as it lets her mind wander, provides her with rest and feels it’s “good for the soul.” She is studying at the United Lutheran Seminary and is set to graduate in 2023.

She said that she has tried to serve God in all

of her jobs so far in life. She was a retail store manager for 16 years. She is also an artist and a public speaker with a focus on patient rights.

“When I manage stores, I serve my customers and try my best to show them kindness,” she said. “When I give speeches, I speak about prayer and being on a mission. When I paint, I tell folks I began drawing as a child while listening to sermons.”

Now Holliday wants to be the one preparing and delivering messages on Sundays.

She said she is looking forward to helping struggling congregations to better serve their communities.

“I serve on many boards so I know how hard it can be to get everyone working together. I am a bit concerned about that, but in Jesus all things are possible,” she said.

When she graduates, Holliday said that she’d like to be called to serve in the Allegheny Synod, however, she is open to go where God needs her to serve.

“The need is great and we are here to serve,” she said.

Her favorite Bible verse is 1 Corinthians 9:24.

It reads: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.” †

## Duncansville Man Recognized for Life in Church and Borough

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Pastor Jaime Olson reports that Evangelical Lutheran Church in Duncansville has been busy celebrating long-time members.

On Jan. 11 about 170 congregation members and guests celebrated Joseph S. Dell, who turned 100 years old. The birthday was celebrated with a banquet.

“Wes was a resident of Duncansville for most of his life,

married to his beloved Kate who is no longer by his side. Wes owned and operated Dell Hardware for many years and served in the military,” Olson wrote in an email.

Duncansville Borough also recognized Dell with a proclamation from Mayor Eric P. Fritz.

According to the proclamation, Dell was born in Roaring Spring on Jan. 11, 1920. His family moved to Duncansville in 1928.

Dell was raised and educated in the borough. He married Katherine Detrick in 1942. She died in 2009 after 67 years of marriage.

Dell was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942 and served in Europe as a mechanic. He operated Dell’s Hardware Store in Duncansville for 35 years.

“Today, Mr. Dell, should be honored for these 100 years on this earth,” the proclamation reads. †



Joseph Wes Dell



## HOLIDAY WRAP-UP

YOUTH GATHERING  
2021 IN MINNESOTA

The next Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Youth Gathering will be held in 2021 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The gatherings are held every three years in a different city and include thousands of youth who join in fellowship and mission projects. The Lutheran Letter asked event organizers to provide an update on the next event. Here is some of what they had to share. More details will be published in subsequent issues.

**The next Gathering will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota from June 29-July 3, 2021. The Gathering also has two pre-events, MYLE (Multicultural Youth Leadership Event), which is for youth of color and those whose primary language is not English and the tAble, which is for youth living with a wide range of physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities, which will be held from June 26-June 29, 2021.**

## KEY DATES

- May 21: Gathering Volunteer Corps Applications open
- Sept. 21: Early bird registration opens

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Submitted photos

Allegheny Synod youth and congregation members were active in their churches and communities during the holiday season. Here are some highlights as the seasons change. Above, the youth presented "Color it Joyful" for their Christmas pageant at Faith Lutheran Church in Somerset. At bottom left, Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg took their Christmas pageant, "Nativity 2019", to the Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg for the holiday season. This photo was posted on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page on Dec. 22. "Thank you to all who worked so hard to make this happen." Was the message online. At bottom right, Grace Lutheran Church in Johnstown went caroling for the residents of the Lutheran Home at Johnstown during the holiday season.



# Synod Women to Meet in Duncansville

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

The Allegheny Synodical Women's Organization will meet in convention on April 18 at Evangelical Lutheran Church, Duncansville.

This gathering is open to all women and is a time of fellowship, worship and inspiration with sisters in Christ from throughout the Allegheny Synod.

This convention has been planned to focus on celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the ordination of women during the Opening Worship Service.

Pastor Elizabeth Platz was the first woman

to be ordained in the Lutheran church in 1970.

Organizers especially invite and encourage all women clergy to attend.

Organizers are happy to note that Marty Jo Irvin-Stellabotte, one of the synod's seminarians, will share her story of inspiration and commitment to the church in a keynote address.

The group will be electing a president, a vice president and two board members during the business session.

Congregational units are reminded to elect one voting member.

There will be only one workshop this year that will be available for nonvoting members

and guests during the business session.

Organizers are also planning a special fun activity during the mealtime.

Specific information about the convention will be published in the "The Courier", which is sent to each church, to women clergy and will be on the synod's website, [alleghenysynod.org](http://alleghenysynod.org).

If there are any questions, contact Carol McClure at 814-695-6904, or via email at [cm.mcclure@hotmail.com](mailto:cm.mcclure@hotmail.com).

Organizers ask that women try to make every effort to join sisters in Christ at the convention. †

## Call for Nominations for Holl Award

BY ALLEGHENY LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES

*"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." — Micah 6:8*

Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries (ALSM) is seeking nominations for The Rev. Walden M. Holl, DD Award. The Holl award is presented during the annual Allegheny Synod Assembly each June.

ALSM established The Rev. Walden M. Holl, DD Award in 2000 to recognize a rostered leader of the Allegheny Synod who has demonstrated by exceptional attitude and action the noble attributes of Micah 6:8 in support of social ministry, which were also exem-

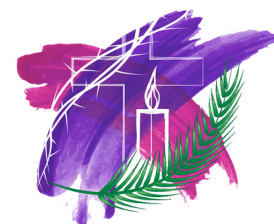
plified by the ministry of Dr. Holl.

If you would like to nominate someone, view the complete criteria and nomination form online at [www.alsm.org/about/](http://www.alsm.org/about/). Nominations are due by April 30 to ALSM's advancement office by mail to 998 Logan Blvd., Altoona, PA 16602, or email to [andrea.schurr@alsm.org](mailto:andrea.schurr@alsm.org).

Please contact the advancement office at 814-696-4516 if you have questions or need additional information. †

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE**  
Nominations are  
due by April 30.

Wishing you  
a reflective  
Lenten season and  
a Blessed Easter!



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## Remember in Prayer

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

### MARCH

#### Week 1:

Luthersburg-Rockton Parish: St. John, Luthersburg; and St. Peter, Rockton

**Week 2:** Bethany Lutheran, Altoona

**Week 3:** Zion

Lutheran, Clearville

**Week 4:** Curwensville

Area Lutheran

Ministry: Grace

Lutheran,

Curwensville; Olanta

Lutheran, Olanta; and

Salem, New Millport

### APRIL

#### Week 1:

First Lutheran, Altoona

**Week 2:** St. Luke, Rockwood

**Week 3:** St. David's Lutheran, Davidsville

#### Week 4:

St. Clairsville Parish:

Messiah, Bedford; and

St. Peter, Osterburg

## In God's Name



# 5ive QUESTIONS With Becca Ehrlich

## More on Becca

### *Becca Ehrlich's biography*

Before becoming a pastor, Ehrlich served in children, youth and young adult ministry positions in inner city Philadelphia and suburban Pennsylvania for 12 years. She was ordained on Oct. 12, 2012, to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament in the ELCA. She served her first call as solo pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Frewsburg, New York; her second call as co-pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Clarence Center, New York; and her third call as associate director of admissions at United Lutheran Seminary. She started her new call in January.

Ehrlich has served on the Upstate New York Synod Candidacy Committee, the Upstate New York Synod Council, the Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center (an outdoor ministry of the ELCA) board of directors and currently serves on the ELCA Spiritual Renewal Team. (which is why she is in the Allegheny Synod now) She holds a bachelor of arts degree in dance and dramatic arts criticism from Muhlenberg College in Allentown; a master of arts degree in theology and ministry from LaSalle University in Philadelphia; a master of divinity degree from The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia; and is currently a doctoral candidate working toward her doctor of ministry degree at United Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg and Philadelphia.

She is also a writer. She primarily writes about the intersection between the minimalism movement and the Christian faith. She has written for Luther Seminary's Center for Stewardship Leaders, Virginia Theological Seminary's Building Faith, the ELCA's BoldCafe and regularly writes on her blog, [www.christianminimalism.com](http://www.christianminimalism.com). She has recently written a three-part series on Christian minimalism that was published in January and can be read on the [LivingLutheran.org](http://LivingLutheran.org) website by searching for her name in the search bar. She is currently writing a book on Christian minimalism.

She has been married to her husband, Will Platnick, for over seven years. He is a systems engineer and is passionate about using technology as a way to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. They enjoy regularly exploring Philadelphia together and watching lots of movies.

Pastor Becca Ehrlich, originally from Albany, New York, now lives in Philadelphia and Altoona part-time while she serves as the Allegheny Synod's interim director of evangelical mission and assistant to the bishop. She took some time to talk about her career and calling with the The Lutheran Letter.

### 1. Can you describe your current role with the Allegheny Synod?

**ANSWER:** I am serving as interim director for evangelical mission and as assistant to the bishop, focusing on stewardship/mission support, mission and evangelism in the Allegheny Synod and spiritual renewal. I connect the Allegheny Synod and the ELCA (Evangelical Church in America) churchwide offices regarding these areas of ministry.

### 2. What are some of your goals?

**ANSWER:** Helping the congregations of the Allegheny Synod think through how they'd like to use the resources God has given them for ministry and mission, and how God is calling them to reach out to those in their communities.

### 3. What's your career path?

**ANSWER:** I was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the ELCA in 2012.

### 4. What are some of your favorite hobbies?

**ANSWER:** Watching movies, exploring cities/towns, playing the ukulele, blogging/writing about Christian minimalism ([www.christianminimalism.com](http://www.christianminimalism.com)).

### 5. What's your favorite Bible verse and what does it mean to you?

**ANSWER:** Jeremiah 29:11 — "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." This verse has reminded me in both the good times and the bad times of God's loving presence and guidance in our lives. †



Pastor Becca Ehrlich

# Eleventh Annual Ecumenical Concert is Planned at Grace Lutheran in State College

BY LAUREL SANDERS

Music and Arts Ministry Coordinator of  
Grace Lutheran Church in State College

At 7 p.m. on March 25 Grace Lutheran Church in State College will host the 11th annual Lenten ecumenical concert with a program entitled “Behold, How Good: Sounds of Unity”.

Preceded by Lenten piano prelude music at 6:40 p.m. — played by local Russian-born pianist Victoria Petrosky — the free program will include the Saint John of Chrysostom Kyrie by Sergei Rachmaninoff as well as two settings by William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons, two Renaissance-era composers who gave us some of the earliest Kyries (“Lord, Have Mercy”) in the English Language.

The main feature will be Bob Chilcott’s “A Little Jazz Mass” for choir and jazz combo, a departure from typical Lenten music that joyfully anticipates and celebrates God’s boundless love and mercy. A reading of Psalm 133 will be followed by Michael John Trotta’s musical setting titled “Behold, How Good.” The Bells of Grace hand bell choir, led by Anna Carol Buffington, will also ring several selections and attendees will have an opportunity to sing several congregational hymns based on the theme of unity. The concert is expected to last approximately one hour. The program will also highlight an original work entitled “The Window: A Kyrie for Notre Dame” by Laurel Sanders, who has directed the ecumenical choir since its inception. “The Window” refers to the great Rose Window at Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, which was installed between 1250 and 1260.

Based on an original three-stanza Haiku poem and scored for choir, tubular bells, hand bells, cello and two soloists, the piece recalls the horrific fire at Notre Dame on April 15, 2019, reflecting on its nearly 800-year history and providing a message of hope for the future.

The work was composed as an expression



Submitted photo

**The choir performs during a past performance at Grace Lutheran Church in State College.**

of unity, recalling when Parisians responded to American tragedies on Sept. 11, 2001, by sounding Notre Dame’s ancient bells across the city to express Parisians’ sorrow amid our nation’s suffering. Each year during Lent the choir, which is made up of singers of diverse faith backgrounds and musical skills, rehearses for six weeks with several goals: to walk the journey of faith together; to make new acquaintances and friendships; and to offer a high-quality concert that explores and shares elements of Christ’s Passion and tenets of our Christian faith. During its 11-year history, the programs have included an original Passion play; a performance of John Stainer’s “The Crucifixion”; a concert of Spirituals; a program based on music of the Creed and on the story of Christ’s life as told through the music of the church year; an art and music event that featured icons by local icon painter Mary Kay LaPlante; and, most re-

cently, Michael John Trotta’s “Seven Last Words” with choir and orchestra. In 2017 the project was awarded a national grant from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, highlighting ways various denominations have contributed to the musical heritage we share across denominations and cultures in our worship traditions. This focus on unity and community continues. The project is an opportunity to learn, sing, grow, use and celebrate our God-given talents for God’s glory; the sum of what we each contribute is far greater than any of us can offer alone. The concert involves approximately 70 musicians, including singers from 12-15 churches of all denominations and backgrounds within the greater Centre County region. Admission is free; free-will offerings are welcome to help defray costs. For details, contact Laurel Sanders at [lsanders@glcpa.org](mailto:lsanders@glcpa.org) or call 814-238-2478. †



# Award-Winning Author, Norris, to Speak at Retreat

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Nothing can dour a merry moment among friends like discussion on politics, the economy and societal issues.

That's part of the reason Allegheny Synod pastors Susan Winger and Julia Sprenkle have invited award-winning poet and author Kathleen Norris to lead a women's retreat on April 24-26 at Camp Sequanota near Jennerstown.

The two pastors have led the retreats for five years.

We are "excited to have an outside person to be our spiritual

guide around this difficult topic," Winger said in an email describing the event.

Norris, who wrote her first book of poems in 1971, has also spent time as an associate in a Benedictine monastery in North Dakota. Her award-winning books include "The Cloister Walk" and "Acedia & Me: A marriage, Monks, and a Writer's Life."

Her works are about candid topics, including her monastic experience, celibacy, loneliness and monogamy.

"Her book 'Amazing Grace' continues her theme that the spir-

itual world is rooted in the chaos of daily life," according to her biography. In that book she delves into grace, repentance, dogma and faith.

She was widowed in 2003 and divides her time between North Dakota and Hawaii.

Winger said she will bring a unique perspective to the synod, particularly in polarized political times.

"In our proposal to Ms. Norris we wrote: 'Engaging one another in civil discourse in these days and times is fraught with difficulty and even pain. Sitting with those with

whom we do not agree is complicated. Honing the fine art of speaking and listening, and agreeing or disagreeing with respect and kindness is challenging.' Thus, we are asking her to help us consider the skill both in a retreat setting and in a public option," she said in the email.

Norris has also been invited to do a public presentation at 3:30 p.m. on April 26 at St. David's Lutheran Church in Davidsville, where conversation can be extended to the synod and neighbors.

For more information, call the synod office at 814-942-1042. †

## Joyous Generosity': Zion's Congregation Given \$30K for Good Works

BY PASTOR DAVID BOWMAN

Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg

For weeks the people of Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg were teased about a surprise that was coming their way.

The secret was closely guarded by the staff and council members who worked to put the plan in place. When the big reveal finally came on Jan. 11-12, the congregation members were itching with anticipation.

The unveiling came during the sermon. Each family was asked to come forward to select an envelope from a basket. Inside each envelope was a check for \$100, \$250 or \$500,



Submitted photo

**Zion Pastor David Bowman hands out envelopes with funding that was sent into the community for "Joyous Generosity."**

with a blank on the "Pay to the order of" line.

The challenge for those present that day was simple: fill the blank.

They were to pray and

discern how to turn this gift of money into ministry. Tying into the day's celebration of Epiphany, they were to spread the light of Jesus Christ in the commu-

nity using these financial resources.

Zion's council named the project "Joyous Generosity." Collectively, the congregation distributed \$30,450 for the people to give away. Funding for the Joyous Generosity campaign came from a variety of resources, including a large donation from an Altoona congregation that had closed years ago. They had asked that the gift be used for ministry within the community.

While members of the congregation were surprised at this gift and responsibility, it is not the first time Lutheran churches commissioned their people to go into the world with cash in hand to do

ministry. An August 2018 article in Living Lutheran highlighted Preston Meadows Lutheran Church in Plano, Texas, which gave away \$125,000. Then, in September 2019, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church outside of Cincinnati did the same with \$60,000.

The people of Zion had until Feb. 15 to figure out how to spread the light of Jesus Christ with their money.

That weekend members were invited to share their experience with the congregation and how this project of Joyous Generosity impacted their lives of faith.

(Editor's note: Watch for an update on this project in an upcoming edition of *The Lutheran Letter*.) †

# AN ABIDING PRESENCE

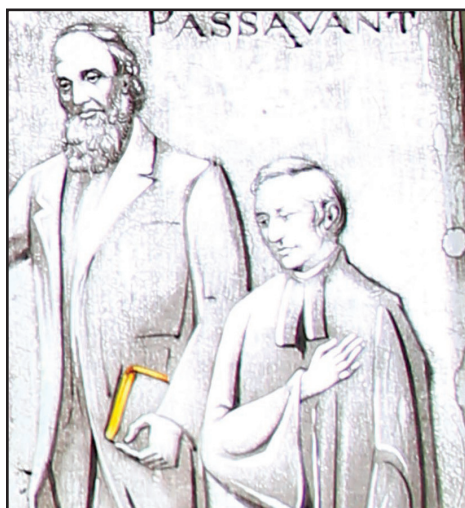
## *Theodore Fliedner was Crucial in Deaconess Movement*

*(Editor's note: This is part of an ongoing feature about the people represented on stained-glass windows in the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg Seminary. The information for this feature was gathered from The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and from numerous online references.)*

A Lutheran leader born at the start of a new century helped milestone moments in the church come to pass centuries later, including work on the Deaconess Movement.

Theodore Fliedner was born in 1800 in Eppstein, Germany. He was ordained as a pastor in 1822 at a small parish in Kaiserswerth.

He soon made an impact by starting a ministry at the Dusseldorf Pris-



Staff photo by Courtney Kazmer  
**Theodore Fliedner, at right, shares a window at the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg with William Passavant. Both men were instrumental in the Deaconess Movement.**

on.

His work led to more prisons starting ministry programs and appointing chaplains.

It was when he encountered Mora-

vian deaconesses that he thought the practice should be revived.

In 1836 he opened a deaconess training center in Kaiserswerth. It's where Florence Nightingale trained to be a nurse in 1850.

Other institutions followed in Paris, Berlin and Jerusalem, among other places. By the mid-20th century there were more than 35,000 deaconesses working at schools, hospitals and prisons worldwide. Fliedner shares a window at the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg with William A. Passavant, who brought the deaconess movement to America in 1849. The movement in America started with seven German deaconesses serving in a Philadelphia hospital. It has grown within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, according to the ELCA.

Today, "deaconesses are con-

secrated church leaders who have earned master's degrees in theology, religion or related courses. While ordained ministers are called to Word and sacrament ministries, deaconesses are called to Word and service ministries," according to the ELCA.

"The deaconess community is the oldest example of women serving in the ELCA. It was started as an official ministry of the church in 1895 by the General Synod, an early predecessor of the ELCA. The ELCA formed in 1987 when three of the largest U.S. Lutheran churches merged."

Women at first served as social workers, nurses and administrators.

Now the deaconesses are also professors, chaplains and spiritual directors. Fliedner helped to get the movement started in Europe more than a century ago.

He died in 1864. †

## Trinity Players Preparing for Annual Comedy Performances

BY CAROL BARNICK

Trinity Lutheran Church in Jennerstown

The Trinity Players, from Laurel Trinity Lutheran Church in Jennerstown, announce comedy performances of "You Can't Take it with You."

Written by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman, the play gives the audience a look at The Sycamores. At first, they seem mad, but it is not long before we realize that if they are mad, the rest of the world is madder yet. In contrast to these delightful people are the unhappy Kirbys. The plot shows how Tony, attractive young son of the Kirbys, falls in love with Alice Sycamore and brings his parents to dine at the

Sycamore home on the wrong evening.

The shock sustained by the Kirbys, who are invited to eat cheap food, shows Alice that marriage with Tony is out of the question. The Sycamores, however, though sympathetic to Alice, find it hard to realize her point of view. In the meantime, Tony, who knows the Sycamores are right and his own people wrong, will not give her up. In the end Mr. Kirby is converted to the happy madness of the Sycamores, particularly since he happens in during a visit by an ex-grand duchess, earning her living as a waitress. No mention has yet been made of the strange activities of certain members of the household engaged in the manufacture of fireworks; nor of the printing

press set up in the parlor; nor of Rheba the maid and her friend Donald; nor of Grandpa's interview with the tax collector when he tells him he doesn't believe in the income tax.

Performances are set for: 7 p.m. May 1; 7 p.m. May 2; and 2 p.m. May 3. All performances will be held at The Mountain Playhouse, south of the church along Route 985.

Cast members are Betsy Kaufman, Jodie Jarosyk, Nancy Wojnarowski, Deron Koontz, Bill Blough, Gary Ziegler, Sam Knupp, Tim McQuaide, Denise Foster, Joe Kaufman, Pastor Will Foster, Keith Barnick, Joyce Walker, Bruce Horner, Wilma Horner, Judy Fyock and Carol Barnick. †



# POST CARD

CORRESPONDENCE

ADDRESS



*Watch for more from the Holy Land in the next issue.*



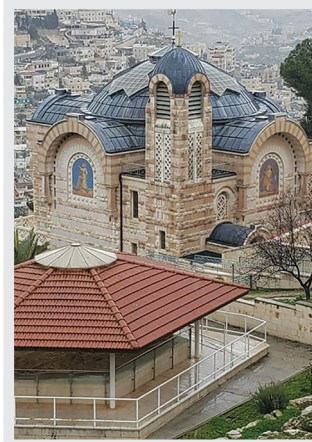
Above, The Garden of Gethsemane has olive trees that are over 2,000 years old. These larger trees would have been in the garden on the night Jesus was betrayed. The Church of All Nations is over the rock pavement where it is believed Jesus prayed that the cup pass from him.

## IMAGES FROM THE HOLY LAND

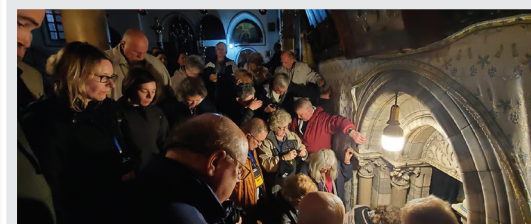
These photos were posted on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page by members of the group of 42 people who traveled to Jerusalem in January.



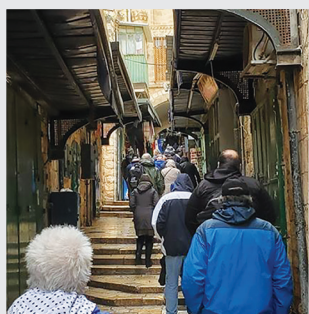
Above and at left, The Via Dolorosa, The Way of Sorrows, is the path Jesus took through the city of Jerusalem to Golgotha. Starting at the site of the Antonia Fortress where Jesus was beaten, mocked and condemned by Pontius Pilate, it moves through the city showing where Jesus falls, met his mother and where Simon of Cyrene took up the cross.



The Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu marks the place where Peter denied Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. This is where Jesus was tried and condemned by the Sanhedrin and imprisoned while waiting to be taken to Pilate.



Second photo above, the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is the oldest active church in the Holy Land with regular services starting in the fourth century. Immediately above, The Western Wall, or the Wailing Wall, was part of the retaining wall around Herod the Great's temple, which is the temple where Jesus taught.





# Message

(Continued from Page 1)

The photos they sent back include ones of the Mount of Olives, of the path that Jesus took to the Crucifixion and of numerous other historic sites.

Those places and the events that transpired there will be included in sermons around the synod this season.

For Pastor David Wright, of St. Clairsville Lutheran Parish, the importance of women during the time of the resurrection needs to be remembered.

“One of the things that I often point out on Easter is that ALL of the Gospels agree that the first to receive the news of the resurrection were the women and that women were the first evangelists — the first to spread the news of the resurrection,” Wright wrote in an email describing what he plans to focus on during his sermon this year.

“In the history of the Church, women have often not been given the credit they should receive for the importance of the roles they have always played.”

Wright noted key women in the history of the church, including Mary Magdalene.

“I think it’s significant that God chose the women to be the first recipients of the news of the resurrection,” he said.

At St. Stephen Lutheran Church in McAlevy’s Fort, Pastor Evelyn Wald plans to focus on Biblical journeys during Lent.

Those include Adam and Eve being banned from the Garden of Eden; Abraham and Sarah wandering about; Moses leading the Israelites out of slavery; and Jesus in the wilderness.

Easter scriptures include messages on the resurrection, including the women and disciples at the empty tomb.

“My emphasis for the Easter season will be about exploring our own personal encounters with the Risen Lord. We’ll be looking at the stories of Thomas, road to Emmaus, etc. My hope would be for the congregation members to gain a deeper understanding of a resurrected Jesus in their lives and gain a greater awareness of future encounters with Christ as they continue their faith journeys,” Wald said in an email. †



## Behold, How Good: Sounds of Unity

featuring Bob Chilcott’s *Little Jazz Mass*

- Free admission -

*features an Ecumenical Choir from the Centre Region  
with cello; tubular bells; jazz trio; hand bells*

*Laurel Sanders, Director*

*and The Bells of Grace: Anna Carol Buffington, Director*

## Wednesday, March 25, 2020

**5:15** Community fellowship meal

**6:40** Prelude music: Victoria Petrosky, piano

**7:00** Concert (approximately one hour)

### Program:

*4 Kyries (Rachmaninoff, Byrd, Gibbons, Sanders)*

*A Little Jazz Mass (Bob Chilcott)*

*Behold, How Good (Michael John Trotta)*

*and selections played by The Bells of Grace*

***freewill collection helps defray event costs***

**Grace Lutheran Church**

205 South Garner Street

State College, PA 16801



(814) 238-2478

[www.glcpa.org](http://www.glcpa.org)



# Bishop Transition Committee Update

*(Editor's note: The Allegheny Synod will be electing a new bishop during the annual assembly in June. This is part of regular updates on the process.)*

**BY CASEY COLLEDGE**

Bishop Transition Task Force  
Chairperson

The Bishop's Transition Committee met at the beginning of February to review surveys that were sent in from congregational councils and rostered leaders.

The survey, which was sent out in mid-January, asked councils and rostered leaders to rate the synod in key areas.

We would like to encourage any congregational council and/or rostered leaders who haven't submitted their surveys to send them in.

The more responses we have, the better our analysis will be. Please send your completed surveys to the synod office at 701 Quail Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602, or email them to ccolledge750@gmail.com.

The transition committee will provide more information about the survey outcomes in the May/June edition of The Lutheran Letter.

In the meantime, there are topics that we would like to provide further information on as we prepare for the synod assembly and the bishop's election:

1. As we prepare for the up-

coming bishop's election, the committee encourages you to be in prayer from now until the assembly. With the Lenten season fast approaching, we have worked with Bishop Michael Rhyne to form prayer petitions for each Sunday in Lent. These prayer petitions are listed on Page 15 for your convenience. We will also be sending out a letter along with these prayer petitions. We ask rostered leaders to include these in their "Prayers of the People" each Sunday during Lent as well.

2. We wanted to make sure that congregations understand the synod constitutional provisions with regard to the number of voting members that each congregation can send to assembly:

- Constitutional provisions 5.01.f, †S7.21., †S6.04. & †S6.04.01. all help to define the rules and guidelines for selecting voting members.

- A minimum of one lay member elected by each congregation with fewer than 175 baptized members.

- A minimum of two lay members elected by each congregation with 175 or more baptized members.

- The goal for synod assembly members is that:

- Ten percent of the assembly be persons of color, or whose primary language is other than English.

- Ten percent of the assembly be youth or young adults (youth

less than age 18, young adults aged 18-30)

The synod council shall seek to ensure that:

- At least 45% of the lay members of the assembly are women.

- At least 45 % of the lay members of the assembly are men.

- At least 60% of the assembly be laypersons.

Continuing Resolution 5.01. C00. defines the term "persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English," shall be understood to mean African American, Black, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, American Indian and Alaska Native people.

This definition, however, shall not be understood as limiting this church's commitment to inclusive participation in its life and work.

What this means is that the number of voting members based on the size of your congregation is just the minimum you can select to come to assembly. If your congregation is able to send a youth or young adult voting member, this would be an additional voting member that you could bring from your congregation.

We want to make sure that congregations understand that the constitution is saying the minimum number, not the maximum number, of voting members.

If you have any questions with regard to your congregation in particular, contact synod secretary David Finney (synodsec814@gmail.com) for clarification. We hope this information helps you when selecting the number of voting members your congregation would like to send to assembly.

3. We want to encourage all voting members and rostered leaders to attend their conference's Spring Caucus Meetings. One member of the transition committee will be attending each of the meetings to share information about the Ecclesiastical ballot and to help answer any questions that voting members have with the regard to the election process. The meeting dates are as follows. All meetings are set for 7 p.m. Meeting locations are still tentative.

- April 23 – Nittany Conference

- April 28 – Bedford

- April 29 – Laurel Highlands

- May 5 – Johnstown

- May 6 – Blair/Huntingdon

- May 14 – Clearfield

I would like to personally thank my fellow committee members for their time and willingness to serve on this committee. The committee members are Donna Lucas, Sally Williams, Gary McGovern, Jim Lakso, synod secretary David Finney, synod Vice President Gary Gable and our consultant, Pastor Judy Simonson. †

# Casebeer Musician Still Learning After Lifetime of Music

*(Editor's note: This article was originally published in the Daily American and is being reprinted here with permission.)*

JUDY D.J. ELLICH

judy@dailymmerican.com

## Christ Casebeer Musician Still Learning Amidst a Lifetime of Music

Richard Kingera lives for his music.

He grew up in Boswell, went to North Star and then graduated from Edinboro University near Erie in 1977. He worked two years and taught at Bishop Carroll in Ebensburg, and then in 1979 he became the band director in Rockwood Area School District. He retired in 2013.

He enjoyed working with the students, grades 5 to 12, while there. He was known affectionately as "K" by them. He was delighted to see them flock to his music room and overflow into the hallway during their recesses because they wanted to learn and play music.

There was no formal classes in music in the lower grades, which is why these children gave up their recess to learn from "K."

He is proud that during his last 12 years at Rockwood he had a jazz band.

He always shared with them something he lives by: "If you get involved in this music thing you have to love the journey, because when you step back, you spend more time practicing and working on your craft than you actually ever do playing for an audience."

He impressed on his students the need to work with their craft daily, noting that it is immeasurable how much time is needed in honing ability.

While teaching at Rockwood, he was working as choir director at St. Anthony Catholic Church in Johnstown. In 1991 he went to the Christ Casebeer Lutheran Church in Somerset in a similar role. He is still there.

Meanwhile, he is playing with a five-piece group named Candle in the Wind, basically "a wedding band" that covers jazz, blues, rock and more.



Submitted photo

**Richard Kingera is the choir director at Christ Casebeer Lutheran Church in Somerset.**

"Back in the day it was really nothing for us that we were playing three nights a week," the Boswell resident said. He still plays in that band.

"This was going on week after week, month after year," he said.

But he never had the time to do "heavy-duty practicing." Or, in a musician's vernacular, "going in the shed."

And time kept marching on, he said.

About three days after he retired, his good friend, Dean Shumaker, who is now deceased, called him up and said that he should spend some time on his own music, now that his teaching was completed.

Kingera listened to his guitar-playing friend.

He thought about his past dreams of attending a top-notch music college.

Later that year, Larry LaVigne, also retired from Rockwood, called Kingera and said he was going to Florida. He asked him to take his piano seat in the decades-enduring Doc's Boys (band). He obliged his friend.

Then he started a duo with Bob Bretz called Deja Vu. He plays keyboard, Bretz, the guitar. Bretz's expertise with the guitar is well-known among musicians in the region, Kingera said. They play in Bedford and Ligonier, to name a few places.

"I say I've had a charmed life," he said.

But he still had an urge to learn more. It was an urging that he had early in life.

"One of these days I'm going to Berklee (College of Music) in Boston, Massachusetts," he had told his future wife, Wanda, just after they finished college.

The couple share the love of teaching and the love of music and have done so since they met in college. She taught music in Conemaugh Township.

Life got in the way of that dream, but it never died, he said.

Berklee College of Music and Berklee College online has professors known for their expertise in jazz and modern American music. He called and spoke with the professors there. He applied and he was admitted and began his online classes in January, three courses, 12 weeks long.

He signed on and after an arduous but fulfilling journey through September, he earned a professional certificate in "Keyboard Skills" from Berklee.

His wife did all the technical work needed on the computer and he concentrated on playing music.

He went to another level.

"The classes taught the intellectual part of this stuff. Classes are over and they sent me my certificate and that I guess means something. Now the journey continues. I got a roadmap," Kingera said.

Playing never stops, Kingera said, as he moved his hands across the piano keys during an interview with a Daily American reporter.

"I just want to play better," he said. "I've been in the shed since September. Now the work begins."

He improves each time he sits in front of a keyboard, he said.

"I could play 12 hours a day for 10 years and at the end there will be thousands who play better than me," Kingera said.

"I'm just proud I keep doing it." †



## Bishop Transition Prayer Petitions

### Prayer Petitions

#### First Sunday in Lent – March 1, 2020

Lord Jesus, you were tempted by Satan in the wilderness and the evil one was no match for you. You are the way, the truth, the power and the light. As we prepare to call our next bishop, assure us that you stand with us. Because you know who our next bishop will be, do not let fear overtake our hearts. Remind us of the victory we have in you. Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

#### Second Sunday in Lent – March 8, 2020

Lord Jesus, you are the light that shines in the darkness. You give us new life. As we prepare to call our next bishop, we pray that you will enlighten our hearts. Be with those who will cast ballots at the assembly. Let them be guided by your Holy Spirit. Show them, and all of us, who you would call to be our next shepherd. Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

#### Third Sunday in Lent – March 15, 2020

Lord Jesus, you sought out and called the Samaritan woman into your life. As we prepare to call our next bishop, we may not feel worthy to be part of this holy work, but you call us and make us worthy. Remind us Lord, that you are with us. You are leading and guiding us. Most of all Lord Jesus, raise up the person we need to be the next bishop of the Allegheny Synod. Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

#### Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 22, 2020

Lord Jesus, you cause the blind to see and the lame to walk. You are the Lord of healing and of life. As we prepare for the call of our next bishop, remind us again that you give us what we need. Give us faith to trust you will carry us through this process. When the time comes for us to gather in assembly, give us eyes to see and ears to hear so we

may fully follow your will in the call of our new bishop. Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

#### Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 29, 2020

Lord Jesus Christ, you called Lazarus out of death into life. As we prepare to call our next bishop, remind us nothing is impossible for you. Strengthen those prayerfully discerning if you are calling them to serve in the role of bishop. Remind us that as you surprised the friends of Lazarus with being raised that you may surprise us with whom you raise up to lead us. Help us to be open to your miraculous surprises. Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.

#### Palm Sunday – April 5, 2020

Lord Jesus Christ, you entered Jerusalem to songs of “Hosanna” on Sunday, and were greeted with cries of “Crucify Him” on Friday. Yet your love never wavered. Though we turned from you, you never turned from us. As we prepare for the call of our next bishop, remind us you are always with us. You stand with the Allegheny Synod and will lead us. We pray again for all those who are discerning the Holy Spirit’s call and ask that you will guide them and guide us in this time. Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.

#### Easter Sunday – April 12, 2020

Lord Jesus, we rejoice this day in the glory of your Resurrection. We thank you for the gift of your life and for your victory over sin, death and destruction. As we prepare for the call of our next bishop, fill us with your Spirit. Show us where you are leading. Let those you call to be open to this call show their best selves. Raise up and strengthen the person you would call as our next bishop. Help us to be open Lord to your amazing surprises. We lift this call of the next bishop of the Allegheny Synod to you, our Risen Lord. Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.

## Reflect

(Continued from Page 1)

On Nov. 21, 1970, Elizabeth Platz was ordained as the Lutheran Church in America’s first woman pastor. More than 10 years later Schmitt was considering following in her footsteps as a high school student in the late 1980s.

Ultimately, she didn’t end up attending seminary until 2000.

“I had been exposed to women in ministry because my home congregation had called a Deaconess,” she said. “But I had not seen a woman pastor.”

She said her pastor seemed neutral on the idea of her attending seminary.

“I believe he wanted to be encouraging, but recognized the difficult path for women in pastoral ministry,” Schmitt said, adding that the concept was still new to the church and female pastors were not always treated well.

Schmitt was not aware of Platz’s groundbreaking ordination years prior. Fortunately the call of the Holy Spirit proved hard to ignore.

Now Schmitt said that Platz’s perseverance provides courage and strength for women in the church, in any role.

“When I was growing up, I remember seeing the adult Sunday School class sitting with men on one side and women on the other. The teachers of the class were often men,” she said. “When a woman was raised up as a possible teacher, it took time for her to be accepted.” She said the same is still true for women in the church, though to a lesser degree.

“Pastor Platz made it possible for women who sensed the Holy Spirit’s movement in their life to step forward and accept the challenge with the same kind of courage she did.” †



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This is one of my favorite issues.

Good news and projects from throughout the Allegheny Synod are featured, including news about Joseph S. Dell, the 100-year-old from Duncansville. Go to Page 4 in case you missed it.

The photos from Jerusalem that were shared by the Allegheny Synod group who traveled there in January are interesting.

Olive trees that were witness to Jesus Christ are still standing.

Courtney and I always take time to note the witness trees at Gettysburg battlefield. Can you imagine touching a 2,000-year-old tree that was around during key events of the time of the crucifixion and resurrection?

Other ancient churches, pathways and scenes created an interesting photo spread this issue.

The group enjoyed a rainbow over the Holy Land, featured on Page 1.

Many of us may never travel to Jerusalem. Hopefully these photos provide a sense of what it’s like. Thanks to the group for sharing the photos. See you in the next edition.

— Rick Kazmer

## Stay Connected

Synod news is also online.

The Synod’s Facebook page is updated with events and video messages from Bishop Rhyne. Find the Synod at Allegheny Synod 8C. For Twitter users, follow the Synod using “AlleghenySynod.” Find videos from around the Synod on YouTube at Allegheny Synod, ELCA channel ([www.tinyurl.com/synodyoutube](http://www.tinyurl.com/synodyoutube)).





## In addition to paying interest, MIF Term Investments also pay it forward.



### Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis, Minnesota

Used an MIF loan to remodel the low-income apartments the church rents to Togolese refugees, thus making their new homes a whole lot homier.



The Mission Investment Fund offers a wide range of investments for individuals and congregations, including fixed- and adjustable-rate Term Investments with a choice of terms. What's more, when you invest with MIF, your investment finances loans to ELCA congregations like Christ the Redeemer. To learn more about our investments and loans, contact us at [mif.elca.org](http://mif.elca.org) or **877.886.3522**.



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