

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

# Digital

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Winter  
Edition

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ANXIETY  
DEPRESSION  
FEAR



# A BATTLE WITHIN

**BY PASTOR  
REBECCA WEST**  
*Moxham Lutheran  
Church*

Michael, a single man in his 50s, ceased coming to weekly worship, was withdrawn, and appeared stuck and very down.

(See MIND 1, Page 10)

**Mental health concerns can be hard to talk about, but opening up about the struggle is a first step to healing, writes Pastor West.**

LONELINESS  
LOSS  
UNKNOWN



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



A Lenten Journey  
PAGE 4

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

is published bi-monthly by the  
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Bishop Paula Schmitt

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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Inviting people to love one another.

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All creation living in harmony with Christ.

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## CONTACT US

Newsletter: [r9remzak@hotmail.com](mailto:r9remzak@hotmail.com)

Bishop Paula Schmitt: [Office@AlleghenySynod.com](mailto:Office@AlleghenySynod.com)

Michelle Bossler: [Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com](mailto:Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com)

Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock:

[kevin.shock@alleghenysynod.com](mailto:kevin.shock@alleghenysynod.com)

Director for Evangelical Mission Sue Ellen Spotts:

[SueEllen.Spotts@elca.org](mailto:SueEllen.Spotts@elca.org)



Allegheny Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

# Support the Mission

## *How We can Reach New Heights*

Happy New Year! I hope your holiday celebrations were joy-filled and you are looking forward to this new year.

This is the time of year when we make resolutions or set goals. I haven't been one to do that. I try each day to be a better me. But this year is a little different. I do have a goal for our Synod. If you remember our last Synod Assembly, you'll recall that we amended our budget in order to make Pastor Kevin full-time assistant to the bishop and to work with the Upper Susquehanna Synod and the ELCA to call a shared director for evangelical mission. Both of those things have happened. The ELCA has called Sue Ellen Spotts to serve as our shared DEM. You can read more about her in this issue of The Lutheran Letter. Pastor Kevin has been making the transition to full-time assistant. I am exceedingly grateful for the gifts of our staff.

In order to do those two things, we presented a budget that decreased our mission support to the ELCA from 46% to 35%. My goal is for us to return to mission support that is 45% or more. It won't happen in a year, but it can happen over time. How will we do it? Together. Together, we can achieve the goal. I wonder if you could commit something small toward this goal this year. Perhaps just an extra 50 cents or dollar in your envelope to your congregation — which translates to a small increase in mission support.



**Bishop Paula Schmitt**

**(See BISHOP 1, Page 16)**



# Scene of the Edition



The Weekend Synod youth event was held Dec. 8-10 at St. James in Huntingdon. Check the next edition for more reflections on this great event.

*Submitted photos*

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# A LENTEN JOURNEY

*Slow down, reflect, repent, and be restored by God*

*Psalm 51: 10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."*

**By PASTOR LAURETTA DIETRICH**

*Pastor of the Spring Mills Lutheran Parish*

Greetings in Christ.

**Let us pray: Holy God, you are merciful beyond all we deserve or can imagine. As we approach and enter the season of Lent, let us come to you with penitent hearts. Guide us to repentance daily, and forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of others. Create in us clean hearts, O God, and put a new and right spirit within us. Amen.**

Lent is, by far, my favorite season of the church year. More than Advent, and yes, more than the Christmas season, I love Lent.

**(See LENT, Page 5)**



## Remember in Prayer

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

### JANUARY

Week 1: Zion Lutheran,  
Hollidaysburg

Week 2: Mt. Zion Lutheran,  
Breezewood

Week 3: Salem Lutheran,  
Bellwood

Week 4: St. John Lutheran,  
Bellefonte

### FEBRUARY

Week 1: Laurel Mountain

Lutherans : St. Paul Lutheran,  
Barronvale; Samuels Lutheran,  
Somerset; Messiah Lutheran, New

Centerville; and Mt. Calvary,  
Lavansville

Week 2: St. Luke Lutheran, Roaring  
Spring

Week 3: St. Peter Lutheran,  
Rebersburg

Week 4: Christ Lutheran,  
Claysburg

## LENT

*(Continued from Page 4)*

During Lent, when I was growing up, we had mid-week Lenten services, as many congregations still do today.

There were no soup suppers surrounding the worship. We simply gathered to worship God and become enveloped in the messages of Lent for us.

And, Good Friday was, and is, the day I waited for most of all. I still wait for it now with holy anticipation. Don't get me wrong, I love Easter.

But I learned early on that Easter does not happen UNLESS there is Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter.

Lent invites us into slowing down, reflecting, repenting, and being restored by God. We are invited to SLOW DOWN and meditate on Our Lord's journey to the cross for us.

We are drawn to REFLECT upon our relationship with God and neighbor.

We are called to REPENT of our sinfulness and be RESTORED by God in relationship with God.

You may say, "That all sounds well and good, but who has time to slow down, reflect, repent, and be restored by God?"

And the answer is: "You do." I am not saying it will come easily to you. We all keep so busy (or preoccupied) that we barely seem to have time to be with God. *(Suggested reading: Henri J. M. Nouwen's book, "Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life")*

How are you MAKING/TAKING TIME to spend with God, alone, in your daily life? How do you take a "time out" from all the busy-ness of life to pray before God, — using your Bible, hymnals, and Martin Luther's Small Catechism, — investing in STILLNESS and SILENCE to just be with God?

If you have gotten out of the habit of spending set apart quiet time with God in prayer and devotion, Lent is a perfect time to quietly reconnect with God, and listen for God.

The effects of taking time to slow down, reflect, repent, and be restored by God may surprise you.

May the Holy Spirit guide and bless you on your Lenten journey. †





# 220 years in Greenville

## *Commemorating and Celebrating the Ministry at Greenville Evangelical Lutheran Church*

*"For the Lord is good, His loyal love endures, and He is faithful through all generations." — Psalm 100:5*

**By PASTOR TYLER GRAHAM**  
*Salisbury Lutheran Parish*

As the Christian church endures myriad questions and challenges, this verse from Psalm 100 echoes into our hearts to recall the steadfast loving-kindness of our God ... a faithfulness that will endure and triumph over any challenge or hardship we experience — either perceived or real.

On Sept. 10, the congregation of Green-

ville Evangelical Lutheran Church in rural Meyersdale took the initiative to recall and proclaim our Lord's faithfulness with a Founders' Day Eucharist liturgy.

**(See GREENVILLE 1, Page 7)**

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*Submitted photo*  
**Greenville Union Church, 1848-1913.**

## **GREENVILLE 1**

*(Continued from Page 6)*

Like many of our sister congregations, Greenville Evangelical Lutheran has experienced a decline in Sunday worship attendance, an absence of families and youth, and questions about the future. In the midst of these realities, the council has taken up the work of actively listening and discerning the future — especially as a church that shares in the partnership of the Gospel with two other churches through the Salisbury Lutheran Parish. What was heard was the whisper of God through the Holy Spirit with the reminder to "remember, I [Christ] am with you always, to the end of the age" and to "rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (Matthew 28:20 / 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Though it seemed straight forward, there remained some question as to what this may actually mean and look like? With additional discernment, it was determined that the church might look backward — with hearts of thanksgiving and acknowledgement of God's presence and guidance — in order to look forward with joy and greater clarity. In response, the church engaged in some historical research and prepared to proclaim the love of Christ by lifting their hearts and voices in praise and thanksgiving through a Founders' Day Eucharist liturgy.

**(See GREENVILLE 2, Page 8)**

## GREENVILLE 2

*(Continued from Page 7)*

The council drafted a brochure, invited the congregation to extend invitations to family, friends, and the community (via in-person contact and a neighborhood mailing), and shared communication through the Meyersdale library.

As the weeks passed, there were questions as to how the invitations might be received ... but there was also a growing sense of excitement — within the congregation and community.

Then came the day ...

On Sept. 10, the church opened its doors and welcomed 106 people — some who regularly attended Sunday worship and some who had lapsed in their attendance during the years.

There were also others who had generational connections to the church, and others for whom this was their first time being in the church.

Overall, there was a tangible sense of joy and community as the church shared in the liturgy — recalling God's faithfulness, which includes the simple origins of the church within the homes of its earliest founders, the early partnership between the Lutherans and German Reformed congregations, the construction of the current building in 1910, the life and ministry of two "sons of the church" (The Rev. Dr. Dallas Clay Baer, 1895–1965 and

the Rev. Dr. Ralph Irvin Shockey, 1915–2001), and the grace to share in the ministry of Christ for 220 years through worship, education, and formation, fellowship, and service.

As the day has passed, and the pews seat fewer people, the congregation remains committed to its baptismal vocation; a vocation, which has taken on a deeper meaning by recalling and remembering God's faithfulness and taking time to return to some of the foundations of our faith ... that Christ promises to be with us — even to the end of the age — and that God's will for us is to rejoice, pray, and to give thanks — at all times and in all places.

Today, there remains questions, challenges, and at times heartache; however, God has shown His love for us through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son and revealed His steadfast loving-kindness throughout the generations.

May we daily give thanks to God and pray with open ears and hearts for the future of the Church with a renewed faith in His promises to transform us into a new creation through His grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love.

*"Praise to the Lord, who will prosper your work and defend you; Surely His goodness and mercy shall daily attend you.*

*Ponder anew, what the Almighty can do, If with His love He befriend you." — hymn: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" †*



# More Photos from Greenville



*Submitted photos*

**The construction of the new church. The picture on the right was taken in 1910. Below, scenes from the commemoration service.**



# 'I've seen so many people suffer in silence.'

## **MIND 1**

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*(Continued from Page 1)*

When I attempted to engage him, he couldn't verbalize his emotions or carry on a conversation. This wasn't the Michael I knew. Soon, his mother, Kathie, came to me and shared Michael's story, since he couldn't.

Michael needed an advocate. His mother took on that role.

"He was stuck," she said.

Michael couldn't sleep, couldn't verbalize what and how he was feeling. For about four months, she helped him navigate the "system." Therapists, psychiatrists, hospital emergency rooms. It was pretty awful. Determining what the right care should be for him was frustrating and confusing. Kathie realized that Michael needed the right combination of medications so he could sleep and process his thoughts and feelings. At one point, Michael was placed in a setting for those with behavioral health issues for five weeks. This added to his trauma. For a time, Michael was "lost in the system."

Finally, after lots of emails and phone calls, Michael was in the right place. He had a competent and compassionate therapist and the right combination of meds. Through all of this, Kathie found support, love, and compassion from her own family and from her family of faith. She opened up to her friends in faith who asked about her and Michael every Sunday. Kathie felt enveloped by this circle of people who loved and cared for her and Michael.

She said, "I heard God speaking to me. God said, 'get your support from your church family.'" And so, she did.

Once I shared with her about my own experience with post-partum depression and anxiety, Kathie opened up to me. We bonded during an anxiety-provoking 35-minute ride to a local hospital emergency room with Michael in the back seat in utter despair. Once in the ER, we sat quietly, waiting for Michael to receive the care he so badly needed.

"I've seen so many people suffer in silence," Kathie shared. "I felt so alone years ago when my husband died from suicide. I learned that we must talk about these things, bring them to the open. There is nothing to be ashamed of."

**(See MIND 2, Page 13)**



# Fellowship in the Forest

*Penn State Students Connect While Removing Invasive Plants*

By **DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON**

*Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State*

On a Saturday before the weather turned cold, some students from Lutheran Campus Ministry/Lutheran Student Community and I joined a crew of other students to volunteer at the Penn State Arboretum. Our task that afternoon was to help remove invasive plants in the woods.

Behind the lush, well-tended gardens and walkways that attract most Arboretum visitors are acres and acres of forest and trails where we worked. A member of the arboretum staff outfitted us with gloves, pruning tools, and shovels of various sizes, then led us out to a section of the woods. There, he showed us the various invasive plants that have found their way from home gardens into forests, forcing out native species and affecting the ecosystem. Our work that day was to remove as much privet as we could.

We clipped branches, dug roots, and pulled out the privet shrubs we found. Before we began, the task seemed daunting, yet as each person pulled what they could, we began to see progress. The pile of privet we had removed grew and the underbrush was less dense. By the end, we had cleared even more area than our staff leader had initially asked us to clear. It was a good day!

None of the students working that day were forestry or plant science majors. Everyone was new to this work, and yet



*Submitted photo*

## **Penn State's Hartley Wood.**

we accomplished much. That afternoon, we helped make a more hospitable place for native plants to grow in the woods. We all learned new things about the natural world and learned new skills in plant removal. Students made new connections as they struggled — digging, cutting, and pulling together. People shared their tools and their abilities, working toward a common goal.

In addition to helping care for creation that day, students learned about each other, the world where they live, and themselves. That's what campus ministry is about. Campus ministry brings students together where they will find new experiences, hear new perspectives, and make new connections.

Whether volunteering in the woods, helping clean up after dinner together, lighting candles for worship, or sharing thoughts in Bible discussion, campus ministry welcomes students to be themselves and to become community together — exploring and learning about God's loving presence in their lives, and in the world.†

# ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

These are some of the churches Bishop Paula Schmitt and Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock visited during the past two months, along with some other news of note from around the Synod.



**Pastor Kevin Shock, assistant to the bishop, was honored to preach at two milestone services on All Saints Sunday in November. In the morning (above left photos) the people of St. James, Altoona, and Bethany, Altoona, gathered for a joint worship service. Following worship, the councils of St. James and Bethany met together with Pastor Kevin to discuss goals for shared ministry in the coming year.**

**In the afternoon, God's people gathered for the closing worship service of St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran in Rockwood. Although there was a mix of emotions around the service, it was a beautiful opportunity to celebrate God's faithfulness in the past and God's continued faithfulness into the future. We were blessed that all of the living past pastors of the congregation were in attendance.**

## *Mark Your Calendars*

**Friday,  
June 14**

**Saturday,  
June 15**

Allegheny Synod Assembly 2024 will be held Saturday, June 15, at the Blair County Convention Center. More Details to come. The Worship service will be held Friday, June 14, at Zion Lutheran in Hollidaysburg.



## MIND 2

*(Continued from Page 10)*

All Michael remembers from this desperate time is the loneliness and loss he felt. He thought he had no one with whom to talk. His racing mind was keeping him from opening up, even to his mother.

"It was fear," he said, "that made me wary about opening up ... fear of the unknown." Michael continued, "I couldn't get my mind off the past and future ... couldn't live in the present. My mind couldn't compute what was happening."

Therapy and medication helped Michael sort through the trauma he experienced at age 35, when his father died by suicide. He was stuck and depressed. He's now realizing that he has nothing to be ashamed of, and dealing with and putting the past to rest is what's helping Michael move on and return to work, worship, and family.

Michael shared, "I'm no longer afraid to talk about things," he said. "Talking about it is helpful."

According to 2021 data from the NIH, CDC, and NAMI, it is estimated that more than 1 in 5 U.S. adults live with a mental illness (57.8 million in 2021). It's likely that we've all, at some point in our lives, experienced mental illness ourselves or have known or cared for someone who has or had mental health issues.

In any pastoral care situation, I've learned to meet a family's spiritual needs without crossing over into the role of a counselor or therapist. I've learned to stay alert to clues that this may be beyond my area of expertise. Providing a

professional referral means avoiding the risk of becoming enmeshed in people's lives. Kathie was Michael's caregiver and helped him navigate his doctor and therapist appointments and keep track of his medications, especially initially. She could be assured of my, and the congregation's commitment to supporting them, and we acknowledged that coping with mental illness or caring for someone who is mentally ill is exhausting and stressful. We prayed together often and allowed them the space to process what was happening.

It's helpful to forgo asking for details of a person's situation and to give them time to work through their therapy and/or to find the right medication and dosage. As Michael's mental health improved, Kathie was able to step back from her role as caregiver so that Michael could resume caring for himself.

We wouldn't advise a diabetic to give up their medications and cast their insulin needs on Christ alone. We can pray while still seeking out medical interventions and praying for those whose God-given gifts have brought them to the medical field. Mental illness is not a sin, a test of faith, or a weakness of the will that can be overcome through stronger faith or more fervent prayer. Nor should anyone be shamed for their struggles with their mental health. As a congregation, we pray weekly for those who are on the margins of society and lift those who are struggling with challenges of mind, body, or spirit.

**(See MIND 3, Page 14)**

## FACTS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

- 1 in 5 U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.
- 1 in 20 U.S. adults experience serious mental illness each year.
- 1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year. About 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people aged 10-14.

*If you or someone you love needs mental health assistance, call the NAMI hotline at 800-950-6264.*

## **MIND 3**

*(Continued from Page 13)*

In 2012, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopted the social message, "The Body of Christ and Mental Illness," and in that statement "commits to accompanying ... families and caregivers with honest, hopeful, yet realistic, and prayerful companionship."

The message addresses the sins of stigma, blaming and shaming, isolation, and that the church can provide a safe place to discuss mental health needs and to talk about those needs without stigma and judgment.

If you or someone you love needs mental health assistance, call the NAMI hotline at 800-950-6264. †



# Meet the New Director for Evangelical Mission

Sue Ellen Spotts is serving as the Director for Evangelical Mission for the Allegheny and Upper Susquehanna synods.

She answered a few questions for The Lutheran Letter about her new role.

She has a husband, Doug, who is a physician and teaches at Penn State. They have two grown children.

**THE LUTHERAN LETTER:** Can you describe your new position, the synods you will serve and how you learned about the job?

**SUE ELLEN SPOTTS:** I will be taking over Kevin's (Pastor Kevin Shock) role as Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) in the Allegheny Synod and also serving in this capacity for the Upper Susquehanna Synod. I learned about the position from the ELCA posting and from discussion with people in the church.

**TLL:** What drew you to this position?

**SES:** I am drawn to the potential to assist individuals and congregations strengthen or re-imagine their witness to Christ's love in our world.



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

**TLL:** What are three big goals you have while you are in the role?

**SES:** I want to start by listening to the stories of the congregations and their members. My aim is to assist them in discovering new and renewed areas of ministry.

**TLL:** What do you expect to be the biggest challenge?

**SES:** Identifying new ways to be the church and to involve others in our ministry.

**TLL:** What are you most excited about as a Lutheran?

**SES:** Our understanding of God's grace at work in the world.

**TLL:** Do you have any hobbies?

**SES:** I like to travel. I enjoy cooking and baking as a means of gathering family and friends together. †

# Grace Bringing Back Lenten Concert

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

The public is invited to a free ecumenical choral and handbell concert, "Songs of Our Time: A Lenten Meditation," from 7 to 8 p.m. Wednesday, March 20, hosted by Grace Lutheran Church.

The church is located at 205 South Garner Street in Downtown State College.

This is the 12th annual Lenten concert and it will be preceded by classical piano prelude music at 6:40 p.m.

Contact Laurel Sanders at [lsanders@glcpa.org](mailto:lsanders@glcpa.org), or call the church office at 814-238-2478, for details.

"If anyone would like to sing, sign up to join us! Music is provided at no cost to singers," Sanders wrote in an email. Rehearsals are 2 to 4 p.m. Sundays, starting Feb. 11 at Grace. †

## BISHOP 1

*(Continued from Page 2)*

Or, maybe your congregation can commit an extra \$50 per month — that's about \$10 per week — which amounts to an extra 25 cents per person in a congregation that worships 40 people. When it's broken down, you can see how it is achievable. And, when we all participate, our chance of reaching the goal increases.

I have told the story of a man in a congregation I once served who committed to stopping his Sheetz habit. Every time he stopped for gas, he would go inside the store and purchase food or drinks. It was having an adverse impact on his health because he was sitting in his car most of the day. It wasn't easy at first. After all, who can resist a freshly baked cookie in the middle of the morning! But, he slowly made

the change.

He lost more than 35 pounds and saved almost \$5,000 by making one small change. Is there a small change you can make and share with your congregation or Synod?

And, if you're like many people in our Synod, you don't really know what the Office of the Bishop or "the Synod" as many people call it, does for you.

Here's a list of the big things, but there are many more smaller things:

- Provide and update minimum compensation guidelines for rostered ministers
- Receive and review updates to congregations' constitutions
- Publish The Lutheran Letter
- Respond to allegations of misconduct

**(See BISHOP 2, Page 17)**

# **BISHOP2**

*(Continued from Page 16)*

- Provide financial assistance for rostered ministers through a discretionary fund
- Place interim pastors in congregations following long or troubled pastorates
- Receive parochial reports from congregations and send them to the churchwide office
- Communicate announcements through a weekly e-mail
- Hold an annual Bishop's Convocation
- Receive mission support remittances, disburse the funds, and account for their use
- Oversee the candidacy process
- Partner with regional synods to support a regional gift planner
- Provide guidance in the call process
- Oversee a nominating committee to invite members to serve in various leadership roles
- Plan and hold an annual Synod Assembly
- Assign supply worship leaders to congregations
- Provide training events for rostered and lay people
- Authorize worshipping communities and new starts
- Assist congregations in challenging situations
- Organize ministry-renewal events
- Introduce Sue Ellen Spotts to congregations to aid in their renewal
- Provide ongoing study of our church's social statements
- Train and provide call vote facilitators
- Arbitrate between factions in congregations to seek resolution through consultation
- Disburse congregational vitality grants
- Facilitate groups of congregation youth attending the ELCA Youth Gathering
- Provide for Region 8 bishops to visit annually with seminary faculty and staff
- Serve as members on or liaisons to the boards of our social ministry organizations
- Support the Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State
- Support the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church
- Annually review and affirm the exchange of ministers with our full communion partner churches
- Support a state public policy office in partnership with the six other synods in Pennsylvania (LAMPa)
- Provide worship leadership coverage in a pastoral vacancy
- Provide training for lay worship leaders
- Coordinate the delivery of quilts to Lutheran World Relief

**(See BISHOP 3, Page 18)**



# BISHOP 3

(Continued from Page 17)

These are just some of the things your Mission Support to the Allegheny Synod helps to facilitate. Beyond our territory, our Mission Support to the ELCA helps to provide missionaries, young adults in Global Mission, ELCA World Hunger, Disaster Relief, and so much more.

There may be seasons in which it doesn't feel like your congregation is utilizing the gifts of the Office of the Bishop or the whole Synod. There will be seasons in which you need to work alongside the bishop or her staff. Regular Mission Support is important, because no matter what season your congregation is in, all congregations and ministry sites of the Allegheny Synod continue to be in ministry together. We cannot do the ministry Jesus has given us without each other. I invite you to join me in finding ways to reach this goal.

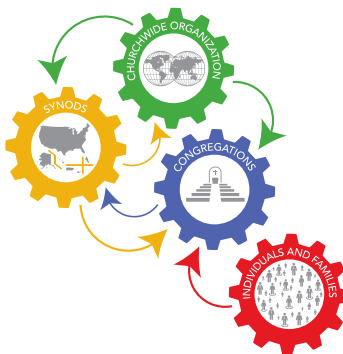
I am cheering for you.†

— Bishop Paula



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

## WHERE DOES MY OFFERING GO?



ELCA members in more than 9,300 congregations in the United States and Caribbean give approximately \$1.75 billion in regular offering to support ELCA ministries in their local communities and worldwide. When members give through their congregations, a percentage of that money is then shared with the local synod and the national churchwide organization.

This unrestricted giving, called Mission Support, gives us both the foundation and the fuel to do God's work in the world and a portion of the gifts circle back to support ministries in synods and local congregations. Of these unrestricted gifts, the churchwide organization receives around 2.6 percent. This represents the largest portion of the ELCA churchwide organization's operating budget.

Your Mission Support helps fund the following churchwide ministries:

### Grow the ELCA in the United States

25%



**357**  
Plant and support  
357 new congregations.



Enable congregations to renew their ministries and reach out to their surrounding communities.



Work together with our African Descent, American Indian and Alaska Native, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Latino/Latina members to develop networks and resources for ministry.



Develop and share resources for faith, discipleship, prayer and worship.

### Grow the Lutheran church around the world

18%



As a member of The Lutheran World Federation, we're in communion with 145 member churches and directly connected to 85 companion churches in other countries.



Accompany new Lutheran churches, expand ministries, and train leaders and evangelists.



**230**

Send 230 missionaries to more than 48 countries, including more than 84 Young Adults in Global Mission in 11 country programs.

### Provide coordination and support for churchwide ministries

16%

**1.1 million**

Maintain constituent database, including 1.1 million records of rostered and lay leaders, members, donors and congregations.



Provide office space, equipment and human resources for staff and operations.



Preserve and maintain archives and historic records of the ELCA and its predecessor bodies.

Equip congregations and synods with resources to assist in risk management and legal matters.



Process 150,000 gifts to ELCA ministries.

**GRAPHIC CONTINUED ON PAGE 19**



# WHERE DOES MY OFFERING GO?

Support and develop current and future **leaders** in the ELCA

15%

**7** Support the work of seven ELCA seminaries and 26 colleges and universities.

**9,900** Recruit, prepare and implement a system for the assignment of 9,900 rostered ministers.

**Offer events and leadership opportunities** for youth and young adults.

**Identify, connect and provide** ministry resources and opportunities for networking for lay leaders.

Invest in **technology** and **communications**

8%

**Design and maintain communications tools** to strengthen our Lutheran identity and grow awareness of our church and its mission and ministries.



**Connect members with one another** through new technology and systems.

Provide **governance and leadership**

5%

**Organize lay and clergy leaders from across the church to serve** on the governance boards and committees that provide guidance and oversight for ELCA ministries.

**65** Coordinate meetings and support for 65 synodical bishops.

Grow and sustain financial resources

5%



**Develop and promote** efforts related to stewardship education, financial literacy, mission interpretation and growth in giving to all church ministries.

Address social issues and **work for justice**

4%



**Engage** in churchwide study and deliberation to create social statements and resources that address social, political, environmental and other public issues.

**Equip** members and leaders to advocate with lawmakers in order to support policies that promote justice and peace.



**1 in 50**

**Support** social ministry organizations, such as Lutheran Services in America, to impact the lives of **1 in 50** Americans.

Your designated gifts to ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response provide additional funds annually to address hunger, poverty and suffering around the world.

Engage in **research** and **strategic planning**

2%

**Research and analyze trends that impact the ELCA and develop innovative strategies** to improve mission and ministry in the 21st century.



Sustain **ecumenical** and **interfaith relationships**

2%

Facilitate dialogue and common action among communities of other faiths, including the development of resources and communications for ELCA congregations.



Seek unity in faith and life with all Lutherans and six full communion partners.

ELCADM1128

# We Want Your Opinion

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

During the 2022 Synod Assembly, we forwarded a memorial to the Churchwide Assembly, which resulted in the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) being formed.

The CRLC has been meeting, working toward outcomes outlined in the memorial. Now, they want to hear from you. The Allegheny Synod has scheduled a listening session at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Jan. 30. The sessions will be held via Zoom and the link will be sent to anyone who registers. This is free and open to any member of the Allegheny Synod.

**CLICK HERE TO REGISTER**

# Assisting One Another

## *Thoughts from the Assistant to the Bishop*

By **PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK**

*Assistant to the Bishop*

The Office of the Bishop went through some good transitions at the end of last year. We welcomed our new Director for Evangelical Mission, Sue Ellen Spotts, who serves our Synod, along with the Upper Susquehanna Synod. This new staffing situation means that my responsibilities have shifted, and so the focus of my Lutheran Letter column is shifting a bit.

You might be able to tell from the new title that “assisting” is on my mind. Of course, my primary role is to assist Bishop Paula in her ministry. The role I’m living into, however, also means that I assist pastors, deacons, and lay worship leaders in their ministries. I also assist councils and congregations in their leadership and in discerning the future of ministry.

From the very beginning “assisting” has been an important function of the Christian church, the body of Christ in the world. We hear in Acts 2 that the early Spirit-gathered community shared all things in common and used their resources to assist one another, as any had need. A little later in Acts 6, church leaders ordained the first deacons to assist widows in the community and others who were hungry. In First Corinthians 12, Paul extols the importance of the varied gifts in the body of Christ just before he delivers his great homily on holy love. Included in the list of gifts he mentions



**Pastor Kevin Shock**

are “forms of assistance.” Although I’m not sure of his exact meaning, this gift is listed apart from forms of leadership, gifts of healing, and deeds of power. Assisting is a vital gift to the ministry of the church.

Unfortunately, the church has bought into the values of our striving-for-No. 1, go-get-‘em culture.

Most people would rather be the boss than the assistant. Congregations want to be all things to all people, and in striving for that model, we often overlook how each of our congregations has different gifts and how we might be able to strengthen our ministry overall by assisting one another. Ministry has become to many of us a zero-sum game. If “that person” joins another congregation, then we have lost that one person. Yet, holy reality tells us that we have still gained that person, even if they don’t sit in our pew.

They have become a part of the body of Christ. We are still in relationship with them, and we can still assist them in ministry, even as they are able to assist us.

Ministry is not a competition; it is collaboration, with all people and congregations sharing their gifts and assisting one another in proclaiming the good news of Jesus and serving God’s beloved people who are in any kind of need.

**(See SHOCK, Page 21)**



# SHOCK

(Continued from Page 20)

As we move into the new year, I encourage you, both individually and congregationally, to take stock of your gifts. What do you bring to

the body of Christ?

Maybe even more importantly, take stock of the gifts of congregations around you.

What can they offer that

you can't? Don't be afraid to join with them in ministry. You will gain more than you lose. Assisting one another, we become stronger in faith and in ministry.†


**SING WITH US!** Sunday rehearsals (2-4 PM) start Feb. 11. Email [lsanders@glcpa.org](mailto:lsanders@glcpa.org) for info

## Songs of Our Time: A Lenten Meditation

Presented by an ecumenical choir from the Centre Region and The Bells of Grace

**Wednesday, March 20, 2024 at 7:00 PM**

**Grace Lutheran Church**  
205 S. Garner Street  
State College, PA. 16801  
[www.glcpa.org](http://www.glcpa.org) \* 814-238-2478



**5:00-6:15** Community fellowship meal  
**6:40** Piano prelude: music of J.S. Bach; classics  
**7:00** Songs of Our Time: A Lenten Meditation

**Songs of mercy, hope, peace, love, unity, light and joy**  
featuring music by Craig Courtney, Greg Gilpin, Kevin McChesney, Mark Miller, Michael John Trotta, Susan LaBarr, Mark Hayes, Larry Shackley and Fred Gramann

Laurel Sanders, Director, Ecumenical Choir  
Sarah Rodgers, Director, The Bells of Grace

Bask in the sounds of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

A freewill collection helps defray event costs.  
Suggested meal donation: \$6 per person; \$15/family.

## Vitality and Innovation Grants Support Ministries

By **THE LUTHERAN LETTER**

In early 2023, through your generosity, the Allegheny Synod awarded more than \$10,000 to local congregations and ministry sites to support new and expanding ministries in their contexts.

The projects receiving Congregational Vitality and Innovation (CVI) Grants included ministries fighting hunger, pet pantries, training for lay leadership, and new equipment to grow music programs.

The Synod Office continues to receive inquiries; however, few donations to build up the fund have been received since our last round of awards.

Would you consider giving a donation, as a congregation or individual, to the Allegheny Synod CVI Grants?

Your generosity keeps ministry growing and renewing here in our Synod.†

# BEFORE *you* GO

## *An Important Topic*

If you didn't get a chance to read Pastor Rebecca West's article in this issue (see the front page), take some time to circle back to it.

She touches on a very important issue: Mental health.

I work for the United Way of the Southern Alleghenies, and we support several programs in the region that provide services for people suffering from mental health problems.

Sometimes, these are common problems, like anxiety or depression. Sometimes more severe conditions are holding people back.

Even anxiety, which most people experience, can develop into seemingly uncontrollable forces in our lives.

That's why it's important to talk to others about the experience, as well as finding ways to cope with stress.

For me, a jog around town often helps to burn off stress. I also find that writing helps me to refocus on more productive thoughts.

Mental health is a tough topic for many, I think, because the signs of it are so hard to see. If someone has a broken leg, for instance, you can easily understand why they can't walk.

A mental health concern is much harder to see from the outside. As we leave the holiday season, the cold, dark winter days often bring their own form of seasonal depression.

It's a good time to be mindful of your friends, neighbors, and relatives. Do they seem happy?

It's a good time of year to add extra value and interest when we greet people, commonly asking them "how are you?"

There may be more going on than is conveyed by the standard reply— "Good, and you?"

And, as I like to mention at the end of this issue each year. We are already working on the Spring edition. The sunny days are in front of us.

See you in March,

— Rick Kazmer, editor