

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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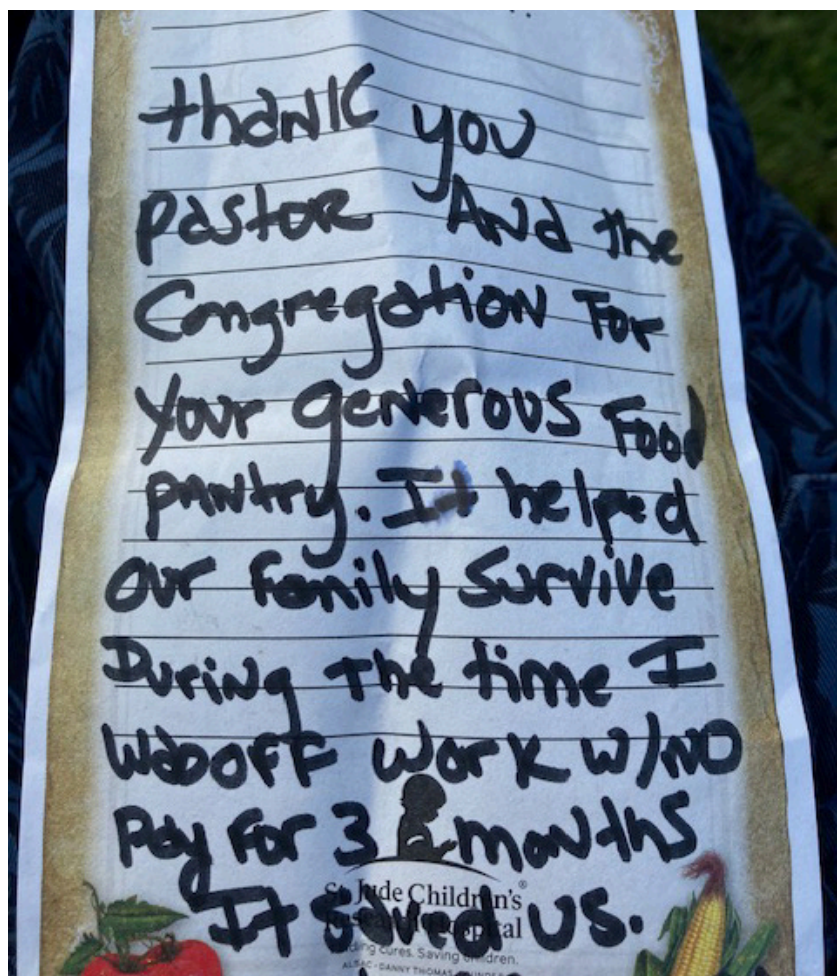
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'It Saved Us'

OUR DAILY BREAD



Submitted photo

Allegheny Synod congregations are leveraging ELCA grant funding to help ensure community members in our hills and valleys have a reliable supply of food. The above note is from someone who used the program at St. Mark in Howard. | Story on Page 4.



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

**Caught Smiling at Synod
Assembly, Page 16**





TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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Please contact the editorial team (above) with
your comments and story ideas. We look
forward to hearing from you.

OUR MISSION

Inviting people to love one another.

OUR VISION

All creation living in harmony with Christ.

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A Mission Church

As many of you know, I vis-
ited our global companion
church, the Kenya Evangelical
Lutheran Church (KELC), in
May.

One purpose of this visit was
to attend the consecration
of the Rev. Catherine Ngina
Musau as Bishop of KELC. In
this historic event, she be-
came the first female bishop
of a national church body on
the continent of Africa. Another
purpose of this trip was to learn about KELC and her
ministries, and to re-establish our relationship as part-
ners, which has long been dormant.

One of my greatest learnings from this trip was wit-
nessing the way that KELC is engaged in intentional
outreach ministry with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Al-
though Kenya has many Christians, it is a nation with
religious diversity and with many people who claim
no official religion. I was impressed how the people of
KELC integrate their faith into everyday life and are will-
ing to talk about Jesus with people whom they meet.

“Bwana asifiwe” (BWAH-nah ah-sihFEE-way), Praise
the Lord!, is a common greeting, not just within the
church, but in all aspects of life.

Their history is one of a mission church. KELC began as
a mission diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church
in Tanzania. The leadership in Tanzania saw a need to
spread the good news of Jesus in the Lutheran tradi-
tion into Kenya. In 1992 the Kenya diocese had enough
parishes, clergy, and lay leaders to become their own
church body, and KELC was established. Right now
their numbers of parishes, parishioners, and clergy are
almost identical to the Allegheny Synod, yet they are
continuing to grow.



**Bishop Shock
PHOTOS FROM
KENYA ON PAGE 20**

(See MISSION, Page 17)

Realizing Life Together

By **PASTOR TRACI A. MARRIOTT**
Pastor, St. Matthew Lutheran Church, Martinsburg
& Assistant to the Bishop

This winter I joined the bishop’s staff as the Assistant for Life Together.

I have described my role as helping the synod to gratefully recognize and wisely use our many resources for mission, so that we do not hide our light under a bushel or bury the talents that God has gifted us.

Whether we’re talking about financial resources or the time, passion, and skill of our people, we are always able to accom-

plish so much more together than we could on our own.

I am eager to be part of the synod’s continued collaboration, but first I want to share an example of cooperation and synergy from my congregation, St. Matthew in Martinsburg.

This year our Wednesday Lenten series focused on prayer – specifically the pattern of intercession we use in worship of praying for the wider church, creation, those in authority, those with particular needs, and the witness of the saints.

(See LIFE, Page 8)

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Thanks to these individuals and groups for their generous donations, which helped to make this issue of **The Lutheran Letter** possible.

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Allegheny Synod
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Daily Bread Grants Awarded

‘As it pulled away, a couple of young children popped their heads out of the sunroof and yelled ‘thank you’ to us’

By **RICK KAZMER**

Editor

ELCA World Hunger was able to fund more than 10 times the budgeted number of requests for Daily Bread Grant projects to help meet growing hunger.

In the Allegheny Synod, 10 projects were funded, each bringing a unique food ministry to the community where they are located.

“Even since the Daily Bread grants, I think you will find most if not all feeding ministries reporting an increase in need since the (Iran) war started and prices of gas and other necessities have risen,” Director of Evangelical Mission SueEllen Spotts said in an email.

St. Mark Lutheran in Pleasant Gap received \$500 to buy food for the Little Food Pantry.

(See BREAD 1, Page 5)

Each of these congregations received a \$500 grant

- Grace Lutheran Church
- St. Mark Lutheran, Howard
- St. Mark Lutheran, Pleasant Gap
- Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State
- Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
- Salem Lutheran Church
- Horner Lutheran Church
- Messiah Lutheran Church
- Zion Lutheran Church, Meyersdale
- Friedens Evangelical Lutheran Church

Editor's note: Stories from the rest of the projects will be up published as they are reported to The Lutheran Letter.



BREAD 1



Submitted photo

The Grace Lutheran team in State College celebrates as they implement the project to help feed community members.

(Continued from Page 4)

This service is located on the church’s front porch.

Service numbers are hard to judge, since the program is open to the public. But Pastor Laura Waltermire said that the pantry is well-used.

“The grant money we received helped us to continue this vital ministry. We find this project to be very rewarding through the thank you notes received stating how our little food pantry helps them to get through a period after they had lost a job and to look for new employment,” she wrote in an email. “And through the gentleman who just wanted a can of chicken so he could make more chicken salad because what he had made a few days prior was just so good.”

The tangible stories, often helping people obtain what should be accessible to every-

one – food – was a common theme throughout the testimonies.

At St. Mark in Howard, the congregation used the \$500 gift to implement a similar program, located outside. The food is available 24/7. Pastor David Pencek said the food is accessed often. Thank you notes, including one that reads, in part, “it helped our family survive,” are evidence about the impact.

“Just being able to help people in need and who are hungry – families, individuals – and have them know that they are seen and people do care about them and are thinking of them and praying for them. One time, we were doing a worship service outside under our pavilion, and a van pulled up outside the pantry on the other side of our parking lot. It stopped for a bit as the family got food.

(See BREAD 2, Page 7)

Summer Campus Communications Continue

By **DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON**

Campus Minister with Lutheran Campus Ministry
at Penn State

Campus may be relatively quiet in the summer months, but Lutheran Campus Ministry continues to support and connect with students while they are away.

Weekly listserv messages and social media posts continue over the summer, helping students to stay connected with each

other, inviting them to read and reflect on the weekly gospel text, and to join in-person or online gatherings.

The Lutheran Student Community Leadership Team gathered on Zoom in June to check in with each other.

They explored scripture together, talked about the fall schedule, and made plans for special events.

(See COLLEGE Page 13)

*Join us for an evening of
food, fellowship, fireworks, and fun at*



*Lutheran Day
at the
Altoona Curve*

Sunday, August 16

Game begins at 6 pm

Please order your tickets by Sunday, August 2.

**Email your order to alleghenysynodcurvetickets@gmail.com or text
814.934.9941. Mail payments to the Allegheny Synod Office,
916 Hickory St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648**

**200-level Terrace
tickets:
\$11/each**



**All tickets must be paid for in
advance and may be picked up
at the Synod Office or at our
will call table by the ticket office
the evening of the game.**

BREAD 2

(Continued from Page 5)

“As it pulled away, a couple of young children popped their heads out of the sunroof and yelled ‘thank you’ to us,” Pencek wrote in an email.

Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State applied for a grant to help students as prices for food, gas, heating, and other essentials started to climb.

In partnership with the Lion’s Pantry, a student-run food bank at Penn State, grant funds were used to buy needed supplies that are not typically donated. The project provided laundry detergent for 400 loads, 132 rolls of toilet paper, and 36 containers of cleaning wipes.

In partnership with the Center for Spiritual and Ethical Development, grant funds provided 60 servings of peanut butter and jelly, and 40 servings of pasta and sauce for the food shelf at Pasquerilla Spiritual Center, which helps to feed students with food insecurity.

College students report a surprisingly high rate of food insecurity in the country, according to Campus Minister Alicia Anderson.

As costs rise for housing, utilities, transportation, tuition, books, and daily necessities,

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Submitted photo

The pantry located at St. Mark’s in Howard.

students can find themselves without the resources to buy healthy food.

Elsewhere in State College, Grace Lutheran’s anti-hunger team used the \$500 to feed up to 175 households twice per month. It was a relief for their existing food program as costs continue to rise, according to Associate Pastor Carolyn Hetrick.

(See BREAD 3 Page 15)



Submitted photo

The banners, stitched by Pastor Marriott at St. Matthew in Martinsburg, had some feline input. More photos are on Page 12.

LIFE

(Continued from Page 3)

Each week we considered one of these prayer concerns and how we might lament, give thanks, or make a petition. Then we wrote those prayers on the back of strips of fabric.

Prayer can be intensely personal (which is why we wrote our prayers on the side of the fabric that only God would see), but we are also called to pray with others and for others.

I stitched everyone's prayers into two banners for Pentecost Sunday – the day we celebrate the Spirit giving the apostles the ability to share their experience of Jesus with the whole known world. Together, we made the flames that symbolize the Holy Spirit, yet the individual prayers were not lost; in fact, the faint trace of red marker bleeding through parts of the fabric shows us the distinct parts that were needed to make up the whole.

We now have a visual reminder of what beautiful things God can do through us when we enter into community with one another.

How is God calling you into the teamwork of the Allegheny Synod? †

Save the Date...

The Weekend.

Allegheny Synod Youth Event
December 11-13, 2026

St. James Lutheran Church & Comfort Inn
Huntingdon, PA

Wanted: Pencils for Love Letters

“We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”

- Romans 12:5

By DEACON SUE ELLEN SPOTTS

Director of Evangelical Mission

At our spring conference caucuses and at synod assembly, participants were asked to share one new thing God is doing in their congregation.

Most of the things that were mentioned as God's doing were things being done through God's people. In other words, you see God acting through you.

I came across a Mother Teresa quote I had never read before: “I'm a little pencil in the hand of a writing God, who is sending a love letter to the world.”

I really like the image that God is not just acting through us in random ways.

God is using us to tell the world how much



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

it is loved by God. This image of being the pencil of God's love letter to the world has some helpful guides for approaching our mission in our communities.

A love letter begins by naming the recipient in a manner that shows how dear they are. When we

consider our neighbors, how do we address them?

Do we speak of them and to them in a manner that lets them know they are beloved – by God and by us? Since God is using us to address them, how would God speak?

(See PENCIL Page 14)

WE are LUTHERAN

Is looking for people to feature!

Know someone in your congregation who is doing unique things, has a cool hobby, or is making a difference? Email contact information to Editor Rick Kazmer at **r9remzak@hotmail.com**.

Effective 4/1/2026



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The Lutheran Letter is a bi-monthly digital publication.

20-YEAR PATRONS

Special 20-year Patrons is a year-long opportunity, running through the May/June 2027 issue. Funding collected through this project will be sent to ELCA World Hunger work. Email Michelle Bossler at Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com to become a 20-year anniversary Patron, or mail this form to the Synod office

Alpha Returns to Trinity

(Editor's note: Trinity Lutheran is again holding this program. This description is an edited version of a story that was published last year ahead of Alpha's first session.)

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Alpha is for the second year being held for the community.

Alpha equips churches and individuals to help others develop a relationship with Jesus. It's centered on creating a space for honest conversations about some of life's biggest questions – all centered on Jesus, according to the program.

Alpha started at Holy Trinity Brompton in London in 1977. It has grown internationally since then, with conferences and even an original film series.

"The Alpha talks have been repackaged for today's audience in the Alpha Film Series, and the Alpha Youth Series was created to reach a younger generation with the Gospel. Even as times have changed, Alpha has continued to be used by the Church as an effective tool to reach the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ," according to the program's website.

It's billed as an opportunity to find purpose, meaning, peace, belonging, and Jesus. Sessions will run from Sept. 2 through November. Alpha will be held at Holy Family Church on Wednesdays beginning Sept. 2; OMOS on Tuesdays beginning Sept. 8; St. Benedict Church on Thursdays beginning Sept. 3; and Trinity Lutheran in Somerset on Thursdays beginning Sept. 3. A meal is provided each evening.

You can select your location and answer other questions by registering using the QR code below. †



Scan the code to
register for Alpha

Stitched in Prayer

More photos of the banner project from St. Matthew in Martinsburg. The banner had prayers stitched on the inside, where only God can see them. It was a unique way to share with other faithful deeply personal prayer.



Submitted photos



“

Together, we made the flames that symbolize the Holy Spirit, yet the individual prayers were not lost; in fact, the faint trace of red marker bleeding through parts of the fabric shows us the distinct parts that were needed to make up the whole.”

– Pastor Traci A. Marriott

Join the Communications

If you'd like to receive the Penn State Campus Ministry weekly electronic message, or listserv, you can sign up at the Friends and Supporters Newsletter Sign Up at lutheranpennstate.org.

COLLEGE

(Continued from Page 6)

The students involved are spending their summer months taking classes, working summer jobs, learning at internships, and studying abroad.

They filled each other in on where they are and what they are doing.

They shared a few stories about the fun and the challenges they are having before discussing the ways they hope to shape worship, community life, weekly dinner, study options, and other events once the fall semester begins.

Our scripture conversations focused on Matthew 9:35-38, where Jesus makes his way around cities and villages, teaching, healing, and proclaiming the “good news of the kingdom.”

In the verses, Jesus is moved by compassion for the crowds and sends out the disciples to heal and proclaim the good news. Students talked about how in their summer roles they had found themselves being compassionate, quietly sharing the good news of God's love and mercy.

Though none of this group is spending the summer working or learning in faith-based contexts where talking directly about Jesus would be reasonable, several students talked about facing difficult encounters in service settings, where they relied upon compassion and kindness to help someone in difficulty – moments where they lived out the kind of love Jesus calls us to.

It is good that summer months bring a different rhythm for students. They have less academic pressure and spend less time with readings, lectures, and assignments.

Without these academic demands, students often find more opportunities to reflect on their behavior and experiences, noticing the values and priorities that shape their choices. What a wonderful way to discover they are living out Jesus' call to love one another. May summer provide those opportunities for you and me, too. †

PENCIL

(Continued from Page 9)

As God continues to write to our neighbors, our mission among them gets defined. How does God define our relationship and how we act. What concerns do we think God has for our neighbors? What is God's message of love to our neighbors, and how will we be the instrument that conveys it?

The thing I find comforting in the image of being God's pencil, is that God is the one doing the writing; God is the one defining the relationship. We are not left wondering how to think of and act toward our neighbor. God's Word already tells us:

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 25:35-36)

What other passages from God's Word inspire and instruct you in reaching out to your neighbor?

As you consider what new thing God is doing through your congregation, consider how this might also be how God is using you to send a message of love to the world. †

BE AN AMBASSADOR!!

In the coming year, we will continue to lift up the new things God is doing in and through our congregations. One way will be through quarterly summits (on Zoom) where representatives from each congregation come together to share, learn, and be inspired by what is happening across the Allegheny Synod.



We are looking for 1-2 people from each congregation to join these summits and then, in turn, take the information back to their own congregation.



If you are interested in being an ambassador, send the information below to sueellen.spotts@elca.org, or mail it to the synod office at 916 Hickory St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648



Name:

Email:

Congregation:



A Father's Day Blessing

(Editor's note: This Father's Day feature was published with the St Mark Lutheran newsletter)

By KATE BOWLER

Bless all the dads – those who have carried us on their shoulders, and in their hearts, and in their minds, and all those who have fathered us in some form or fashion.

The ones who answer our calls no matter the time of day, who try to fix-it even if they don't know how.

And for those who resort to dad jokes just to see us smile.

Those who remind us that we are loved, loved, loved no matter what.

We thank them and honor them all. Those we can hug today, and those who are now gone and those now distant from us.

And bless all those too for whom fathering is complicated, difficult, heartbreaking, or incomplete.

Do what only you can do, God: Bless and heal.

Restore and rebuild all generations, forward and backward in time.

Amen. †

BREAD 3

(Continued from Page 7)

Specifically, the grant was used to provide canned chicken and pasta to families for one distribution, as part of the effort to reduce the amount of processed, sugary snack foods.

"It has been heartbreaking to imagine that families, veterans, and vulnerable people might not have any genuine food support, especially in the midst of an agricultural area and university. Being able to offer anything that is more filling shows others they are not forgotten by God or by us," Hetrick said.

Four congregations that are part of Laurel Mountain Lutherans in Somerset County help families through the Lazarus Gate Food Pantry, based at Messiah Lutheran in New Center-ville. Susan Barclay started the project in Rockwood to help with food scarcity in the rural area before the church closed and the program relocated. The \$500 will help Lazarus organizers continue providing food to people who need it most.

"All of the volunteers go above and beyond to help with the needs of our community," parish member Ann Ferry said. †

SMILE!

Happy Faces From Assembly



Photos by Eric B. Zimmatt

MISSION

(Continued from Page 2)

From my perspective the reasons for this growth are simple: They know people who need good news; they know they have good news to share; they share it.

KELC is also unencumbered by its history. They are a mission church that had no resources only a few short decades ago. Therefore, in their ministry, they do not perceive that they need much to gather as church and to spread the gospel of Jesus. There are parishes that have no floor, that have no roof, that have no chairs, that have no buildings or books or materials. They begin with evangelists telling the story of God in Christ, and they trust that the Lord will build the church from that point forward.

Bishop Catherine's consecration service was on the day of Pentecost. Yet I witnessed many other ways the Spirit was moving in KELC as on the first day of Pentecost.

Friends, this trip caused me to wonder what our ministry would look like if we saw ourselves as a mission church here in the Allegheny Synod. Our history is much different. Just a few decades ago we had more financial resources, buildings, materials, pews, musicians, clergy, etc.

We have grown weary of trying to match where we had been or what we had been. If we look into our distant past, however, during the time of the birth of this nation, Lutheran Christians were meeting wherever was available to hear the story of God in Christ from pre-written sermons or lay evangelists or clergy who traveled and visited gatherings once a month or less. Those clergy trained lay people to share the gospel of Jesus Christ through the confessional

materials of the Lutheran tradition.

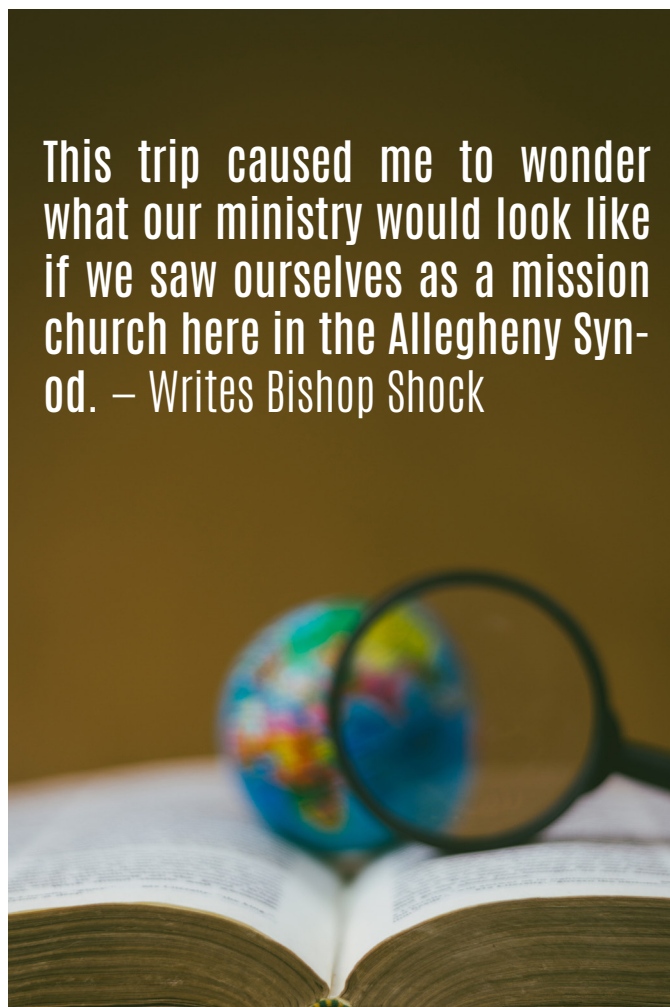
We are very similar in our current situation to that of KELC or of the missional Lutheran movement in North America.

We live in a religiously diverse nation, and fewer people claim an official religion or faith community.

People need good news, and we have all that is necessary to spread good news and grow the church: the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. I have seen what the Spirit is doing in KELC. I see what the Spirit is doing in some communities in the Allegheny Synod. I know that the Spirit has much more in store for us in these Allegheny hills and valleys.

When we imagine ourselves to be a mission church, God will indeed build us up. †

This trip caused me to wonder what our ministry would look like if we saw ourselves as a mission church here in the Allegheny Synod. – Writes Bishop Shock



Day at the Curve Around the Bend

By **PASTOR MARTY JO IRVIN-STELLABOTTE**

Assistant to the Bishop

Lutheran Day at the Curve has become a long-standing tradition in the Allegheny Synod. Renewed interest in recent years has brought a resurgence of folks out to the ballpark to gather for food, fireworks, and fellowship. It's a chance to connect with other Lutherans from throughout the synod who they might not get to see as often during the year.

This year's event is coming up on Aug. 16. The game begins at 6 p.m. and tickets for the 200-level terrace seating are \$11 each for adults and free for kids ages 2 and under.

This year's outing won't include a picnic in the ballpark before the game, as the concourse picnic area was not large enough to accommodate our entire group last year. However, individuals are encouraged to arrive before the game begins and enjoy dinner with one another, either in the concourse area or in the reserved seating sections.

Ticket order forms are available online on the synod's website, in congregations, and at the synod office. To order tickets, please complete the order form and return it to the synod office (916 Hickory St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648) along with payment. Ticket orders may also be emailed to alleghenysynodcurvetickets@gmail.com and payment mailed to the synod office.

The synod will not be mailing tickets, as several were lost in the mail last year. Individuals may pick them up at the synod office, or they may be picked up the night of the game at the synod's will-call table near the ticket office by the main gate. All tickets must be paid for in advance.

For any questions or additional information, please call the synod office or email alleghenysynodcurvetickets@gmail.com. The synod staff looks forward to seeing you at the ballpark this year. †



Koontz Ordained



Submitted photos



Pastor Penny Leigh Koontz was ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament on June 13. She has been called as pastor to serve among the people of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Windber. God's blessings to Pastor Penny and her ministry. She is pictured at left with Bishop Kevin Shock.

Scenes from Kenya



Submitted photos
These are photos from Bishop Shock's recent visit to Africa. A travel log and more photos from the trip will be in the next issue.

Introducing Zeteo: A Lutheran Search Tool for Ministry

By GO TELL IT IN THE MOUNTAINS

Over the past several months, our Bishops, the Steering Committee, and GTIITM have worked together to curate Lutheran-specific resources that can support leaders in the daily work of ministry. The result is Zeteo Search Engine - Lutheran Edition, a search tool designed to make trusted, Lutheran-affirming materials easier to find and use.

Ministry often requires quick access to reliable resources.

Whether you are preparing a sermon, planning a Bible study, refreshing your understanding of a passage, looking for a particular verse, adapting content for your congregation, or searching for support during a

demanding week, Zeteo brings helpful materials together in one place.

Instead of wading through endless online results, users can search within a collection shaped by Lutheran theology, congregational life, and the practical needs of pastors, deacons, church staff, and ministry leaders. Zeteo is intended to save time, strengthen preparation, and provide thoughtful support for the work already happening in congregations and communities.

This is a tool created with ministry in mind: accessible, focused, and grounded in the Lutheran tradition. We invite you to explore Zeteo and discover how it can support your preaching, teaching, learning, and leadership. †

Preaching with Purpose ... and Maybe a Little Less Panic

By GO TELL IT IN THE MOUNTAINS

Clergy carry a holy mountain of responsibilities—sermons to craft, worship to plan, prayers to offer, pastoral care to give, and the ever-mysterious movement of the Spirit to discern. With all that swirling around, adding one more thing can feel like trying to balance a hymnal, a coffee, and a malfunctioning copier at the same time.

But tucked inside that beautiful busyness is a gentle invitation: a chance to pause, breathe, and sharpen the craft that makes ministry come alive. Because here's the truth—growth isn't optional in ministry; it's sacred. Think about it: which surgeon would you trust—the one who graduated decades ago and never cracked open a new

study, or the one who keeps learning, refining, and practicing their craft? Preaching is no different. The Word deserves our best, and our best keeps getting better when we keep learning.

Join our Preaching Cohorts to swap stories, insights, and “you won't believe what happened during worship last Sunday” moments while having a Coach and Mentor help you grow. Explore our Ready for Sunday videos to strengthen your sermon prep without adding stress. Hear what fellow clergy find Compelling Preaching in our Video on Demand Section – and let their wisdom spark fresh joy in your own calling.

The resources are here. The support is real. And yes, the copier might still jam—but at least you won't face it alone. †

BEFORE YOU GO

Opened doors

This spring I changed jobs for only the second time in about 20 years.

It was a difficult decision because I truly enjoyed my work at United Way, but an opportunity with Somerset Engineering made sense for my family. My role is to help clients find grants and funding solutions while supporting some marketing efforts.

For several years, I also worked a handful of side jobs to help make it possible for Courtney to stay home with Nora during her early years. Earlier this year, many of those opportunities began to disappear. As they did, anxiety and uncertainty started to creep in as we wondered how our plan would continue.

Around the same time that one of my primary writing opportunities officially ended, my new position opened up.

My mother-in-law observed that God had closed one door and opened another. Looking back, I am grateful for how timely the opportunity was. Often, God's timing does not match our own. We may think something is happening too early, too late, or not at all. Yet when we look back, we can often see that God was at work all along.

I think about the people I see on LinkedIn who have been searching for a job for months or even years. I think about families waiting for the right home, the right opportunity, or the right answer to a prayer. Courtney and I spent two years searching for a home more than a decade ago. We waited for about three years for Courtney to become pregnant with Nora - so I know how tough waiting can be.

Patience is one of the hardest things to practice. If you are waiting on something in your life, know that you are not waiting alone. God sees the path ahead even when we cannot. The answer may not arrive when or how we expect, but we can trust that God is present and working through every season.

See you in the next edition. †

– Rick Kazmer, editor