

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital



The Winter Edition

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HELPING OUR FRIENDS FROM KENYA



Submitted photo

The new sanctuary at the Malindi Lutheran Parish in Kenya. Donations from the Allegheny Synod helped to make the new church possible.

Synod Helps KELC Endure COVID, Flooding

PASTOR ELISA OSMAN

St. John Lutheran Church, Bellefonte

The Allegheny Synod is helping Kenyans as they deal with COVID-19 and severe flooding.

The synod Global Ministries Team was made aware that in the area where

Pastor Catherine Ngina Musau serves in Kenya, there had been unprecedented rainfall. This rainfall caused two nearby rivers to flood severely, taking lives and homes, a church building, as well as washing away food stores and entire fields of crops.

(See **HELP**, Page 6)

Two thousand twenty-one carries a lot of hope. The new year will hopefully see the end of the pandemic and the beginning of a peaceful and prosperous period. ¶ Maybe that's a lot for which to hope. It can sometimes be frustrating, and hard to be patient enough to hold out hope throughout long, dark times. ¶ The Bible has many examples that can help. Pastor Julie Holm, of Brush Valley Fusion of Faith, and Pastor Scott E. Schul at Grace Lutheran Church in State College, offered some insight on hope, and some examples of fresh starts in the Bible.

(See **FRESH**, Page 4)



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

RICK KAZMER
The Lutheran Letter

The LUTHERAN Letter

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Bishop Michael Rhyne
701 Quail Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602-3010
Phone: 814-942-1042 • Fax: 814-941-9259
www.AlleghenySynod.org •
email: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor Rick Kazmer

Copy Editor Courtney Kazmer

Email: r9remzak@hotmail.com

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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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CONTACT US

Newsletter: r9remzak@hotmail.com

Bishop Rhyne: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

Bishop Emeritus Pile: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

Rev. Paula Schmitt: Paula.Schmitt@AlleghenySynod.com

Michelle Bossler: Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com



God Remains in Control

Dear Friends,

As we moved into the last days of 2020 and the first days of 2021, this opening passage from the Gospel of John has been on my mind. It is the Gospel lesson we hear on Christmas Day. It is St. John making sure we understand Jesus. John tells us in the opening of his gospel that Jesus is the living and eternal Word of God who is God. He is the creator who brought all light and life into being. John is making sure we understand that the one who we call Jesus is the eternal God who became flesh to save us.

In 2020 that is a message that I have needed to hear. I needed to be reminded in this hectic year that the one who was with us was no one less than the God who made heaven and earth.

In times like these I have taken comfort in knowing that nothing is more powerful than the God who made us. Jesus who conquered sin, death and the devil is more powerful than pandemics, social unrest, natural disasters and the evils of racism that we have seen this year. No matter what happens, Jesus is in our corner and will get us through these hardships. This, too, shall pass, and the living God, Jesus Christ, will get us through these storms.

I wish the realization that the Living God is with us meant that life would be easy. Unfortunately, God doesn't take all our problems away. We still live in this world where there is pain and suffering. We know that we often suffer as we live in this world. I am especially aware of this as we hear more reports of COVID-19 infections and deaths in the territory of our synod. A number of

our congregations have lost members to this virus. Many of us know people who are ill, or who have died because of this pandemic.

The promise for us is not that God will make all our problems go away.

The promise is that God will not go away from us no matter how bad our problems get. For those of us who grieve the loss of friends or loved ones, it is God who holds us in those times. It is God who sends friends and family to walk with us and stand with us. It is God in Jesus Christ who promises to be with us always and until the end.

That is something that gives me hope. No matter how bad it gets, I know that our Lord and our God is faithful and with us. I know that I will never be alone. I know that the power of the Holy Spirit is working in and around my life. I fully believe that God is at work in all things to lead me and you where we need to go.

In the end, I know that my Lord and God is in charge of my life. No matter what, I know that I will be with our Lord Jesus. Since I know the ending is the blessing of eternal life with our Savior, it makes these tough times a little more bearable.

God was truly with us. I needed to hold onto the fact that the Jesus who claimed you and I in the waters of baptism is no one less than the God who brought all things into being.

No matter what awful things came our way. God is not only in charge, but God is with us in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who is walking with us and who promises to be with us always.

(See **BISHOP**, Page 3)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” — John 1: 1-5

BISHOP

(Continued from Page 2)

I needed to remember that no matter what happened, I belonged to the Lord and this God would get me, and all of us, to the other side of this year.

I thank God, especially this year, that you and I are known and belong to our Lord Jesus. I don't know what any of us would have done if we had to go through this alone. In Jesus Christ, God promises that we will never be alone and that nothing will separate us from the God who brought all things into being.

May God's grace and peace be with you as we cross the threshold into 2021.

I pray that you are well as we begin this

new year. I suspect that many of you join me in thanking God that we have gotten to the other side of 2020.

In the early fall I was able to lead worship in one of our congregations where I observed that if you want to know what an extraordinary year this was, take note that we haven't heard anything about the "Murder Hornets" in months. The story of giant hornets invading the U.S. would have been a major story in any other year. But the murder hornets got swallowed up by a news cycle that was filled with so much noise. It has been quite a year.

As we think about this past year, I would like to lift up to you some gifts that this

year of strife has given us. I think that we have been blessed with two things in the past year. The first is that our normal routines have been changed to the extent that many of us have had to slow down, take time with friends and family, and step off the hamster wheel of "busy" that we too often find ourselves on.

The second thing is that we have learned that we really are not in control. God is in control. I believe that both of these learnings are spiritual gifts, which we need to make sure we hold. †

May God bless you,

— Bishop Michael

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Soup(er) Job in Shanksville



Submitted photo

The Thrivent Action Team at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Shanksville held a soup sale in the autumn to help people in need in the community. The soup was vegetable beef and vegetable with no meat. Pictured are church members getting ready for the soup sale. In the front row are: Kay Dively, Charlette Smouse, Darla Shaulis, Pauline Walker, Alice Jean Musser and Patricia Platt. In the back row are: Cathy Lowery, Diane Harmon holding Christian Harmon, Robin Lambert, Gayle Miller and Chris Meyer.

FRESH

(Continued from Page 1)

Holm referenced Luke 1:46-49. "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.'"

Holm said Mary was dealing with a teen pregnancy, a betrothed husband who knew he was not the father and with the social problems that would greet the birth.

"It must have felt to Mary like the world was ending, and there must have been a huge amount of stress. But in her wisdom and her cousin Elizabeth's faith, they trusted in God and that God had the ability to turn around even the worst of situations

into a brand-new start; a new start beyond their wildest dreams," Holm said. "This is and will be a dark winter for us, but out of the most stressful, most difficult situations God can and will make not just a new start, but one that is magnificent. The Mighty One has, and will do great things for us, and holy is God's name indeed."

Schul looked to Psalm 4:8 for insight on how to deal with uncertain times. He said Psalms has long been the prayer book of God's people.

"In that one book of scripture one can find the full spectrum of human emotion, from joyful praise to bitter lament. Martin Luther treasured the Psalter because, in his words, 'it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly ... that it might well be called a little Bible.'" Schul

wrote in an email.

During the pandemic, Schul said he has dwelled in Psalms. He said the final verse of Psalm 4 has resonated with him. It is traditionally prayed at bedtime.

"I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety," the verse reads.

Schul explained why he finds the verse comforting in uncertain times.

"This verse frees me of the illusion that I can fix or control all of the negative things in our world. It refocuses my eyes on Christ crucified, settles my weary heart and enables me to sleep in peace, confident that the Lord who loves us so dearly has not forgotten us and will bring relief to his beloved people. I pray that this verse likewise blesses you." †

Remember in Prayer

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

JANUARY

Week 1: Ferguson Township Lutheran Ministry: Pine Hall Lutheran and Gatesburg Lutheran, State College

Week 2: St. John Lutheran Church, Sinking Valley

Week 3: St. James Lutheran Church, Huntingdon

Week 4:

Boswell-Benscreek Parish: St. Andrew, Boswell and Benscreek

FEBRUARY

Week 1: Trinity Lutheran, State College

Week 2: Christ Trinity Parish: Christ Casebeer, Somerset and Laurel Trinity, Jennerstown

Week 3: St. James, Altoona

Week 4: Mt. Calvary Lutheran, Johnstown



School districts have been using a mix of virtual and in-person education to teach students during the pandemic. It's been a struggle in many ways. Here's one way an Allegheny Synod church helped students at the start of the school year.

Bethany Says Lunch is on Us

TERRY KOCH

*Bethany Lutheran Church,
Altoona*

Bethany Lutheran Church in Altoona held their annual back-to-school giveaway on Aug. 15. The school supply giveaway and free lunch event was appreciated by all who benefited. Donations of school supplies were greatly appreciated by the organizers. We had more this year than in the past.

The school supplies were donated by the members of Bethany and some church friends. Prep work took place on Aug. 12.

There were eight members present to help pack all the school supplies that were collected at the church. We packed 78 backpacks and an additional 44 packs of school supplies in baggies.

We also were given 19 backpacks filled with supplies from Wehnwood United Methodist.

Traci Naugle was able to obtain a grant through Thrivent Financial to cover the cost of the food for the free lunch giveaway.

Each lunch included a sandwich, potato salad, fruit, cookie, crackers and bottles of water. Saturday morning work began early as a crew came in to prepare the lunches for the giveaway. We made over 100 lunches. By the time the giveaway opened up there were some



Submitted photo

Pictured are Maryann Eckenrode, Becky Twine, Traci Naugle, Jodi Johnson, Cheryl Harpster, Sue Pry, Rhonda Barry, Pastor Drew McCaffrey and Debbie Lechner. Not pictured are Terry Koch (photographer) and Dennis Fasekas.

folks waiting in line.

There were a few backpacks and packets of school supplies leftover.

These were given to a local elementary school for students who do not have supplies. There

were also a dozen lunches remaining, and these were given to a teen shelter in Altoona. They were very appreciative of our donation to them.

It was a highly successful event. We gave away about 90

backpacks filled with school supplies and 90 lunches to the youth in the neighborhood. Thank you to those who donated school supplies and for your time in making this a very successful event. †



Submitted photo



Some more photos of the new sanctuary, and of some of the Kenyans who will be using the food supplies bought with help from the Allegheny Synod.

HELP

(Continued from Page 1)

In the aftermath, people were left struggling to find enough for one daily meal, much less deal with the devastating impacts of the pandemic, job loss and flood destruction.

The Kenya Evangelical Church is the Allegheny Synod's companion synod. Musau was scheduled to visit the United States, and possibly the Allegheny Synod in the spring, but the pandemic forced the trip to be canceled.

That hasn't stopped the two groups of faithful from finding ways to connect.

In May the Allegheny Synod sought to provide assistance to our sisters and brothers in Kenya.

A number of people and congregations throughout the synod rose to the occasion.

In September we sent just short of \$10,000 to provide food and other materials needed for recovery.

In response to our giving, Musau sent a letter of thanks, saying: "On behalf of the Malindi Lutheran Parish, I wish to extend sincere thanks for the flood support. This support came at the right time when people were experiencing difficulties in their homesteads and even worshipping under a tree due to natural [disaster] circumstance. Economically, we are not stable due to the economic situation here in our Country."

Through our gifts, Musau, the new bishop of the KELC, pastor Johnes Kutuk Ole Meliyio, and the two evangelists who work with Musau, were able to distribute food supplies to 225 people: maize flour, beans,

canola oil and rice. Bar soap was also provided. The recipients shared with their neighbors, so more people were fed.

The funding also provided maize seeds for 55 families to plant new crops.

The money also helped the congregation in Uyombo begin the rebuilding process for their sanctuary. The congregation was able to begin worship inside their new building on All Saints Sunday, Nov. 1.

Thank you, people of faith throughout the Allegheny Synod, for reaching out to our companions with the kindness and compassion of Christ. Your gifts are life-giving to people who were suffering greatly.

Your offerings have become a visual sign of the God who is love. Thank you for being one visible answer to the prayer "Give us this day our daily bread." †

A STEP in the RIGHT DIRECTION

ST. PETER'S LUTHERAN CHURCH HOLDS SHOE DRIVE

St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Osterburg participated in a shoe drive fundraiser Aug. 2 through Sept. 30, to raise funds for their outreach program and the women's organization. The congregation collected 1,875 pairs of shoes and earned \$485 through Funds2Orgs. St. Peter's earned funds based on the total weight of the gently worn, used and new shoes collected. All shoes will be distributed throughout the Funds2Orgs network of micro-enterprise (small businesses) partners. Funds2Orgs works with micro-entrepreneurs in helping them create, maintain and grow small businesses in developing countries where economic opportunity and jobs are limited. Proceeds from the sales of the shoes collected in shoe drive fundraisers are used to feed, clothe and house their families. One budding entrepreneur in Haiti even earned enough to send her son to law school. †



Submitted photos

Volunteers help with the shoe fundraising project at St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Osterburg.

Home & Garden

Get Stitching

Overcoming Fears and Learning How to Sew

COURTNEY KAZMER
Home & Garden Editor

About two years ago I purchased a Singer sewing machine.

I had only ever watched my grandma sew on a machine. I had never tried it myself. But it's a craft that I have always wanted to learn and master. Unfortunately, if you would ask me what I have learned about it in the last two years, you would hear crickets. In truth, I have been a little intimidated by it. When I look at it I feel anxiety. Will I break it? Will it bite me? How do I put the thread in it? How in the world do I even turn it on?

These are just a few of the concerns I have had about sewing. The pandemic, like everything else, has complicated matters. Family members who could give me some pointers can't stop by for a visit. But I am determined to learn the trade in 2021. My goal is to eventually make some of my own clothing. That, of course, is a long way off. For now, I need to get it out and do some simple stitching. My Singer is model No. 3337. It has 29 different stitches, one-step buttonhole, top drop-in bobbin and an LED light, among other things. Don't ask me what that all means just yet. Hopefully by this time next year I will have it all mastered. I will keep you all updated on my progress (at least on the stuff that turns out half decent). If anyone has suggestions that would help new sewers like me, send them to r9remzak@hotmail.com. Even words of encouragement are appreciated. †



Staff photo by Courtney Kazmer

This is my Singer sewing machine. I am hoping that learning how to use it is as "simple" as it says on the machine.



**ALLEGHENY LUTHERAN
SOCIAL MINISTRIES**

We Touch Lives

Thank You

**Your support and prayers
over the past year are appreciated
by our residents and staff team members.**

**Your gifts of homemade masks, greeting
cards, and financial support provided
safety to our residents, clients,
and staff team members while
keeping their spirits high.**

We wish you a happy and healthy New Year.

Gloria De Dios — Latinx Project Making Progress

LUTHERAN LETTER

Gloria De Dios, the Allegheny Synod's Latinx new start, is off and running.

The goal of the project is to have a new Lutheran congregation in the synod focusing on the Latin community, and those who speak Spanish primarily.

"As Christians in the Lutheran tradition, we have a mission from our Lord to go out and share the message of life that is found in Jesus Christ. When Martin Luther was calling for reforms five hundred years ago, one of the reforms he called for was that the worship service to be in the congregation's common language rather than always being in Latin," Pastor Paul Tomkiel, of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Pine Grove Mills, said. He is involved with the project.

"A couple of years ago, the Holy Spirit called my attention to how few opportunities there are for Christians who speak Spanish as their primary language to be able to worship God in Spanish in the State College area. And so, through the work and passion of several members of St. Paul in Pine Grove Mills, we began to explore this project and created Gloria de Dios."

The pandemic has complicated progress, but in November photos of a gathering were shared on Facebook.

The new start must gain approval through an ELCA vetting process to be official. Tomkiel is working with Pastor Becca Ehrlich, the synod's interim director of evangelical mission, on the project.

Tomkiel said earlier this year that the



Photos from the Allegheny Synod Facebook page

These are scenes from a Gloria De Dios gathering in November. It's a new start for the Latinx Faithful in the State College area.

group is working through COVID-19 guidelines to make progress during the pandemic.

"Just as we are doing with most everything in the Church these days, it is going to take imagination, innovation and invention to do this work. Even though we are facing these hurdles, we still have our holy calling to share the Gospel and we can still answer our calling. It might just look different than we first thought it might look."

The group earned a \$6,000 grant for the project in Centre County. †



Philipp Jakob Spener, a Hero of Pietism

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

Philipp Jakob Spener was born in France in 1635 and would in his life become a leading figure in German Pietism.

Pietism was a movement among Protestants in the 17th and 18th centuries based on improving oneself and acting upright.

Between 1651-59 when he was studying in Strassburg, Spener began thinking about reforming Lutheran orthodox practices.

"In particular, he objected to the rigidity of ecclesiastical structures and the lack of moral discipline among the clergy," according to the Encyclopedia Britannica. When Spener was 31 he became superintendent of the Lutheran Church at Frankfurt am Main. It was there that he developed his school of piety.

The focus was on personal spiritual growth, prayer and the Bible.

"His extensive correspondence with the German clergy contributed to the growth of Pietism, as did his major work, 'Pia Desideria' (1675; Pious Desires)," according to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

AN ABIDING PRESENCE

**Philipp
Jakob
Spener**

"Pia Desideria" outlined Pietism and put Spener on the map. Many considered his focus on practice extreme. But Spener was determined to rectify what he thought to be harmful doctrine.

In 1686 he earned a high honor in the German Lutheran Church, chaplain at Dresden.

His devotion to Pietism soon drew attacks, however, from orthodox Lutherans at the University of Leipzig.

"(A)nd from the Saxon court, whose elector, John George III, had been rebuked by Spener for drunkenness," according to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

In 1691 he moved to Berlin to become provost of St. Nicholas Church.

In Berlin Spener found the support that enabled him to carry out the reforms he sought. "By the time of Spener's death, Pietism was well established in Germany, and its influence reached to England and eventually to the British colonies in America," according to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Spener died in 1705 in Berlin. †

‘God’s economy operates out of abundance.’

(Editor’s note: This is a personal stewardship story from Pastor Traci Marriott, of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Martinsburg. She shared the story this past year on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page.)

For many years the pastors of a few congregations would take their confirmation students to Camp Sequanota in the winter for an overnight retreat to study a topic of the catechism. Several years ago, we decided to expand that retreat to two nights and invited other congregations to be part of it. It had been fairly inexpensive to house, feed and supply 12 or 15 of us for one night, but when we considered the additional expense of adding more people, more meals and an extra night’s lodging, we were concerned that the higher cost would prevent some families from participating. One of the ways we thought we could help keep the price low was to add a note to the packing list allowing the students to bring a snack to share. With that invitation, those who had plenty could contribute, but it wouldn’t seem like an obligation for a family on a tighter budget. By the time all the students got to the retreat, the snack table was filled to overflowing with homemade cookies, chips, pretzels and candy, enough that even after snacking all weekend, most of them still had leftovers to take home. This was a beautiful illustration of several aspects of faithful stewardship:

- First, we are gifted with resources for the purpose of sharing them. Not one of the students was unwilling to share what they brought, and most of them enjoyed trying what someone else shared.
- Second, when we give generously out of our abundance, we allow more people to participate in our community who might otherwise go without. If we had charged even a little bit more to cover the cost of snacks, we might have priced the retreat out of reach of some of the students.
- Third, when we provide people an opportunity to give, we welcome far more ideas, gifts, abilities and energy than if we only allow one or two people to run the show. Had I shopped for snack food, there is no way we would have enjoyed the variety of what all the different students contributed.

It is human nature to look at the world from a perspective of scarcity; but God’s economy operates out of abundance. We are gifted so that, by gifting others, we all have enough. That is how we live out our communal calling where we discover that we are better together than we are apart. †

BEFORE *you* GO

Don’t Be Afraid to See God in Your Life

This, by now for many, is a familiar story. In December I had a close aunt who became ill with COVID-19 and ended up in the hospital on a ventilator. Throughout her struggle, no one could see her. Unfortunately, she lost the battle with the disease. It has been a devastating blow to the family. At the same time I was struggling with deciding whether to make a career change, after working for about 15 years with the same company. After a lot of prayer and contemplation with family members, I decided to make the move. But it was a very hard decision. I had moments of regret shortly afterward, and that was coupled with the constant feeling of loss because my aunt had died. Shortly after she died I got a text message from a church program that sends daily Bible verses and inspirational messages. It said: “Your future needs you ... your past does not!” It felt like a direct message to me, even though it went to many people in the area. The church is in Ebensburg. I am not a member of the church, nor do I speak regularly with the pastor. I truly feel the message was sent from God to help me feel confident about the future. I also clearly imagined those words of advice coming from my aunt. I could even hear her saying them. Many people will say that I am looking for support wherever it can be found because the mind naturally seeks comfort. But I believe my mind was created by God. Is it not sensible that it would naturally gravitate toward and notice other things originating from its source? My mind is seeking comfort. It’s also seeking God, my creator. He can be found in even simple messages that others choose to ignore. Don’t be afraid to see God in your life. Don’t ever let anybody tell you that what you consider to be a personal message from God is a coincidence of your own making. He remains all around us. See you in the next edition — Rick Kazmer

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