

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

# Digital

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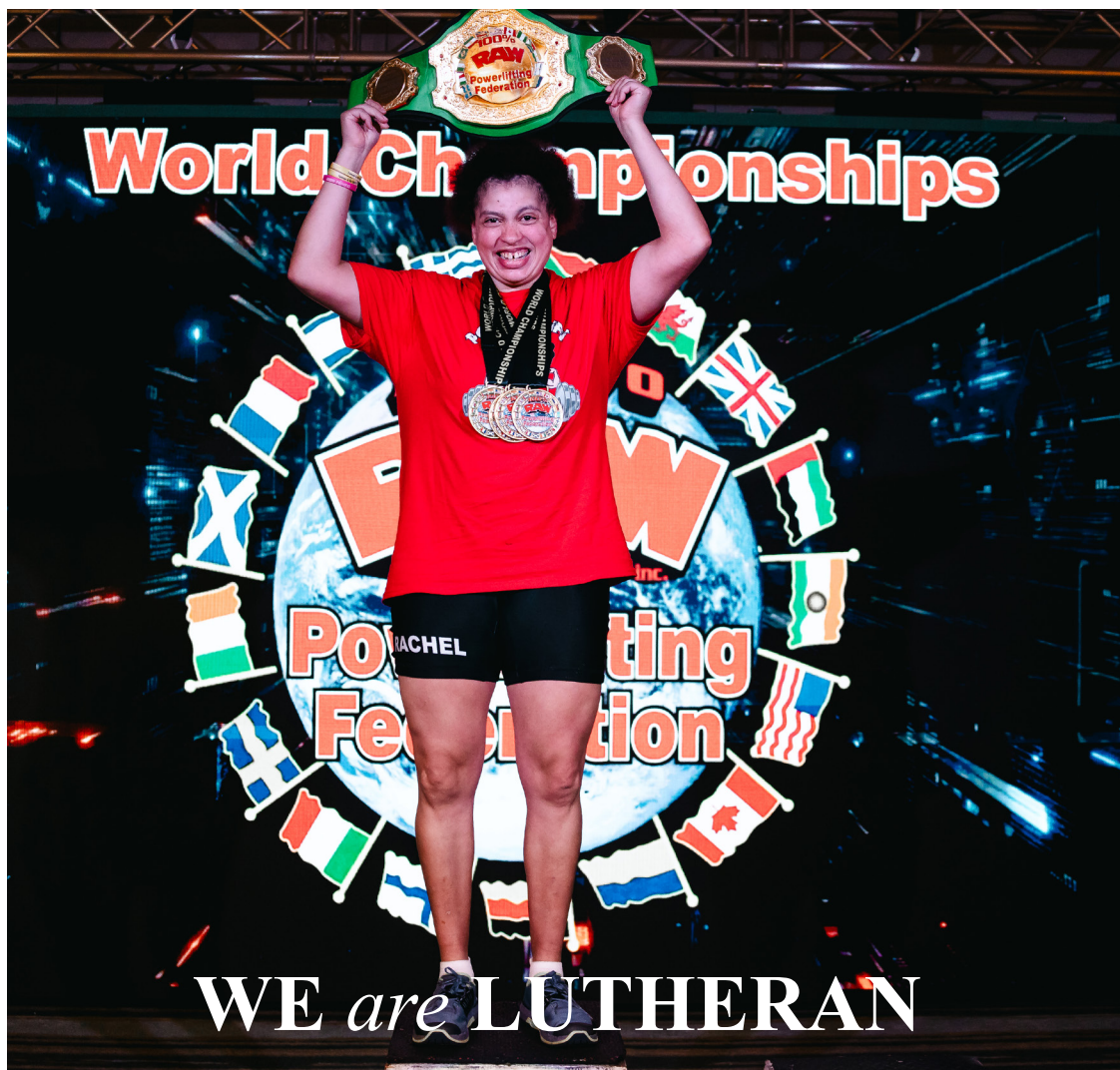
## 'I Thank You God For Being Here With Me'

*Clearfield power-lifter  
staying focused during  
competitions*

**By RICK KAZMER**  
Editor

When some of Pittsburgh native Rachel Clarke's friends on her high school basketball team got involved with power-lifting in 2005, she decided to pick up the dumbbells herself.

(See CLARKE 1 Page 5)



Submitted photo  
St. John, Clearfield, congregation member Rachel Clarke with some of her power-lifting winnings.



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

tend

PAGE  
SIX

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

is published bi-monthly by the  
**ALLEGHENY SYNOD OF THE ELCA**

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## OUR MISSION

Inviting people to love one another.

## OUR VISION

All creation living in harmony with Christ.

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

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

Send files to [LutheranLetter@AlleghenySynod.com](mailto:LutheranLetter@AlleghenySynod.com).

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Allegheny Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

# Change of Seasons

*"For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven."*

— Ecclesiastes 3:1



**Interim Bishop  
Barbara J. Collins**

As I drive across the mountains and through the valleys of the Allegheny Synod territory, I am struck by the view created by the return of Spring.

It is stunning to see the trees and flowers in bloom, grass turning green again, and birds returning to their northern home.

This is one change in creation's seasons to which we typically look forward. But the seasons and times of every matter in life of which Ecclesiastes speaks are more complex than watching the seasons of nature come and go. In some cases, they are changes not readily welcomed. Our synod has been living through change, some of which was unexpected.

Our congregations, leaders, and communities are all in the midst of change, some of which has been planned and appreciated, some of which has been unpredicted and challenging.

For the past seven months I have been listening to the positive and negative effects of change that this synod has experienced. And I would like to add my own rendition of Ecclesiastes' sentence structure of parallels.

I believe it is a season and time: for us to show up and be present for one another more, and stay isolated less; for us to listen to one another more, and talk at each other less; for us to see one another as partners in God's mission more, and as competitors less.

(See BISHOP, Page 12)



# Scene of the Edition



Mt. Calvary,  
Johnstown, after  
a Saturday eve-  
ning service in  
early March.

Photo by Pastor Kevin Shock

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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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**Remember  
in Prayer**

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

**MAY**

**Week 1:** Trinity  
Lutheran, Sidman

**Week 2:** St. Luke  
Lutheran, Mt.  
Union

**Week 3:** St. Mark  
Lutheran,  
Pleasant Gap

**Week 4:**  
Mountain Saints  
Parish: St. John,  
Addison; St. Paul,  
Fort Hill; Mt.  
Carmel,  
Meyersdale; and  
Mt. Tabor, Garrett

**JUNE**

**Week 1:** Mt.  
Pleasant, Mattie

**Week 2:** St.  
Michael Lutheran,  
Berlin

**Week 3:** Mt.  
Zion Lutheran,  
Glasgow

**Week 4:** St.  
Stephen  
Lutheran,  
McAlevey's Fort

*Building Healthier Communities***By THE LUTHERAN LETTER**

St. Mark Lutheran Church near Howard hosted the Penn State Community Engagement team on Feb. 23. Several members of St. Mark participated in the gathering that was centered on the Penn State team's desire to launch a Dinner Table Talks initiative.

The purpose of the session was to gather feedback on the idea of "Dinner Table Talks," a concept created by Dr. Michael McShane, an Internal Medicine physician with Penn State Health.

As both a researcher and a doctor practicing medicine in the areas surrounding State College, McShane is interested in the health of rural communities. To better serve folks living in these areas, he wants to learn what health topics are of greatest concern to them, and how health care researchers can shape what they do to address these concerns.

The goal of Dinner Table Talks is to understand what is important to rural communities, allowing researchers to focus on the health care topics that matter most to these individuals and their families.

St. Mark agreed to host the initial session. Building on the concept of "commensality" — the practice of eating together — the Penn State team shared a meal with St. Mark members and created a setting where true listening and understanding could happen.

Attendees provided thoughtful comments that will shape future events, ultimately making sure that these sessions provide a welcoming environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their voices.

"These type of gatherings are something, I believe, churches can hold on a variety of issues and topics, not just health care," St. Mark pastor David Pencek said.

"It was a good gathering where the people from Penn State asked a few questions but were mostly there to listen to what the people who attended had to say."

In his discussions with the Penn State team, Pencek said that Penn State is making a strong effort in ensuring that the concerns and needs of rural communities are heard and addressed.

Penn State's team said that by honoring these narratives, it aims to learn about community concerns that will guide researchers in their pursuit of answers to important health questions, ultimately forging a path of togetherness that leads to a healthier future for all Pennsylvanians. †

# CLARKE 1

*(Continued from Page 1)*

She likely didn't realize at the time that the decision would lead to a successful endeavor that has produced numerous awards during the years. Clarke, 37, is now a Clearfield resident and a member of St. John Lutheran, where she helps to distribute bulletins and to collect tithes. She also sings in a Saturday night group.

She noted her dad, Greg Clarke, and her two brothers, Chris and Josh, as immediate family helping to empower her.

Her power-lifting prowess started immediately, as she was competing in 2006.

"And I kept at it for a long time," Clarke wrote.

She took a break from lifting for 10 years, revisiting it in 2021. But a Cross-Fit injury derailed her plans for a while.

In 2023, she began what might be her most successful stretch in the weight room, breaking dead lift records.

"I did break national/world records in April 2024 and broke it again in Nov. 2024," she wrote, adding that she lifted 468.4 pounds.

"My favorite lift is deadlift 100%."

She isn't taking it easy on other lifts, either. She can bench 165.5 pounds, and back squat 352.7. Clarke's latest meet was in April.

God is with her throughout all of the heavy lifting.

"I make up my own prayer when I go out on the platform. 'I thank you God for being here with me on the platform. Let's show what I have been training for. Let's go!'"

With the Lord's help, Clarke has



**Rachel Clarke**

stacked up numerous awards during the years. But she credits God for everything.

"Thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for being with me every step of the way," she wrote.

Speaking of Jesus, celebrating his birthday on Christmas is among Clarke's favorite seasons at church.

When not lifting, Clarke enjoys swimming, singing, and dancing, along with hanging out with her friends. She is a nutritionist and a personal trainer and is working on a power-lifting instructor course. She also enjoys being a member of St. John's.

"I love my church," she wrote.

**(See CLARKE 2, Page 6)**





# It's Time for Tend

By **HANNA WEIMER**  
Camp Sequanota

What is the Tend Festival all about?

The Tend Festival is a community of people who gather together with God to care for themselves and each other.

The festival is all about living, learning, and loving together.

The Tend Festival will help you tend and nurture your spirit for life as God's disciples.

Our lives are busy. Our culture feels like it is in chaos.

Our future feels uncertain and anxious. Our hearts and spirits need some care. This year's festival will form a holy space for us.

We have asked speakers and leaders to present on a variety of topics, including music, self-care, spiritual practices, the natural world, and art.

Check out [this two-minute video](#) from a past festival to see what it's about.

(See TEND, Page 7)

## CLARKE 2

### WE ARE LUTHERAN

(Continued from Page 5)

**THE LUTHERAN LETTER:** What's your earliest memory of a Lutheran Church?

**RACHEL CLARKE:** I had an amazing time in church when I was little. We learned a lot of stuff from the Bible, and we had fun doing it, too.

**THE LUTHERAN LETTER:** What would you tell someone considering attending a Lutheran church for the first time?

**RACHEL CLARKE:** We would love to have you join this family of God with open arms and you will have a lot of fun learning about God here.

**THE LUTHERAN LETTER:** What are you praying for the most lately?

**RACHEL CLARKE:** Right now, I am praying for a good outcome for this meet, April 12, 2025. The meet is in York. †

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# REGISTERING FOR THE TEND FESTIVAL



Scan the QR code and **register online** today!

Scan the QR code to **learn more about** the Tend Festival!



# TEND

*(Continued from Page 6)*

## A Time for Recreation, Rest, and Conversation

Living life in community means digging deeper into the challenges of our time, then engaging in dialogue with other passionate people to seek potential solutions and paths forward. This extended weekend will include conversation, individual creative experiences, music, spiritual practices, self-care, recreation, natural stewardship, food, worship, fellowship, and time to just relax.

### Should I bring the whole family?

Yes! Children, youth, and families are welcome! Sequanota staff will be leading activities during the mornings so that adults can attend the sessions of their choosing.

### Engaging Session Options

- Nurturing Ourselves in Nature
- Animal Rescue as Care Creation
- Creating a Community Art Mural
- Defining Christian Nationalism
- Faith Formation in the 21 Century
- Handbells for ALL
- Colorful Cooking in the Kitchen

### Program and Lodging

Find program and lodging pricing [here](#). Pastors, invite two or more members to come with you from your congregation and your registration fee will be free!

Register today for the Tend Festival and join us as we dedicate time this extended weekend for rest, recreation, and conversation.

We'll see you in June! Have any questions?

Call us at the office at 814-629-6627 or email us at [contact@sequanota.com](mailto:contact@sequanota.com).

[Register here.](#) †

# Framing Faith for the Future Campaign

## *Step One Accomplished*

By **PASTOR NATHAN PILE**

*Camp Sequanota Executive Director*

In 2014, the Sequanota Board of Directors launched an ambitious Capital Campaign to renovate several well-loved facilities across the 400-acre campus.

It had been over 40 years since a campaign had been attempted at Sequanota.

The massive goal of \$1.2 million was set to help upgrade almost every major facility to meet modern camp expectations.

The project list included a major renovation to the camp swimming pool, upgrades of appliances in both commercial kitchens, digital infrastructure for high speed internet and improved phone systems, cabin and retreat center improvements, and water/sewer system enhancements.

These projects were necessary upgrades to keep the Sequanota experience safe and comfortable.

As the renovation projects were completed, there were additional construction outlays to accomplish the facility upgrades.

The board secured a significant loan

to complete the remaining improvements in 2017-2018.

Being fiscally responsible, the board guided the staff to seek a complete repayment of the loan before continuing with any other new major building or renovating projects.

In December 2024, Sequanota received the final contributions to make complete repayment of the capital loan and bring our first major capital campaign to a successful end.

These contributions return Sequanota to a debt-free state. In total, the Framing Faith for the Future campaign exceeded the Board's goals and raised \$1.5 million dollars.

Thank you, people of the Allegheny Synod, for completing this huge goal. Because of you, Sequanota is now safer and better able to serve the needs of campers and guests.

This accomplishment reminds us that we can accomplish big things together.

Sequanota will be completing a full report of the Capital Campaign that will be released during the upcoming summer season.

**(See CAMPAIGN Page 10)**



# Food Memories

By **SUE ELLEN SPOTTS**

*Director of Evangelical Mission*

When I am traveling in my car, I like to listen to podcasts. Several of my favorite podcasts are about food — "The Splendid Table." "Food Talk." "Be My Guest with Ina Garten."

A favorite these days is "Your Mama's Kitchen," where the host, Michele Norris, talks with various celebrities about the food experiences of their childhoods.

She begins each conversation asking the guest to "tell me about your mama's kitchen, the kitchen where you grew up?"

What follows is a revealing of how the kitchen and the food prepared there shaped the life of the guest. Very often, it turns out that life centered around the kitchen table ... a place where relationships were formed and nurtured ... where life was explored. And there is talk of the food that was prepared and the memories that food has the power to evoke.

What foods bring special memories to mind for you? What foods make you remember a particular person or event?

One of my favorite Bible stories is the post-resurrection account of Jesus walking with two of the disciples on their way to Emmaus. The disciples don't recognize Jesus, even while he is interpreting to them the things about himself and the scriptures.

But they have a feeling while they are



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

with him. It causes them to invite him to stay and join them for a meal. And it is in the sharing of the meal that they recognize him.

Invite. Share. Recognize.

This is a simple formula for experiencing Christ in our midst. It happens when we celebrate communion in worship. We are invited to the table,

we share in the meal, and we recognize the grace of God in our midst.

In the judgment parable in Matthew 25 Jesus explains that when we give food to those who are hungry, we feed him. In other words, when we invite our neighbors — or strangers — who are hungry to our table and share a meal with them, Jesus is revealed to us.

Invite. Share. Recognize.

Recently, I invited the congregations of the synod to tell me about the feeding programs you are involved in. You responded by telling me about meals, and food pantries, and food distribution ministries you host or participate in. You also told me stories of the people you have met while sharing the food. You have told me of listening to their troubles, of praying with and for them. You have told me of how you share Christ's love as you share food.

**(See FOOD Page 12)**



Submitted photos



**Above, a scene at the renovated Sequanota pool during a worship event. At left, campers enjoy friendship and activities.**

## CAMPAIGN

*(Continued from Page 8)*

Improving the facilities was just one important step as we build and curate faith formation experiences and resources for the people who live in these Allegheny hills and valleys.

Building community and nurturing faith is the true end goal of the Framing Faith for the Future campaign.

Step one is completed. Now we continue the work of ministry: providing a holy place and unique experiences where guests and campers grow closer to Christ, creation, and community. Thank you for making an impact on the lives of thousands of people each year! †



# Take Me Out to the Curve Game

**By PASTOR MARTY JO IRVIN-STELLABOTTE**

*Geeseytown-Newry Lutheran Parish*

Don't miss the chance to enjoy fun, food, and fellowship with Lutherans and friends throughout the Allegheny Synod at the annual Lutheran Day at the Curve at PNG Stadium in Altoona. As in previous years, this year's event is being held during the Curve's Faith Night on Aug. 24.

This year, we'll plan to gather at 5 p.m. for an all-you-can-eat picnic buffet at the First Base Picnic Area, located on the main concourse level of the ballpark. Buffet will include hot dogs, hamburgers, potato chips, cookies, soda, and water. Following our buffet, we'll move to the terrace (200 level) to watch the game, which begins at 6 p.m.

Please mark your calendar and watch for more details, including buffet/ticket pricing, which will be sent out in May to congregations. If you would like to be added to the email list for more information, please send your contact info to [alleghenysynodcurvetickets@gmail.com](mailto:alleghenysynodcurvetickets@gmail.com). We hope you'll gather in community with us at this fun event!†

**Lutheran Day at the Curve  
at PNG Stadium in Altoona**

**Held during the Altoona  
Curve's Faith Night on  
Aug. 24.**





# BISHOP

*(Continued from Page 2)*

A time for us to think outside the box more, and be confined by our “boxes” less; for us to focus on God’s abundance more, and our fear of scarcity less; for us to trust God, God’s promises, God’s presence, and God’s love more — period!

God has claimed us and called us to be partners in God’s mission of reconciliation. We are called to proclaim God’s love for all creation through our words and deeds. We know that this is not always easy for us because our humanness gets in the way. We strive to do our best in the places where faithful generations before us planted churches.

But change in “seasons and times” beyond our control make that task difficult.

Change is always part of life. So, we need each other to figure out how we can continue to serve God’s mission and proclaim God’s saving Word across

the communities in which we live, and across the whole territory of the Allegheny Synod, amid change.

How can we be present and supportive of one another? How can we share the load in meeting the needs of those we serve? How can we do better — together?

I ask that you watch for ways in which to connect with the ministry we share: to participate in events; to gather for fellowship opportunities; to step forward when positions are open for committee work; to communicate more openly and often ... and to pray for the current change of seasons through which our Synod is living.

God has claimed and called us and blesses us for this ministry. May God continue to guide us in the way forward to continue to be God’s people and church in this place. †

# FOOD

*(Continued from Page 9)*

And people experience Christ in those moments, in the sharing of that food.

I have also heard that some of you are seeing increased numbers of people seeking help, even as some of the sources for food are restricted or disappearing. As, food insecurity increases, how do God’s people respond? How do we increase the cycle of invite, share, recognize?

In the coming months, I will be offering times for us to talk together about the needs we are seeing and the ways we are trying to meet those needs.

We will explore ways to increase the response across the synod, and ways to support each other in our separate efforts. If you have not yet shared with me the feeding ministries you are involved in, please send me your story at [sueellen.spotts@elca.org](mailto:sueellen.spotts@elca.org).

And keep an eye out for announcements for joining the conversations where I will start by asking you to “tell me about your Jesus table.” †

# A Sensational Morsel

By **PASTOR DAVID BOWMAN**

*Zion Lutheran Church, Hollidaysburg*

Even in the sterile times of the 21st century, we are aware that death has a sour smell to it.

If you've ever made the discovery of a dead mouse in your dwelling, there's a fair chance that your nostrils led the way to the corpse. The sour smell of death is a distinct odor associated with the decomposition of organic matter. The rotten dankness makes the air feel heavy.

On the first day of the week, at dawn, the women took spices to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. They intended to complete their burial ritual and to combat the stench of death with their fragrant mixture. In the surprise of the resurrection, the women never had the opportunity to finish their task. They are asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" At the discovery of Jesus' resurrection their mourning was transformed into wonder and amazement. Grief became joy. The spices of death became the fragrance of the resurrection. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

With these Easter themes in mind, I present to you a recipe that transforms sour into sweet: Sour Cream Pound Cake. This recipe produces a sensational morsel with the help of tangy sour cream. It's a cake fit for celebration and is perfect for the berry season that looms on the horizon. It's super easy to whip together, so give it a try!



## Sour Cream Pound Cake

### Ingredients

- 1 cup butter, softened
- 3 cups sugar
- 6 large eggs, room temp.
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

### Steps

1. In a bowl, cream butter and sugar until light and fluffy, about 5-7 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Combine, flour, baking soda and salt; add to creamed mixture. Add sour cream and vanilla. Beat on low until blended. Spoon into a greased and floured 10-inch bundt cake or tube pan.

2. Bake at 325-degrees for 75 to 90 minutes, or until a toothpick comes out clean. Cool in pan for 15 minutes before removing to a wire rack to cool completely. If desired, garnish with confectioners' sugar and fresh fruit. †



# ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

Some images and news from the staff's travels around the Synod.



**Gatesburg Lutheran and Pine Hall Lutheran, State College, on the March morning of their shared vote to call Pastor Ted Williams to serve.**



# Assisting One Another

## *Thoughts from the Assistant to the Bishop*

By **PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK**

*Assistant to the Bishop*

*"The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved."*

— Acts 2:42-27 (CEB)



**Pastor Kevin Shock**

In my last column I wrote quite a bit about the barriers that can prevent us from living out the mission of the church.

All of those barriers are rooted in sin and, to paraphrase Martin Luther, turning our focus inward to ourselves, even to our own congregations.

It is certainly tempting when times are lean and resources are less plentiful than they used to be to want to focus on ourselves and our own needs, but scripture shows us, the history of the church shows us, the Spirit

shows us that focusing on ourselves leads us away from life rather than toward it.

It might seem counterintuitive that giving our resources away would result in us having more, but all signs point to this being the way that God's kingdom really works.

I have always been drawn to the description of the early church from Acts 2.

At first, I was intrigued by it, because it seemed to be such a mystery, a way of people living with one another that we could never really return to.

As we read further in the book of Acts, the focus of the earliest Christian community on holding all things in common begins to lessen as the Word spreads and people in different regions and towns establish their own Christian communities.

**(See SHOCK 1, Page 17)**



# Spreading the Word

By **PASTOR JOHN KRATZ**

*Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative Director*

Social media has certainly changed the communication landscape in our communities, congregations, and even within our families.

As with any change, it may be used for evil or for good. This month of May we celebrate the Go Tell It IN the Mountains contract with Braden Social to create and promote through social media channels the resources that may help all our preachers.

We have indeed found that some congregations do not know of the Go Tell It IN the Mountains Initiative. That lack of awareness is distressing as it means some congregations have not had the opportunity to voice their needs and desires related to preaching through our assessment tools.

This also means that some preachers have not been blessed to hear of the Mission Insite, Zeteosearch, Faith+Lead, and United Seminary resources freely available to them.

It is our hope that through full social media platforming and through regular U.S. Postal Service mail, as well, we can reach all our preachers and congregations with the new training, new resources, and freely available tools to help all of our preachers become compelling preachers.

Final reflection: remember that we are always looking to support all who desire to be preachers of the Word of God. If you know of anyone who may be interested or called to become a preacher, please pass their name along to me. †

# SHOCK 1

*(Continued from Page 15)*

Two-thousand years later we have different outposts, or congregations, in different places, but our mission remains the same: to share the good news of Jesus and to live out his love for one another and all our neighbors.

Our core mission leads me back to what is happening in the earliest Christian community.

They had unwavering focus on the mission: learning the Way of Jesus, tending to the needs of the community, eating with one another, praying. Their focus was so strong that they had adopted the mentality that Paul names in Philippians 3: that all things are regarded as loss, as meaningless, because there is nothing that is as worthwhile as knowing Jesus Christ.

This mentality is why the people in Acts 2 were able to let go of all they had, in order to give others what they needed. They rejoiced in daily life together; they did not engage in arguments about the way to do things; they held goodwill as more powerful than holding on to what they thought they needed for themselves.

What was the result of that mentality and way of living? “The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.”

It’s no wonder. If there were a group in my community who seemed to care more about their neighbors than what happens to their own property and possessions, I would want to join that community. Generosity and goodwill

— giving away what little we have — leads to receiving more than we could imagine. Pouring out what we have in the name of Jesus, as Jesus poured himself out, leads to more fullness of life than what we started with.

Everywhere I go in the Allegheny Synod, I hear the same laments: fewer people, less financial resources, inability to afford a pastoral presence, aging populations and aging properties. I also hear behind those laments that focus has shifted from things like learning the Way of Jesus, tending to the needs of the community, eating with one another, and praying, toward a focus on hanging in there as long as we can. It makes me feel like we have lost our way, giving lip service to Jesus, while clinging to the ways of the world that tell us to hold on to what little we have. The view from above shows me that our great need to survive is exactly why we’re all struggling as individual congregations. If we shifted our focus back to Jesus, to his generosity and goodwill, we might start to see the abundance of God rather than our scarcity. If we joined in common, prayerful ministry, I’m convinced that what we do would not diminish, but rather grow and thrive. The life of Jesus is not a zero-sum game where the more someone else has, the less I have. God’s abundant life tells us that the more someone else has, or another congregation has, the more we all have together.

**(See SHOCK 2, Page 18)**



**If we joined in common, prayerful ministry, I'm convinced that what we do would not diminish, but rather grow and thrive.**

— Writes Pastor Kevin Shock

## **SHOCK 2**

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*(Continued from Page 17)*

I began this column hoping to communicate how central to ministry it is for us to assist one another. I feel like I have failed in that goal. Assisting one another isn't something nice or cute to do; it's our only chance for growing ministry across this Allegheny Synod, whose people are in deep need of the love of Jesus and the abundance of God, in case you haven't noticed. If you're reading this, let's talk about how we can hold more things in common, care for our communities, and pray for Jesus to add daily to the ministry we do in his name.†



**Allegheny Synod**

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

# BEFORE *you* GO

## *Finding Your Happy Place*

My daughter, Nora Belle, turned 1 on April 1. It's amazing how quickly she has grown in a year. She now says words (including Kuala) and can give us a pretty good idea of what she's thinking with her looks and body language.

We recently turned our sun room into her playroom. It was the best place to contain the chaos. She can throw her stuffed animals and other toys around without worry of hitting anything else. It's a concept we have taken on the road.

My grandparents' homes have areas we can designate as Nora's play area. We even bought a special attachment for our camper that turns the awning area into a bonus room. Take a guess about who will have rule there.

It's comforting to have that little comfortable place to provide for her wherever we go, a place where she knows that all of her favorite toys and stuffed animals will be waiting.

It's something we try to replicate throughout life, I think. Man caves, she sheds, and even garages often turn into our places of refuge.

Sometimes it doesn't even have to be a physical place. For me, a cup of coffee enjoyed anywhere is my comfort zone.

For several months we have been streaming our church service online as we figure out Nora's feeding schedule and made it through the flu season. We are about ready to start back to church in-person. But the online option provided a sanctuary for us. The places don't need to be physical structures, either.

As we embark on the summer, I hope you find some happy places at campgrounds, parks, beaches, or even your own front porch. And in case you missed it, there's a great recipe in this edition to try this summer, too. It's courtesy Pastor David Bowman.

See you in the next edition,

— Rick Kazmer