

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital



THE FALL

EDITION

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TOGETHER WHILE APART



Submitted photo

Hike participants, in the front: Carla Rossi. In the middle row: Caroline Banerjee, Alyson Hoegg, Michele Peiffer and Kevin Honz. In the back row: Tara Banerjee and Michael Hetrick.

Grace Hikers Improvise for Trail Time

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

When Pastor Carolyn Hetrick watched her vacation plans evaporate earlier this year because of the pandemic, she said that she began to wonder how to take some time for self-care and renewal.

Hetrick, associate pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in State College, frequently traveled to Holy Cross Monastery in West Park, New York, and discovered that in lieu of having an open guest house, they were offering virtual retreats online via Zoom.

(See HIKE, Page 11)

The coronavirus continues to plague the Allegheny Synod, state, nation and world. Congregations are stepping up to help in unique ways. The Lutheran Letter is continuing to tell some of the stories. ¶

Pastor John Barichivich had only been with Friedens Lutheran Church in Somerset County for a handful of months when the COVID-19 crisis started. But the disaster provided Barichivich and his congregation the opportunity to start a food program that he said will likely continue after the pandemic has passed. ¶ “The economic need is going to (remain) when the government says COVID is done with,” he said.



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

By RICK KAZMER
The Lutheran Letter Editor

(See FOOD, Page 10)

The LUTHERAN Letter

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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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Assembly Pushed Back; Rhyne to Serve Another Year

By **THE LUTHERAN LETTER**

Some changes have been made regarding the Allegheny Synod Assembly and Bishop Michael Rhyne's term.

Here's the latest news.

• The assembly has been moved from Sept. 18-19 to June 4-5, 2021. Because of the pandemic, it was going to primarily be a virtual assembly this fall. But synod officials decided to postpone it until next year. The decision was made due to continuing concerns about COVID-19 and Gov. Tom Wolf's order limiting the size of indoor – in-person – gatherings.

Synod officials are planning to gather in assembly at the Blair County Convention Center in Altoona next year. Synod officials are working on additional contingencies if it is not possible to gather in-person in June.

• Bishop Rhyne has agreed to extend his term through the summer of 2021, when the new bishop will be elected. Rhyne announced earlier this year that he is not seeking another term, however, the pandemic has complicated the process to elect a new bishop. The bishop-elect of the Allegheny Synod is set to begin their 6-year term on Sept. 1, 2021. †

'A More Excellent Way'

Siblings in Christ,

May God's grace and peace be with you and may you know the presence of our Lord Jesus now and always. I have been thinking about who God is calling us to be in the time of COVID-19. At the time of this writing, we are entering our sixth month of dealing with this virus. It has been a time of upheaval and uncertainty for many of us. In this time, we carry grief for what might have been. We long for the normal lives that we used to know, and though we may not want to face it, we know that it will be a long time before we return to something that resembles life before the pandemic.

I want to say again how amazed I am at the way our congregations and leaders continue to be the church in this time. COVID has turned worship upside down and on its head. We are having to do things differently and change is hard.

Yet, you, the people of God in the Allegheny Synod, are figuring it out. In addition, the work of the church goes on. You are feeding people, sharing with your community, reaching out to those in need. You are the church in the midst of pandemic that is changing everything in our world. I thank God for you, and I am proud of how you are responding to Jesus' leading in the midst of all of this.

At the same time, we stand on what feels like shaky ground. This pandemic is a natural disaster. Yet unlike a hurricane, earthquake or forest fire, which strike for a number of hours or days and then are over, six months in and we are still dealing with the impact of this pandemic. We don't know when this storm will be over.

It is hard when we worry about the health of those we love. It is hard when we, or those we love, have lost jobs and opportunity. Many of you have commented to me how you have seen the levels of anxiety and fear rising in your communities and in your congregations. This is understandable.

(See **WAY**, Page 6)

Pastor Paula Schmitt is Leaving the Synod

(Editor's note: this is a letter from Pastor Paula Schmitt to readers. She has resigned as assistant to the bishop. Her last day was Aug. 7.)



Pastor Paula Schmitt

Beloved ones,

By now you know that I have resigned my position as assistant to the bishop in the Allegheny Synod. That decision was not an easy one to make. And, you should know, I did not seek out this opportunity to be an intentional interim in another synod.

It came as quite a surprise to me. I wrestled for several weeks with what it would mean to change calls — especially now.

I knew the hardest part about doing that would be leaving all of you. While I know this change in call does not mean ending our relationship, I do know that our relationship will change. Quite frankly, to me it feels like breaking an engagement because I have fallen very much in love with all of you

over these last six years. That might sound kind of corny, but it is no less true. You are amazing people. You are a blessing to your communities. You are bright lights in a dark and sometimes scary world. You matter and what you do together for the sake of the Gospel in your congregation and community makes a difference.

What has been challenging in these last several months is the level of anxiety and fear and brokenness that is permeating our society. When we let those things take up more space than they need to, it

creates shifts in our ways of thinking and being in the world.

Unfortunately, sometimes it also causes pain in others. It doesn't have to be that way. One of the things I have deeply appreciated about being a Lutheran is not always having an answer — even in a world where great value is placed on having answers to everything.

Martin Luther encouraged people to live in the questions and not always jump to conclusions or to look for an easy out of tough questions. That wrestling and discerning is a core of our Lutheran faith tradition. When we find ourselves in pain or feeling afraid, it's often easier to point a finger or form coalitions against what we are afraid of, than it is to sit in that uncomfortable place and work through it all, relying on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. My encouragement to you over these next months is this: BE. God created human BEings not human DOings.

Being means resting in the arms of God's great mercy and grace and listening for that still, small voice for guidance and direction and peace. Being is not easy for those of us who are accustomed to doing more and more to find the affirmation we need. Friends, rest. Be. Pray. Keep showing up as the beloved children of God and squint as hard as you need to see God's image in everyone you meet and treat them accordingly. Shine the light that is in you as brightly as you can every day.

Thank you for all the ways you live out the covenant of your baptism in the world. Thank you so very much for your confidence in me, for the grace you have shown me and for your prayers. When I came to this office, I inherited a family; not just a brother and sisters in our staff members, but all of you, too. For that — and many other things — I am exceedingly grateful. You mean so much to me. (See **PAULA**, Page 4)

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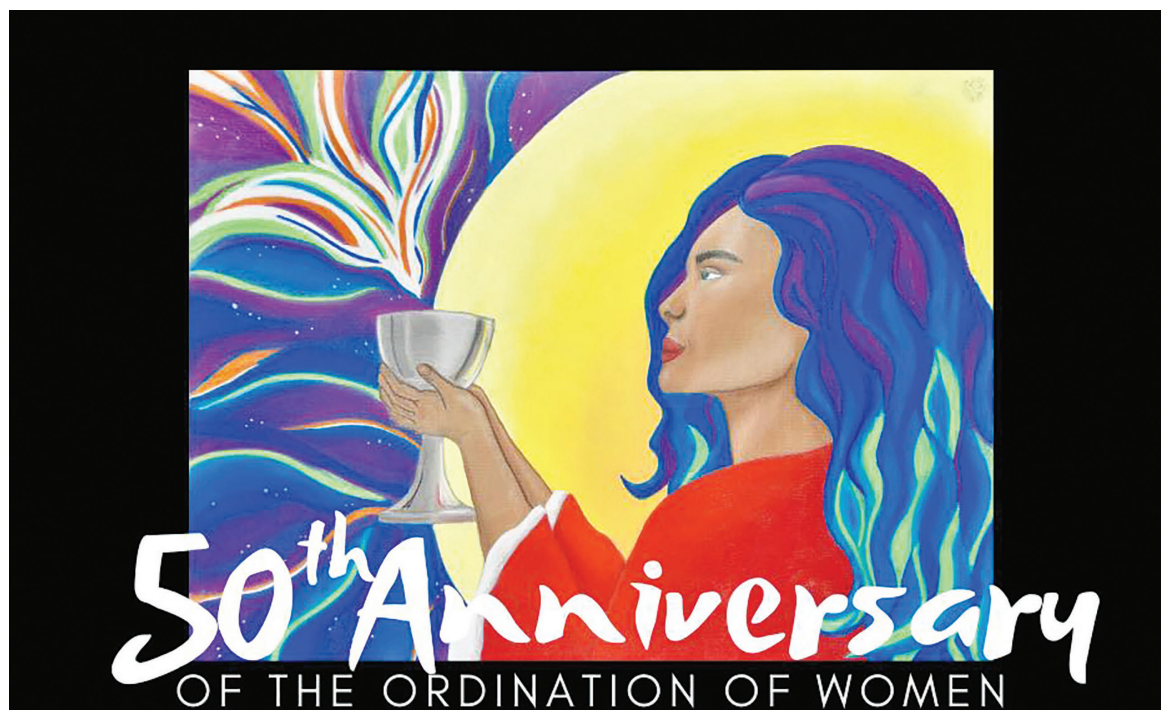
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COMING IN NOVEMBER — More on Pastor Dena Gable, who created the painting at right to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women in the Lutheran tradition in the United States. It is called "The New Covenant." In the next issue The Lutheran Letter will be looking back on the year of coverage celebrating Pastor Elizabeth Platz's ordination on Nov. 21, 1970.



ALLEGHENY LUTHERAN SOCIAL MINISTRIES

We Touch Lives

As a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Annual Dinner of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries (ALSM) will not be held this year.

We ask that you consider supporting our appeal for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The cost of the PPE to keep our residents, clients, and staff safe will far exceed \$100,000 of funds that are unbudgeted.

Gifts may be donated on our website at alsm.org/donate or by mail to 998 Logan Blvd, Altoona, PA 16602. Please indicate PPE appeal on the memo line as well as the program/senior community you wish to designate.

Thank you for your prayerful and financial support.

PAULA

(Continued from Page 3)

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May God's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May God give you the grace never to sell yourself short;

Grace to risk something big for something good;

Grace to remember that the world is too dangerous for anything but truth

And too small for anything but love.

So, may God take your minds and think through them;

May God take your lips and speak through them;
May God take your hearts and set them on fire. Amen

Faithfully,
Pastor Paula Schmitt †

Remember in Prayer

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

SEPTEMBER

Week 1: Good

Shepherd Lutheran, Windber

Week 2: Christ

Lutheran, Madley

Week 3:

Geeseytown-Newry Lutheran Parish:

Geeseytown

Lutheran,

Geeseytown; and

Evangelical Lutheran, Newry

Week 4: Grace

Lutheran, Bellwood

OCTOBER

WEEK 1: Yeager

Memorial Lutheran, Bedford

WEEK 2: New

Centerville

Lutheran Parish:

St. Paul Lutheran, Barronvale; Samuels

Lutheran,

Somerset; and

Messiah Lutheran,

New Centerville

WEEK 3: Trinity

Lutheran, Altoona

WEEK 4: Faith

Lutheran, Somerset



Updates from Penn State Ministry

By **DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON**

Campus Minister at Penn State

As you might imagine, it has been a very different year on campuses everywhere. Students at Penn State stayed home after spring break and finished the semester through online instruction.

This fall, colleges and universities will begin classes under restrictions unlike they've ever had before. Things will be very different, whether classes are on campus or online.

Every year we ask congregations and members for names and contact information of students who are returning to college or heading there for

the first time. This year it is especially important for you to help campus ministry reach out to students.

Students will be facing new challenges this fall. Many of the usual ways students find and connect with Lutheran Campus Ministry will be drastically changed or severely limited. Campus life will present new challenges as schools adapt to COVID-19 procedures and work to keep their communities healthy. Students will be facing new challenges and will need the connection of a faith community even more than before.

You can help.

Use the link below to send names and contact information to students in your congregation, your

community or your family. Through the Lutheran Campus Ministry Network (LuMin), we can connect students with campus ministry or a congregation at or near their college or university anywhere in the nation, not just here in the state.

We are eager to connect with students coming to Penn State, and you can also share the names of students going anywhere in the United States.

Thank you for your help supporting your students while they are at college.

Here's the link: <https://lumin-networkreferral.org/student-referrals/>

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at ara2@psu.edu. †



JUNE 29-JULY 3, 2021

Every three years, 30,000 high school youth and their adult leaders from across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gather for a week of faith formation known as the ELCA Youth Gathering. Through days spent in interactive learning, worship, Bible study, service and fellowship, young people grow in faith and are challenged and inspired to live their faith in their daily lives. The next event is scheduled for June 29-July 3, 2021, in Minneapolis, though planning has started. **Key organizer Molly Beck Dean, and others involved with the planning, has answered questions about the event, which are being published in each issue of The Lutheran Letter until the gathering next year.**

THE LATEST FROM ORGANIZERS: *Gathering leadership continues to work through a variety of scenarios of what this ministry may look like during a pandemic. We have decided to pause our upcoming webinars, the release of the Getting Ready Materials and the start of financial assistance, so that all may be adjusted accordingly for any possible changes. The Gathering timeline will be adjusted accordingly as updates are announced, so that adult leaders have time to prepare. All updates will be shared on our social media as well as on our website: www.elca.org/youthgathering*

The Scoop

How has everything going on in society impacted planning the gathering?

(Editor's note: This question is in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and to George Floyd's death in Minneapolis on May 25. Floyd, 46, was killed while being arrested by police officers. The incident has resulted in protests around the country, including in Minneapolis.)

MOLLY BECK DEAN: As of now, Mr. (George) Floyd's death and the protests surrounding it do not have an impact on the logistical aspects of our planning. Minneapolis was, is and will be a great host city for the Gathering. The recent incidents have put a spotlight on racism in our country, and across the nation many young people are leading efforts and protests to stand with our siblings of color. This may affect our programming as we look to lift up what is most relevant to life and faith in high schoolers. We shall see.

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting our plans. We are working through a variety of scenarios and hope to have official announcements about changes soon. Those will be available on our website, social media and through the gNews. †

WAY

(Continued from Page 2)

People are worried about their families and their future. When we are afraid or anxious, tensions rise.

When tensions rise and anxiety grows it can lead people to do things that they wouldn't do in a different time. Anxiety can lead us to vent our frustration on others. We can over-function in situations so that we can feel a sense of "control." You might have experienced this with work, in your families, or in your congregation. Sometimes higher levels of anxiety lead to bad behavior. In times like these it can be difficult to remember that God calls us to be people of grace who show love and patience for our siblings in Christ.

Who is Jesus calling us to be in this time? We have an amazing opportunity to show the world a better way. Because everything has been turned upside down, the world is expecting us to be short-tempered, angry, and disrespectful. But what if we are not?

What if we, the people of God, consciously and intentionally choose to show the world what the Apostle Paul calls, "a more excellent way"? We are living in a tough time. We are all dealing with realities we didn't ask for and that none of us deserve. Yet we have a choice about how we respond. On one hand, we can become people who let the uncertainty of the moment turn us callous and impatient. Or we can rise above the struggles of this time and show this world grace and love.

I am inviting you, people of God, to be the people of hope that God calls us to be. God calls us through our baptism to share the love of Christ and show the world the difference that Christ's love makes. I am not saying that we need to simply put on a happy face and smile in the face of all that is around us. We cannot stand in the midst of adversity and pleasantly say, "No problem, everything is fine." But we can stand in these times and know that it will be fine. There are struggles now, and some of them are very difficult, but we know that God will get us through this. We have faith in our Lord Jesus



Bishop Michael Rhyne

who promises to be with us until the end of the age. We will get through.

When we know that Christ is with us and will lead us through this struggle, it changes things. This pandemic will pass. We will eventually get to the new normal on the other side of this. Nineteen years ago our world was turned upside down on Sept. 11. Things changed as a result of that day and will never be the same. But we are here. We continue to move forward. We will move past this pandemic as our ancestors moved past world wars, civil wars, revolutions, depressions and other pandemics that have come and gone.

I am calling you to be the people that God calls us to be. We are the ones who can show this world the more excellent way, the way that is rooted in a faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ and that does not give way to the fear and anxiety of our time.

I am calling on you to join me in striving to reflect the light and hope of Christ. That means that we will strive to share Christ's love with everyone we meet. We will remember that it is hard now, but we don't need to make things harder for those around us by bringing more anxiety and strife into the world. What may be the harder part, I am asking you to commit to not returning evil for evil. You have and will encounter people who will respond out of their fear, their

anxiety, worry and pain. They may become mean in the way they try to satiate their fear and seize control in an uncontrollable situation like this pandemic. But as people of God we can respond with grace and love instead of the hostility that is being shown us. You don't have to accept bad behavior. But there is a difference between responding with a conversation and responding with a sledgehammer.

You get to choose. I think we all know that choosing to lash back or to pour out our anger at someone or something is the easy route. But choosing the path of anger and anxiety only sows more darkness into this world. Rather, I am calling you to choose the path of grace. The path of sharing Christ's love with an anxious world.

Will you do that? Will you strive to be the people who Jesus calls you to be? I believe you can, but I also believe we need to commit to doing this. That is one of the things that can help us to put the brakes on when the ugliness that we may feel like vomiting out on this world rises up. If we say we are going to intentionally be the people God wants us to be, pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and trust that Jesus will show us the way forward, we can make a difference in this world.

I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Gracious Jesus our Lord and Savior, you show us the way of your love and peace. Our world is in a time of upheaval and uncertainty. Use us to share your love and mercy. Show us how we can sow the seeds of your compassion. Let us reflect your light, your love and share your gentleness with this world. We pray this in your holy name. Amen. †



5ive QUESTIONS

with Megan E. (Will) Flower



Submitted photo

Megan on a recent trip to the Holy Land, where she stepped into the Dead Sea.

Megan E. (Will) Flower is a Somerset attorney and a member of Friedens Lutheran Church. She is the daughter of Greg and Amy Will. Her husband is Ben Flower. They have two beagles, Daisy and Abby. She agreed to share a little about herself with The Lutheran Letter.

Q: You are an attorney in Somerset. Does your faith impact your work, or do you try to separate the two?

A: It impacts my work every day. I refuse to separate the two. I was a criminal defense attorney for seven years and daily I would remind myself that those “criminals” as they’ve been labeled, are still children of God and still deserve love. Now that I’m an assistant district attorney, that thought process hasn’t changed. I just find myself praying for far more families and situations on this side of the fence. Regardless of my title, I don’t ever believe I’m above anyone, even those incarcerated or facing significant consequences for their actions. God loves every single one of us, despite our shortcomings, and we need to emulate that.

Q: What’s the biggest social problem in your community that you’d like to see solved?

A: Access to quality health care. We have nice health care “systems” in our area, but we’ve recently seen the closure of a cancer center as well as an OB-GYN unit at Somerset Hospital (UPMC Somerset). It’s upsetting that many of our local people have to travel so far to receive treatment for their conditions, especially when many are persons on a fixed budget who may not have the means to get there. We’ve seen a real trend of shutting down localized units in favor of outsourcing to bigger hospitals and campuses. While I understand the financial concerns of the health care systems, it really leaves

our citizens on the outside looking in.

Q: What’s the best “good news” story you recently read, seen or heard?

A: I just read a story on KDKA yesterday where police in Pittsburgh collaborated with Northside Common Ministries (a homeless shelter with food pantry and other outreach services) to put together Father’s Day gifts in a bag — a necktie, socks, hygiene products, etc. Definitely cried reading that. Friedens has had a relationship with Northside Common Ministries and these small gifts would definitely mean so much to those men at the shelter.

Q: What’s your favorite hobby and what do you like about it?

A: Reading — it is an absolute escape from the craziness that is my work life. I love fiction, nonfiction, mysteries, thrillers, memoirs. I’m reading a book called “Evicted” about evictions in Milwaukee and how broken our landlord/tenant dispute and housing system is. It’s a real eye-opener and a great complement to understanding what our nation is experiencing right now.

Q: What’s your favorite thing about your church?

A: The supportive people in it. Pastor John (Barichivich) had the idea for a porch pantry for people in need during quarantine and our members just took his idea and exploded it to be so much more than anticipated. I was up for an award with the Daily American a few times for favorite attorney and so many of our members let me know they voted for me. It’s just really sweet and inspiring when you see all these folks come together to just support one another and people they’ve never met. Our mission team continues to do local, regional and international work to assist others in need and be a light during some dark times. On my worst days, I know I can text or call any of the ladies I sit with on Sunday morning and they’ll be there for me. †

Home & Garden

From Humble Beginnings

By **COURTNEY KAZMER**

The Lutheran Letter Home & Garden Editor

Grapes are one of the most delicious foods.

Whether it be a handful of grapes, or grape jelly, I am eager to eat them.

Down on the farm there used to stand an old grape arbor. On that arbor grew tons of delicious grapes. I would walk up to that old arbor with my grandma and we would pick grapes, sometimes for her wonderful cooking and baking, and other times just to eat them right off the vines. Eating them right off the vine is the best way to enjoy them. I have never tasted a grape from the store quite like those ones. That arbor no longer stands – I miss those grapes and those precious memories with my grandma.

I asked Rick to build me a grape arbor in our backyard. He got right to thinking about how he would build it. One weekend in July we took a trip to Lowe's to get our supplies. We needed six 2x4's, six pieces of thin wood to build the lattice and two flat boards for the decorative pieces across the top of the arbor to complete our project. Rick did all the cutting and, well, let's just say I did all the supervising.

In a matter of hours we had ourselves a grape arbor. The following week we stained it with two different colors. For the lattice we used a darker oak color. For the posts and the boards across the top we used a natural color. I ordered the grape plants from Burgess Seed and Plant Co. out of Illinois. They took about three weeks to arrive. Instructions that came with the plants said that they won't yield fruit for two to three years. As I am writing this they have been in the ground



Staff photos by Courtney Kazmer

for about two weeks and we are starting to see signs of growth. The instructions also said that a mature vine will produce 20 pounds of grapes.

Our plants may not look like much of anything right now, but in a few years we will be rich in grapes and grape jelly. It will be well worth the wait. I am pleased with how it turned out.

Rick came up with the design all on his own. Hopefully with some tender love and care our grape vines will produce for years to come, just like the ones that were a part of my childhood. †



In the top photo is the grape arbor that Rick and I built. The bottom photo shows one of the humble little grape plants that arrived in the mail. In a few years it should be producing grapes.

AN ABIDING PRESENCE

(Editor's note: This summary of the life of Gustavus Adolphus was put together using numerous online sources. This feature is part of a series of stories about people depicted on stained-glass windows at the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg.)

Gustavus Adolphus is characterized in most accounts as a deeply religious ruler of Sweden in the early 1600s. He is considered a military innovator who held his men to high moral standards. He is said to have been a Christian, and held his army to Christian standards as well. He helped to make Sweden a European power, rather than just a regional one. He is considered to be one of the great military minds in history.

Here is a brief history of his life, pulled in part from Wikipedia and other online sources.

He is born in Sweden in 1594 after his father's death. He inherits several wars to deal with after taking power.

Conflict is part of his entire life. He nearly drowns in the Battle of Vittsjo, which was waged against Denmark.

More wars and treaties follow. In 1620 he marries Maria Eleanora.

More war comes in 1626 when Gustavus successfully uses infantry and cavalry.

In December of that year his daughter and successor, Christina, is born, but it comes amid conflict that seems to be a theme of his life.

In May of 1627 he is shot and seriously wounded in an assault on Danzig. Later that year he is wounded again at another battle, being shot twice.

Staff photo by Courtney Kazmer

Gustavus Adolphus fought wars for most of his life. He was deeply religious and held his men to high moral and Christian standards.

A truce in September of 1629 leads to Livonia and Estonia being ceded to Sweden.

But in May 1630 Gustavus arrives in Germany to enter the Thirty Years War, a harrowing religious war that saw Gustavus fight on the Protestant side against what they called Catholic oppression.

Political concerns eventually trumped religious reasons for the fighting as the war progressed, drawing in more European powers, according to the online reports.

The fighting continues until November 1632 when Gustavus Adolphus is killed in action at the Battle of Lutzen. Sweden, however, won the fight.

The war continued until the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. †

Clothes Closet Open to the Public



Submitted photo

The Clothes Closet at the St. Mark Lutheran Church, located along Main Street in Shanksville, is open to the public from 5 to 7 p.m. Mondays. Pictured are Alice Jean Musser, coordinator for the Clothes Closet, Debbie Musser and Martha Flick, as they organize the gently used clothing. Additionally, the Clothes Closet offers free clothes and household goods on regularly scheduled Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.



Submitted photo

An example of the shirts distributed in Johnstown.

Mt. Calvary Puts Grant to Work

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church in Johnstown is celebrating a \$500 congregational mission grant.

"It was greatly appreciated and put to good use," church member Mike Kozak said in a letter to the Allegheny Synod. The grants are possible because of a generous bequest to the synod from Pastor Chris Ramsey's estate, along with funds the synod council approved for the cause, according to a note on the synod's website from Jan. 7. The grants encourage and support congregations as they carry out new and creative ways to help their communities. At Mt. Calvary, the following items were purchased for the children in the community:

- 200 snack bags containing cookies, crackers, fruit bars and lollipops.
- An outdoor activity bin containing Frisbees, jump ropes, sidewalk chalk, kick balls and gear for a variety of other outdoor activities.
- 110 shirts that were distributed through August. †

FOOD

(Continued from Page 1)

The church has implemented a drive-thru food donation service under the church's portico.

People who need food drive through and pick up what they need.

Barichivich said people also drive through and drop off donations.

Church members, other community members and even the Dollar General across the street from

the church have helped with donations.

It is available around the clock daily.

"I do know it is well used," Barichivich said.

The church is also helping to fill the void for children through a backpack meal program.

On Thursdays parents can pick up a meal pack for their kids to help get them through the weekend. Pop-Tarts, macaroni and cheese and other food that is easily prepared are part of the

packages.

Parents drive up to the kitchen areas and the food is given to them there, Barichivich said.

The pastor said he is proud of how his congregation has stepped up to fill a need that he feels will be around for a while.

He anticipates being able to help.

"As long as the need continues," he said. †

HIKE

(Continued from Page 1)

The online meeting app has become popular for social and work events during the COVID-19 crisis.

The virtual pilgrimage retreat "Journeying Together While Apart" caught her eye, she said.

Led by a Presbyterian pastor, a group of eight participants from

Arizona to Maine gathered via Zoom in the morning and evening each day. They committed each day to taking one short walk in silence, to taking a hike wherever they were and to pray the vespers service, which was being streamed on Facebook Live. "During their times together, fellow travelers had shared readings, music, pictures from hikes and anecdotes, and the group has continued to meet for Zoom happy hours and support," Hetrick wrote in an email explaining the program.

Last year Hetrick started a hiking group of Grace members and friends called Happy Valley Hikers SC.

Since the hikes they had planned for the year were becoming less feasible, she decided to do smaller, more workable retreats, she said, which were inspired by the West Park project.

Hetrick reached out to hikers on Facebook when Centre County entered the state's "green," least-restrictive reopening phase, to see who would be interested.

They traveled separately to gather at Tiadaghton Trail. She also asked if anyone would like to hike separately, but in spirit with the group. So-



Submitted photo
Pastor Carolyn Hetrick on the trail.

cial distancing and other COVID-19 guidelines were observed.

Eight people hiked in person, and another four hiked "together in spirit."

It has been a hit with the hikers.

"As a Lutheran afraid of coffee hour, I couldn't be happier to have Happy Valley Hikers. Walking together in God's beautiful creation, there isn't the pressure to fill every silence -- the birds will do that for you. Conversation can move to places rougher around the edges, and everyone looks out for each other on the trail. Happy Valley Hikers is where I met my neighbor four houses down the street, and it is where I meet God the Creator of everything beyond humanity," hiker Kevin Honz said.

For hiker Alyson Hoegg, the trail time is the perfect remedy to weeks in seclusion. It was also a reminder of all the beauty that people sometimes forget about.

"Following a long break from contact with many people, the opportunity to get out in nature was a welcomed relief. Being able to hike, share stories and time together as a group was absolutely amazing," Hoegg said.

Hiker Tara Banerjee summed up her sentiments concisely: "I'm really looking forward to the next time!"

Using Grace's new podcast, "Pocketful of Grace," Hetrick created a companion resource for the hikes in the form of a 20-minute podcast of prayers, music, scripture and reflection that hikers can utilize in any way that supported their journey.

The podcast draws upon stories of creation in "Celtic Treasure" by J. Philip Newell, poetry from Wendell Berry and an excerpt from "The Guide to Forest Bathing." Recorded in her backyard you can hear the birds singing. Those not hiking with the group posted updates on where they had hiked.

For more information, visit Happy Valley Hikers SC on Facebook.

To hear the hiking podcast and more, you can find "Pocketful of Grace" on Spotify, iTunes and Tune-In/Alexa. It is also available at www.glc-faithformation.org. Look for the "Pocketful of Grace" icon. You can also listen to podcasts at www.glcpa.org. The podcast website link is www.buzzsprout.com/1110440. †

Go in PEACE

For this issue Courtney wrote about the grape arbor we made during the summer.

I can't think of a better example of great things coming from humble beginnings. The grape plants we ordered by mail resembled twigs when they arrived (see Page 8.)

They are already showing signs of growth. They are starting the journey to reach the potential God intended for them.

The conditions won't always be ideal. Harsh winters will threaten to freeze new buds. Droughts will dry the ground. Heavy rains will threaten to rot the roots.

Disease and blight may try to take hold.

But I have confidence the little sprouts will grow.

It's all part of the plan. Perhaps the trials that the plant endures during growth will help it to make better fruit in later years. Everything seems to be made stronger by what it endures.

There will be tough times. But grape plants, like everything else, will be OK with some care.

— 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).



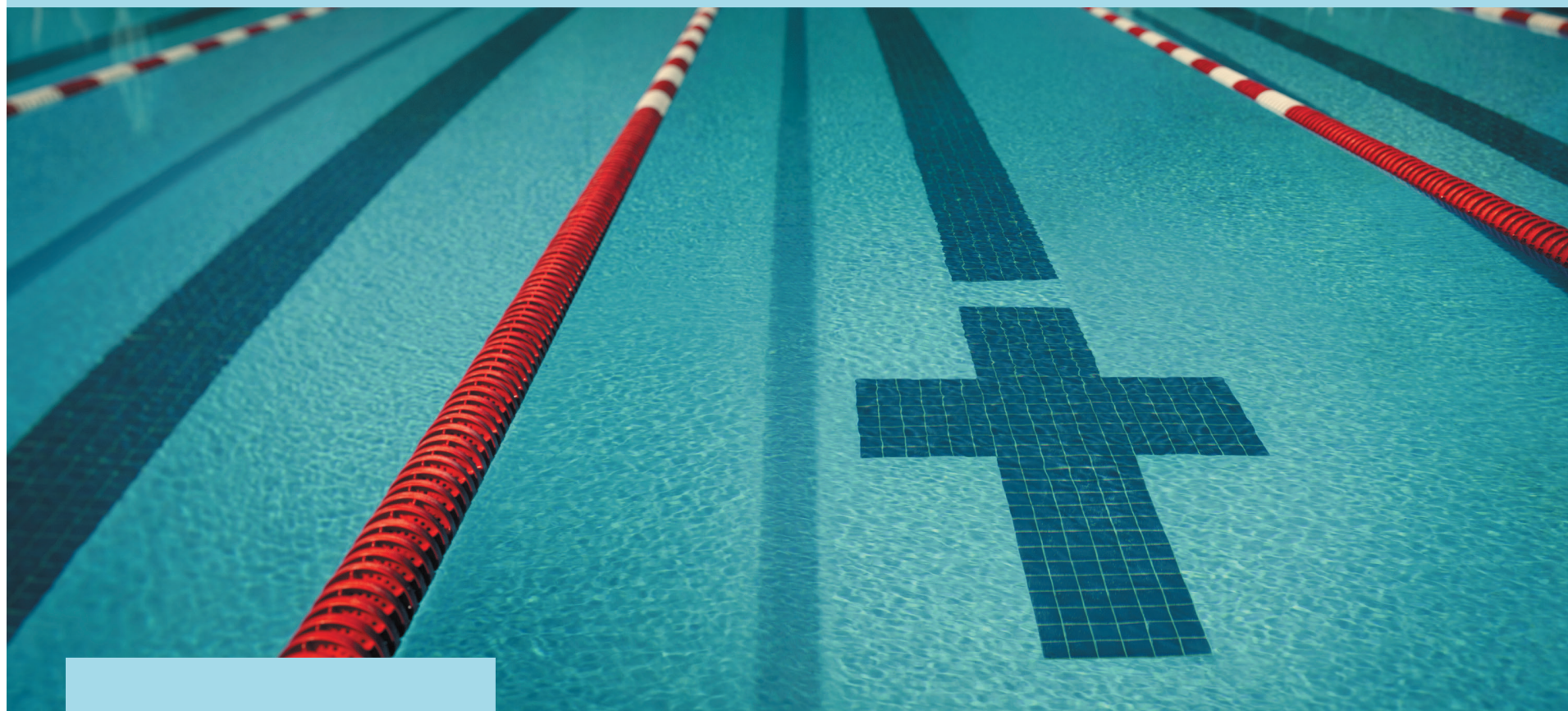
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Camp Agapé in Hickory, Pennsylvania

Used an MIF loan to add classroom space. Now, along with the pool which the campers love splashing around in, they have a place to learn Bible stories—proving yet again that God's work needs no vacation.

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