

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

Volume 18, Issue 2 • www.AlleghenySynod.org • Spring 2023

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Submitted photo

Patricia Savage has led Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries since 1996.

'IT HAS BEEN THE GREATEST HONOR OF MY LIFE'

Longtime Social Services Leader Retiring

STORY ON PAGE 5

Group Travels to D.C. to Tackle Homelessness

By **RICK KAZMER**
The Lutheran Letter Editor

A group of area residents traveled to D.C. earlier this year to raise awareness about homelessness.

It was part of a larger effort, the Homeless Remembrance Blanket Project.

As part of the event, blanket makers — knitting, crocheting or quilting — created a gift for a stranger experiencing homelessness. At the end of the evening, up to 600 quilts were delivered to Friendship Place, a D.C.-area shelter.

(See WARM, Page 4)



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

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

is published bi-monthly by the
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 in God's work and sharing the Gospel as the Holy Spirit increases the followers of Jesus Christ.

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Articles for the Letter should be about 300 words or less and include applicable website or contact information.

Images should be as high resolution as possible, ideally 300 ppi at 3x5 inches (900x1500 pixels.)

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Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Trusting God's Vision

A Message from Bishop Paula Schmitt

I quite often feel like a failure.

That might sound odd coming from me. But, it's the truth. I look over our Synod on a daily basis and see the needs we have, knowing that I alone can't fix them. I wish I could. I joke with colleagues about when I might receive the magic wand I was promised in this call. They all laugh with me because they, too, wish they had a magic wand to wave around their Synods and heal the hurts, fix the broken parts, fill the pulpits, bring the people back and stretch the budgets.

I remember a scene in the movie "Bruce Almighty" when Bruce Nolan was lashing out at God. God appeared and said, "If you think you can do it better than me, here — let's see you try."

And God gives Bruce all the power of God to try on for size and see how well he can fix all that's wrong in the world.

Of course, Bruce tries to use God's power for his own gain with people who have hurt him in the past. I am pretty sure I would do the same.

While I don't lash out at God, thinking I can do it any better, I sometimes wonder what I can do to hurry God along in the things I see that need fixing.

And then I am reminded that the things I think need fixing are not always the things God sees that need fixing.



Bishop Paula Schmitt

(See BISHOP, Page 19)

Scene of the Edition



The sky above St. David's church in Davidsville on Jan. 5.

Photo by Bishop Paula Schmitt

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Susan Barclay and Ann Ferry, who both attend Messiah Lutheran Church in New Centerville. They traveled to the capital to raise awareness about homelessness.

Submitted photo

WARM

(Continued from Page 1)

"Homelessness isn't always living on the streets. It can be living in a cheap hotel room, living in a car or having to move in with family or friends. A couple, on the day of the Memorial Blanket Project, pointed out another reality. They had once lived in a shelter of four walls, but had no electricity, running water or heat," Susan Barclay, director of the Lazarus Gate Food Pantry in Rockwood, said.

She made the trip to the capital with other members of Messiah Lutheran Church in New Centerville. "They actually felt fortunate because they had four walls."

Barclay said she appreciated people passing by who offered to help.

"People (were) stopping, asking questions and wanting to know how they could help shows the heart of people in this nation. Almost all agreed that we as a nation could and should do better. It was a long day and I was exhausted as I got on the bus to return to Carlisle. But, it was so worth it," Barclay said.

There were about 1,200 quilts

spread on the lawn. Each state was encouraged to make 100 or more blankets — shipping 10 of them to the event and distributing the others through outreach organizations across their state, according to a report on the event's website.

"The gentleman in charge at the shelter that evening got on the bus and thanked us for those who would receive the quilts, but would be unable themselves to thank us," Barclay said. "He told us that by the time we made our two-hour trip home to Carlisle, all the quilts would be distributed to those who were served that evening at the shelter and/or kitchen."

In January 2020, there were 580,466 people experiencing homelessness, according to endhomelessness.org, a site that tracks statistics, based on Census results.

"The thank you and need completely caught me off guard as I shed a few tears. The next few days the cold snap that gripped much of the nation hit the D.C. area. I hope the quilts provided some warmth and a token of our love," she said. †

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 Milport

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

ALSM President is Retiring

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

The long-time chief of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries is retiring on March 1.

Patricia W. Savage, who has served in the role since 1996, has oversaw work at ALSM that includes services for child care and seniors throughout eight counties in west-central Pennsylvania.

"As in any role (perhaps, especially in health and human service work) I will miss the people. I will miss the commitment and the caring attitude of those persons with whom I have had the honor to work. They exemplify the mission of ALSM — 'to serve people through a ministry of love, compassion and mercy in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ,'" Savage said in an email about her announcement.

ALSM serves 3,000 people a year with a staff of more than 300 and an operating budget of \$28 million.

"ALSM has grown to serve more people. ALSM has also expanded its offerings with affordable rental housing for seniors in addition to expanding and enhancing our independent-living programs for seniors who want to age in place," Savage said. "We have tried to relate the work of ALSM as a social ministry with the Gospel we hear every Sunday. Our work is in fact the Gospel in action. We have also tried to increase the awareness of ALSM service in our communities through participation in local chambers of commerce and other service organizations."

Throughout her career, Savage has earned several degrees and has served on various professional boards in her field.

In 2013, she was recognized for efforts to advance the field of aging services with the Paul Haas Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Leading Age Pennsylvania.

She said she is a lifelong Lutheran who has always been active in her church.

"I always sought to serve in a leadership role (and optimally, in the social ministry setting).

(See SAVAGE, Page 8)

WE *are* LUTHERAN

Doug Rhodes Thanks His Mother for His Love for Music

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Doug Rhodes started to play piano with his mother while in elementary school.

He grew up in a "musical household" where development was encouraged.

"Developing additional musical skills was always stimulated within the family, so all of us (siblings) played multiple instruments. I started my love of the brass family with the trombone, which continues to this day," he said.

Rhodes, 58, is the principal organist, choir accompanist and pianist at Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg.

He said that playing music during prelude, before a service, is a great time for reflection.

"Both for me and the congregation," he said, noting that he also enjoys playing music during communion distribution.

"I try to find arrangements fitting to the scripture of the week as well as wonderfully arranged for the keyboard."

His favorite music to play includes any Haydn sonata, Brahms's "Intermezzo in E Major," "Opus 116, No. 4" and the Chopin nocturnes,



Doug Rhodes

among others.

"I love to accompany soloists. Any opportunity I get to help a professional, or amateur, perform a piece or song they've spent

sweat equity learning is a total joy for me," he said.

Once he played two, full solo concerts to benefit the American Heart Association. He said the performances were important because they were in memory of a friend who died suddenly from a preventable heart condition.

"The concerts were deeply emotional, not only due to the pieces I chose, but also because of the attendance both evenings and donations received," he said.

(See RHODES, Page 14)

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Sabbatical Report Part 5:

The Land Where Martin Luther Walked

(Editor's note: This is the fifth 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

I had visited Wittenberg briefly before, but this trip gave me time to linger.

I headed first to the Stadt (or city) church. While not the most famous church, it is the one Martin Luther would have preached in the most, and it contains a number of famous Reformation artworks. Although the main church was closed, and I would visit it the next day, the chapel was open for prayer. A nun invited me to join her community for evening prayer at 6 p.m., and I had another community welcoming me for three days of evening and morning prayer, and communion one day!

This guided my heart and soul toward God each day.

Joining the sisters also meant that I was up early in the morning. Arriving at the Lutherhaus,



Photo by Pastor Julie Holm

A selfie at The Stadtkirche, or City Church, in Wittenberg.

I was more than an hour early! I walked across the street and sat under the Luthereiche (Luther Oak — planted when and where Luther burned the papal bull, threatening his excommunication) for a bit, then started walking in the Luther Garden. Here are many of the trees planted for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and I resolved to find the Allegheny Synod tree.

Luther lived at the Lutherhaus most of his life, first as a monk, later as a family man. It is preserved as a museum about his life and the life of his wife, Katarina von Bora.

(See JOURNEY 1, Page 13)

Disciples Together

Unique Ministry Growing at Grace

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Pastor Carolyn Hetrick's goal is to one day host a Synod gathering for adults living with physical and intellectual disabilities.

She wants to provide an opportunity for them to worship with music, fun and faith, similar to standard youth events.

The good news is the foundation building toward that dream

has already been laid at Grace Lutheran Church in State College, where Hetrick is associate pastor.

"Long before I was called to Grace as a pastor, this faith community was providing for the needs of those living with disabilities for decades, in large part because members of the congregation were children and then adults living with intellectual disabilities," Hetrick said. "What we

do now stands on their shoulders."

In 2019, monthly meetings started with up to 25 people offering Bible study and a faith formation activity for people with intellectual disabilities or mental wellness concerns. The sessions included direct support professionals, family members and anyone who wanted to take part in the gathering.

(See TOGETHER 1, Page 9)

SAVAGE

(Continued from Page 5)

"I have had many opportunities to serve in a professional role as well as a volunteer role in the Lutheran setting," she said.

She plans to continue social ministry in retirement, through teaching and community service.

"I also plan to travel and spend more time with family and enjoying some favorite hobbies like needlework, reading, cooking and writing," she said.

Savage is married to Dr. Roger

Johnson and has three children and five grandchildren. She will be moving to Lititz to be closer to family, she said. She plans to travel to Italy, Germany and France.

"It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as the president/CEO of a Lutheran social ministry organization. It has been an especially humbling honor to serve with the people of the Allegheny Synod because of their kindness and love of their fellow human beings," she said. †

TOGETHER 1

(Continued from Page 8)

Momentum was building as participants read and discussed the Bible, shared prayer concerns and blessed each other. They call themselves Disciples Together.

"After half a year of promise, the pandemic hit. During the rest of 2020, we utilized a combination of doorway pizza visits, Zoom meet-ups, parking lot gatherings and an outdoor summer picnic to remain connected. Many were struggling with isolation. Some weren't able to be with family for holidays. It was heartbreaking," Hetrick said.

In 2021, Dr. Jonna Belanger from Penn State, asked the church for a space to host FitLink cardio fitness for community members with intellectual disabilities and mental health concerns.

As the pandemic recedes, the group started meeting in person again and FitLink has become a complimentary part of Disciples Together.

"We expanded to offering quarterly meal and worship gatherings after some coaching from Rejoicing Spirits, an organization helping churches offer inclusive worship. Today, at Grace, the umbrella ministry called Disciples Together includes dining together on Wednesdays for a meal and brief Table Talk for those who can join us; Fitlink; quarterly dinner church-style worship led by and with our disciples; and occasional fellowship gatherings like our up-



Submitted photo

Some of the Disciples Together members during an event.

coming Movie Night," Hetrick said. "If this sounds like a fluid process, it is. We try to involve the greatest number of folks while recognizing the schedules and transportation variability require flexible planning."

Hetrick said the umbrella of ministries celebrates and supports the body, mind and soul for participants. She said there is a spirit of joy during gatherings.

"We offer faith community for some in community group homes whose biological families do not have a faith life, but who long for that connection to Jesus and God's word. We pray for each other, cheer each other on from Special Olympics victories and console each other in losses. There is gratitude that there is a space for everyone as they are to know they are beloved to God and to each other.

(See TOGETHER 2, Page 12)

Celebrating our Musical Gifts

A Report from Lion Country

(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

Through the years, we have consistently been able to recruit students to play piano for our Thursday worship services on campus.

Some have already been part of the life of our community when they started playing, while others have found their way to our community when we were looking for a pianist. These gifted young musicians have been majoring in journalism, physics, animal bioscience, education, biology and of course, music.

Our weekly worship has certainly been blessed by their musical skills, yet every one of these young people has become an important part of the community of faith that gathers on Thursdays, not just because of the music they have made. Our student musicians have shared their concerns and joys for the prayer list, raised questions in the reflection/conversation about the weekly gospel, gathered for sto-

ries and laughter around the dinner table, shared ups and downs of their week, and listened to the struggles and successes of their peers.

Last week, when our usual pianist had a conflict with our worship time, I made plans to use the piano recording we made during the COVID semesters (part of an elaborate process that allowed us to have music for worship while not singing in the common space together).

When everyone gathered for worship, however, another student volunteered to play the piano and did a wonderful job. It had been a while since he had accompanied and though he was anxious about it, everything went beautifully.

It was good to welcome this other student's musical gifts. It was much more enjoyable to sing evening prayer with live piano instead of a recording. It was also a lovely reminder that there are always gifts hiding in our communities of faith, ready for the opportunity to emerge and be a blessing. I can't help but look around at the students who are part of Lutheran Campus Ministry and wonder what hidden gifts they are on the verge of sharing with our community, with the wider church, with the world.

God has created us all with many gifts. May we find places to share them.†

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

Have you ever experienced a moment so holy that you got chills?

It has happened to me a few times in my life when someone said something profound or when I felt like another person understood my sorrow or my joy. Usually, a physical feeling like chills or a rush of blood tells me that the Holy Spirit orchestrated the meeting or conversation. Sometimes, the feeling doesn't come until much later. I'm not a person who generally associates faith with a feeling I have, but there are times when the Spirit does not want a holy moment to go unnoticed.

There is one such moment that I still think about often, even years later. To say that I think about it doesn't accurately describe what happens. The memory, and sometimes an associated feeling like chills, creeps up on me when I'm not expecting it. When the thought comes into my head, it feels again as though the Holy Spirit wants me to take the words I heard to heart and wants me to follow the Spirit's direction in my ministry.

Here is the situation as I can best re-



Pastor Kevin Shock

call it: About a dozen years ago, I was asked to do a funeral for someone unknown to me through a community connection. As I met with the loved ones of the deceased person, it seemed as though they did not

have much church experience, and yet they were also exceedingly hospitable and gracious in welcoming me into their home and in their gratitude for the service I would be providing. Following in her parents' hospitality and grace was a 4-year-old girl. She was eager to talk to me and take me on a tour of the parts of the house and yard that she knew best.

It was a delight to be in her presence, and it was a privilege to be a pastor for this family, even if just for this one event. It was a beautiful late-summer day when we gathered for the graveside service — warm, sunny and breezy.

I was greeting people as they gathered, and most people were expressing joy and gratitude for having known the woman we were commending into God's eternal care.

(See DEM 1, Page 20)



Submitted photo

Disciples Together offers an opportunity for fellowship and fun.

TOGETHER 2

(Continued from Page 9)

"How many people do you think around the Synod would benefit from this? Everyone!" Hetrick said.

According to the Collaborative on Faith and Disability, 84% of people with disabilities said their faith is important to them.

Only 45% of people with severe disabilities attend a place of worship at least monthly.

A mere 10% of faith communities do congregation-wide disability awareness. Yet, 32% of parents of children with disabilities changed their place of worship because their child was not included or welcomed.

"We had one disciple come to us after another church asked that he not return because he was deemed 'disruptive,' Hetrick said.

The pandemic and transportation

"It could be that we grew during the pandemic, stayed strong and loving, and our disciples are evangelizing and joyful."

— Pastor Carolyn Hetrick

have been early challenges, but organizers report that God has been active in the work.

Each week, Hetrick sees a success. "It could be the Batman-themed 50th birthday at our Wednesday meal for a disciple who is the oldest living person in the country with a particular syndrome. It could be two guys in a Scout troop for those living with intellectual disabilities that want to do their Eagle projects here. . . . Another who struggles with mental wellness joined the choir. It could be high fives after communion, or having a dance party and seeing two of our disciples who are a couple get to dance together," Hetrick said.

"It could be that we grew during the pandemic, stayed strong and loving, and our disciples are evangelizing and joyful." †

JOURNEY 1

(Continued from Page 7)

The highlight of the house is being in the room, looking at the tables around which Luther's "table talk" sessions with students occurred.

Through his life, Luther was an ongoing presence, continuing and developing his theology, and even taking it much too far, to his antisemitic writings later in life.

His footsteps here felt amazingly deep and the site reminded me that Luther's contribution was a life dedicated to figuring out the relationship of believers and God.

Wittenberg is so rich in Reformation sites. I cannot elaborate on them all; I visited Melancthon and Cranach houses, both Schloss and Stadt churches, the 16th century panorama and the exhibition of Christian art in the former castle.

Visiting Erfurt, I first saw where Luther was a student, and walked past the University Chapel, the Collegium Maius (the original University of Erfurt) and Luther's dorm. Thrillingly, I checked into a room at Augustinerkloster, the monastery where Luther was a monk, in the oldest section of the monastery, sleeping where monks slept and breakfasting where monks ate.

(See JOURNEY 2, Page 15)



Photos by Pastor Julie Holm

The study of Luther's house in Wittenberg, where friends gathered for "Table Talk."



The Allegheny Synod Tree in one of the Luther Gardens in Wittenberg.



The church of the Augustinerkloster in Erfurt, where Luther was a monk.



Above all, maintaining family relationships is my highest priority.

RHODES

(Continued from Page 6)

Rhodes also enjoys writing, at www.DougHugs.com, when he has the time. He teaches classroom music at Penn-Mont Academy and Holy Trinity, as well as operates Doug's Dawgs, a food concession business. The business is 18 years old.

"Above all, maintaining family relationships is my highest priority. If it wasn't for a supportive and loving family from the start, music may not have ever been in my life to begin with," he said.

"I owe mom the world. I wish she was still here to know this . . . somehow I believe she does."

FAITH MATTERS

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

DOUG RHODES: Understanding the "why" in a faith life. Trying to get to a deeper understanding of what faith actually is in a Christian walk.

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

DR: Macaroni prayers in Mrs. Wissinger's Sunday school class.

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

DR: For Zion? A very active youth program headed by Ryan Custead and a growing ministry led by our pastor, Dave Bowman. Overall, as Lutherans, we offer you grace in all you do, faith that you can get through whatever problems exist and a scripture-based foundation for all the advice and help you may want to receive. There is no judgment.†



The Luther Stone. Engraving is translated as "Help me, St. Anne; I will become a monk."



Photos by Pastor Julie Holm



The church in which Luther was baptized is now an area baptismal center.

JOURNEY 2

(Continued from Page 13)

Touring the museum part of the monastery, I realized the accommodations and the breakfast are greatly improved from Luther's day. A visit to Erfurt's old Synagogue reminded me of the marginalization of Jews in Germany, going back to some of Luther's problematic writings. I visited the Cathedral in which Luther was ordained.

After taking a bus up to the Luthersteine, the stone that commemorates the place where Luther took shelter during a violent storm and promised to become a monk, I hopped a train to Eisenach. The Wartburg, the castle where Luther hid after his refusal to recant at the Diet of Worms, features an amazing juxtaposition of a beautifully decorated medieval castle with the humble room where Luther worked to translate the Bible into German. The Lutherhaus in Eisenach is the place where Luther spent part of his childhood. While none of the original house remains, there is an exhibition on Luther's childhood, and on the role of music in

Luther's life and the reformation. Back in Erfurt, I spent a couple of evenings enjoying that most German of festivals, Erfurt's Oktoberfest!

My final stop was Eisleben, where Luther was born and died. The birth and death houses had exhibitions, but as Luther was at both for a very short time, they were not overwhelmingly notable.

I enjoyed the Luther rose among the cobblestones as I followed the Luther trail. The real jewel of Eisleben is the church in which Luther was baptized, now a baptismal center for the churches in the area. In addition to the original font, there is an immersion pool and a more modern baptismal font. A bus ride took me to Mansfeld, where Luther grew up. The tourist center is in the school Luther attended, and the Lutherhaus and museum in that city focuses on what living in that day would have been like, and what the Luther family was like.

Leaving Eisleben, I spent a night near the Frankfurt airport, before embarking on the last part of my sabbatical: Greece!†

CAPTION IT!

*(Editor's note: I thought we would try a fun, new feature. Each issue I'll post a photo, and readers can submit funny captions. I'll repost the photo in the following issue, with your captions. I'll include a new photo for you to write more funny captions. **This only works if you submit interesting photos to spur the imagination. Email photos to r9remzak@hotmail.com.)***



Send your suggested captions for this photo to the editor at r9remzak@hotmail.com.

Example: "I look about as happy as I feel." -- Rick Kazmer



CAMP SEQUANOTA



WEEKS	DATES	CAMP PROGRAM & AGE/GRADE COMPLETED	COST Tier I / Tier II / Tier III
	May 19 - 21	Lifeguard Training (Ages 15 +)	\$300/residential \$200/commuter
Week 1	June 12 - 16	Sequanota Days - Day Camp (Elementary: K - 6)	\$130 / \$165 / \$200
Week 2	June 19 - 20 June 22 - 25	Sampler Camp (Elementary: K - 6) Well Festival Weekend - All are welcome! Find more info at sequanota.com	\$130 / \$165 / \$200
Week 3	June 25 - 30	Cabin Camp (Elementary, Junior High, Senior High: Grades 2 - 12) 1/2 Week Cabin Camp (Elementary: Grades 1 - 6) - June 25 - 28 SaLT - 2 weeks: June 18 - 30 (Senior High: 9 - 12)	\$400 / \$500 / \$600 \$250 / \$325 / \$400 \$715 / \$815 / \$915
Week 4 (4th of July Fun)	July 2 - 7	Cabin Camp (Elementary, Junior High: Grades 2 - 12) 1/2 Week Cabin Camp (Elementary: Grades 1 - 6) - July 2 - 5 SaLT continues (Senior High) Bethesda (Adult)	\$400 / \$500 / \$600 \$250 / \$325 / \$400 \$500
Week 5	July 9 - 14	Sequanota Days - Day Camp (Elementary: K - 6) Grandparents & Kids / Friends & Family Camp (All ages)	\$130 / \$165 / \$200 Visit sequanota.com for prices
Week 8 (Theme Week)	July 30 - August 4	Cabin Camp (Elementary, Junior High, Senior High: Grades 2 - 12) 1/2 Week Cabin Camp (Elementary: Grades 1 - 6) - July 30 - August 2	\$400 / \$500 / \$600 \$250 / \$325 / \$400

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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.



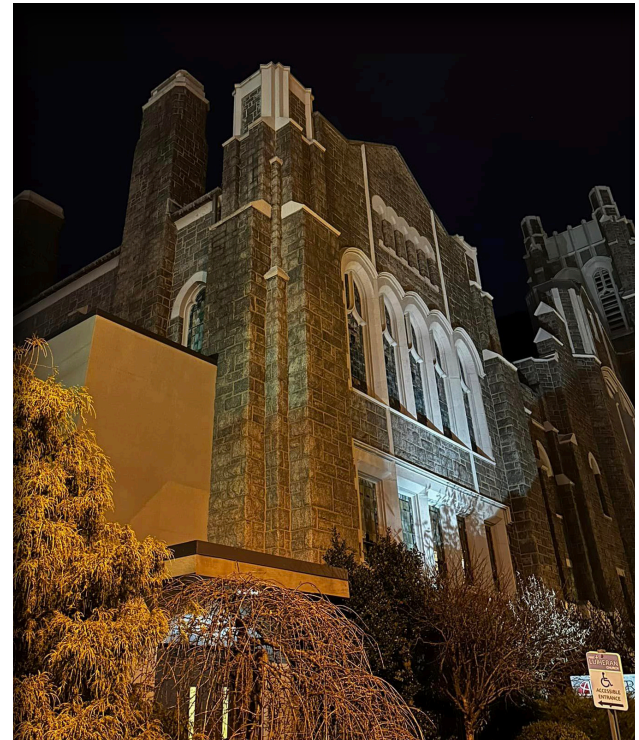
Zion Lutheran in Petersburg



Grace Lutheran, Curwensville



Christ Lutheran in Claysburg



First Lutheran in Johnstown

Grace Adding Stephen Ministers

BY BRENDA PALMGREN

Grace Lutheran Church

Grace Lutheran Church in State College is expanding its Stephen Ministry program, an exciting ministry that will allow it to reach out to more people with one-to-one Christian care.

Through Stephen Ministry, a team of Grace Lutheran's members, known as Stephen Ministers, has been equipped to provide quality Christian care to people (from any congregation) facing a variety of life difficulties. Some of the situations in which Stephen Ministers provide care include the loss of a loved one, divorce, unemployment, medical crisis and difficulties in starting or adding to a family.

Stephen Ministry is a trans-denominational caregiving ministry developed by Stephen Ministries St. Louis. Started in 1975, Stephen Ministry is now in 190 different Christian denominations from all 50 states, in Canadian provinces and in 30 other countries. On April 16, we will commission 10 members as Stephen Ministers at Grace. These caregivers will serve under the leadership of Rev. Carolyn Hetrick, pastor, Brenda Palmgren and Susan Hirth, the Stephen Leaders at Grace Lutheran.

Before commissioning, Grace Lutheran's Stephen Ministers received in-depth training in Christian caregiving skills, covering topics such as

active listening, distinctively Christian care, feelings, confidentiality and crisis theory, as well as ministering to people in specific situations such as divorce, grief and medical crises. After they begin providing care, Stephen Ministers continue to meet monthly with their Stephen Leaders for continuing education and peer supervision as they strive to offer the highest-quality Christian caregiving. A major emphasis of Stephen Minister training and supervision is on confidentiality. Stephen Ministry is a confidential ministry; those receiving care can be sure that their identity and what they talk about in the caring relationship will remain private. The people at Grace are excited about this new dimension of their ministry.

Grace expects their Stephen Ministry to be a source of warmth, care and blessing for many years to come, enabling the entire congregation to grow as a nurturing community where people are cherished and cared for and their needs taken seriously, all in the name of Jesus Christ. If you are interested or have questions about Stephen Ministry at Grace Lutheran, or know someone who might need care or support, call Palmgren at 814-574-1039. For more information about starting Stephen Ministry, call 314-428-2600, or visit their website at stephenministries.org. †

SPRING TRAVELS & DATES TO MARK ON YOUR CALENDARS

BY BISHOP PAULA SCHMITT

As Pastor Kevin Shock (assistant to the bishop) and I travel to our conferences this spring ahead of our Synod Assembly in June, we will be talking about trust, faith and hope for the future. We will be making a presentation about our budget and asking for your discernment as we look to the future. I hope you will make plans to join us.

Meetings start at 7 p.m. — Bedford Conference: April 25, St. Peter's in Osterburg; Blair-Huntingdon Conference: May 3, Location TBD; Clearfield Conference: April 26, St. John in Clearfield; Johnstown Conference: April 19, Location TBD; Laurel Highlands Conference: April 24, Friedens Lutheran, Friedens; Nittany Conference: May 2, Location TBD

Watch the congregation news on our website, our Synod's Facebook page and in your bulletins for more information about our conference meetings and Synod Assembly. If you are not able to make your conference meeting, feel welcome to attend another local meeting. †

BISHOP

(Continued from Page 2)

And, God isn't really in the business of fixing things so they will be right or to my satisfaction. He is more in the business of transforming our hearts so that we will be the change that is needed in those places.

As we enter into the season of Lent, when we examine ourselves and pray about ways that we might better reflect the love of Christ to our family, friends and neighbors, sometimes we take on spiritual practices that help us to be mindful of our need to rely on God and trust that God has it all in hand. It's not an easy thing to give up our sense of control to God; to listen; to be patient; to honor the gifts of other people — that's why it's called a practice. We need to do it over and over again until we get better at it.

I recently heard a distinction made between a believer in Jesus and a follower of Jesus. The person said we could believe in all kinds of things without necessarily putting them into practice. But, if we were a follower of Jesus, we would choose a path of action — the first of which is to trust, because we will not follow someone we do not trust. That made sense to me and spoke into my desire to fix everything. So, this Lent, I am going to work on trusting that God has it all in hand — even when it doesn't feel that way. I hope you will join me in this work. †

HE IS RISEN



JOHN 11

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;

26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

DEM 1

(Continued from Page 11)

At one point before the service began, the young, hospitable and gracious girl walked up beside me, but not with the same effervescence of the previous night. She seemed to be deep in thought as I greeted her warmly. She returned the greeting by saying, “It must be hard to be a pastor.” A bit taken aback, I replied, “Sometimes it is. What makes you say that?” Motioning with her head and hand to the gravestones before us, she simply said, “Just look at all these people.”

A lump formed in my throat that told me I shouldn’t reply. Tears welled up in my eyes that let me know I had been seen and understood. The breath was sucked out of me in recognition that this young girl possessed more wisdom and compassion than many adults with much more knowledge and experience. This was a “unless you welcome the kingdom of heaven like a child, you will never enter it” moment. I somehow knew that, in the presence of this child, I was in God’s presence.

(See DEM 2, Page 21)

DEM 2

(Continued from Page 2)

I don't even remember what happened after I collected myself.

Maybe I was rescued by the funeral director telling me it was time to begin.

Whatever happened next, it felt to me like time had stopped.

I wonder about that girl sometimes.

She's probably in high school now with typical teenager joys and woes.

I hope that she has held on to some of that wisdom she had all those years ago.

I know I have held on to her wisdom. Anytime that event comes to mind, I'm convinced it's because the Spirit wants me to hear those words again: "just look at all these people."

They are words that have guided me in ministry, not just as an ordained minister in the church of Christ, but as a simple follower of Jesus.

Each day it seems like I meet someone else who has been hurt by the church, or who has questions about God or who carries with them unspeakable sorrows.

I think of the feeding of the multitudes and of Jesus taking notice of all these people following him and having compassion on them.

When the disciples want to send them away, he tells them instead to give them something to eat.

When I get too self-centered in my life of faith, when I get in a rut of doing ministry the way I'm used to do-

ing it, when I get bogged down with all I think I have to do, the Spirit puts those words in my head and my heart again: Just look at all these people.

Just look at all these people who are carrying heavy burdens.

Just look at all these people who have been pushed out of the church.

Just look at all these people who want to ask questions, but have no one willing to hear them.

Just look at all these people who have never been shown the love of Jesus.

Just look at all these people who face every day without any joy or hope.

Just look at all these people . . .

Don't gawk at them, but really look at them. Look at them the way that Jesus looks at them.

Look at them and don't ignore the lump in your throat or the tears in your eyes or the breath sucked out of you.

Take notice of the people that Jesus takes notice of, and let yourself respond the way that Jesus would have you respond.

Just look at all these people. I can hardly think of wiser words for guiding us in the ministry to which we have been called.†

BEFORE *you* **GO**

There is no 'good' grief

Charlie Brown always says "good grief" after a calamity.

You know, like when Lucy pulled the football from under him as he was about to kick it?

I am certain Charlie didn't mean his statement to be taken literally. There is no — as far as I have come to learn — "good" grief.

There is "teachable" grief, "reflective" grief and maybe even "resetting" grief.

There are losses — of a job or a belonging — that we come to learn afterward reshaped our lives in a way that ended up for the better.

Maybe in hindsight, the grief experienced was "good," because it produced a better result.

But when we are experiencing it, it's not good at all.

The loss of a loved one is much harder to reconcile. How can a future without that person ever be better than if they were here?

No future benefits from the loss will seemingly ever rectify what was taken away. Sometimes I like to think of God's vision of things as a door and a room. God sees everything in the room, where the books are, where the chair is, where the outlets are located. He knows where people need to set, where people will need to go to find what they are looking for. He knows where to put the lamp so it can be plugged in.

We are on the outside of the door sometimes. We can look through the key hole and see glimpses. There's the desk in the corner, but why isn't the chair nearby? There's no outlet by the lamp!

It's hard to let God arrange the furniture, especially when we can't see the entire room.

But we must have faith that whatever is missing from the room will be accounted for in the end. Everything we need will be there — and everyone.

No, this comparison won't make grief easier to handle. But, we can rest assured that our rooms are being well prepared for us.

— Rick Kazmer

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Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis, Minnesota

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