

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

Volume 16, Issue 4 • www.AlleghenySynod.org • Summer 2021



A familiar face returning **AS BISHOP**



Submitted photo

Pastor Paula Schmitt, former assistant to the bishop in the Allegheny Synod, is returning as bishop. She was elected in June to replace Bishop Michael Rhyne, who is not seeking another term.

MORE ON PAGE 8.

How Acts can be a Guide During Times of Change

"After Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders."

- Acts 15:2

BY PASTOR JULIE HOLM
Brush Valley Fusion of Faith

Acts follows the story of the early church through the ministry of Paul as it spreads to the whole world.

(See ACTS, Page 10)



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

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE
is published bi-monthly by the
ALLEGHENY SYNOD OF THE ELCA

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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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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.

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Swan Song

To the Saints of the Allegheny Synod,

This is the last time I will share my "Bishop's Message" with you in The Lutheran Letter. Our next edition will bring greetings from our new bishop, Bishop-elect Paula Schmitt. I thank God for our new bishop and will continue to pray for her and for all of you in the Allegheny Synod.

I have been thinking lately about the first time we came to central Pennsylvania. We were here to interview and meet the people of the Geeseytown and Newry Lutheran Parish, because Bishop Pile thought I might be a good pastor for them. On that first visit we were amazed at the beauty of this place.

The mountains, the streams and the amount of wildlife is amazing. As members of our future parish drove us around, we kept saying, "Wow, look at that!"

It is a beautiful place to be and to live. The people who were showing us around were a little surprised at our reactions because they saw it all the time. The mountains, the valleys, the snowcapped ridges we get in the winter, is what they have always known. One of them said to us, "You know this is a pretty place, we just don't notice it anymore."

What is right in front of us, what is familiar, is sometimes hard to see. I am not going to spend my time telling you to notice how pretty the Allegheny Synod is. But I would like to remind you about something that we don't always see, something that I think we take for granted.

You have heard me say before that I am constantly amazed by the way that the Holy Spirit moves and works in our people and in our congregation.

(See BISHOP 1, Page 13)

When the Flood Waters Rose, a Synod Parish was Ready to Help



Submitted photo

These are some of the flood buckets that New Centerville Lutheran Parish has ready to help people in need.

STORY ON PAGE 4

Lutheran Letter Patron Form

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Flood Buckets Continue to Aid Community

By **BARB HARROLD**

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church

On March 1 the small towns of Confluence and Ursina, located in southern Somerset County, experienced flooding from the combination of steady rain and snowmelt.

Confluence is located where three rivers join, and eventually flow to Pittsburgh. Pastor Lee Gable, of the New Centerville Lutheran Parish called, knowing that I grew up in the area. He asked if I knew of anyone who needed help recovering from flood damage. I called family, and contacted Confluence Borough officials and the local fire company to ask about anyone in need. There was a need for three flood buckets, which our congregation had prepared.

I delivered them the next morning. Two went to a local pastor, whose son is a member of the fire company, for delivery. The third I delivered

directly to the individual in need. This person attended the same school I had attended. He was in the special needs class, and went on to receive a diploma. He went to work in a factory and has since retired. He lives alone and during the pandemic only left his home to go to the local food pantry where I volunteer.

I knocked on his door, and he was surprised at seeing me, asking "Barbara what are you doing here?" I replied that I had heard he had flooding. He said he had, the basement flooded and had to be pumped. I told him I had a bucket of supplies and opened the lid. He started to cry, and said "no one cares about me." I told him I care and so does my church! He then gave me a hug, saying that he knew he should not hug, but was so grateful. (Yes, I was wearing my mask). He then said, "Barbara, thank you so much." I got in my car and said, "no Ben, thank you so much. You made my day." †

'This story is just one example of how these flood buckets are reaching out to touch the lives of our neighbors with love.'

By **PASTOR LEE GABLE**

*New Centerville
Lutheran Parish*

The Flood Bucket Project was a 2018 initiative started by The Allegheny Synod Global Mission Team and then Director of Evangelical Mission, the Rev. Tim Knauss.

Our parish participated in this synod-wide effort. St Paul's Lutheran Church agreed to store part of the Laurel Highlands Conference stockpile of buckets. Last year, at the beginning of the pandemic, we went through many of the buckets to obtain the N-95 masks that our local frontline workers and first responders needed. This spring, as the snow quickly disappeared, the waters started to rise in some areas. We reached out to the Rockwood Borough and Confluence areas, both known for flooding.

(See BUCKETS, Page 11)

Remember in Prayer

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

July

Week 1 First Faith Cooperative Ministry: First Lutheran, Phillipsburg; and Faith United Lutheran, Houtzdale

Week 2 St. Luke Lutheran, Centre Hall

Week 3 St. John, Clearfield

Week 4 Christ Lutheran, Johnstown

August

Week 1 Friedens Lutheran, Friedens

Week 2 Zion Lutheran, Everett

Week 3 Holy Shepherd Parish: Holy Trinity Lutheran, Lanse; and Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran, Karthaus

Week 4 First English Lutheran, Tyrone

Battlefield in bloom



Photos by Courtney Kazmer

These photos were taken at Gettysburg the weekend of June 4. Above is a flowering Southern Catalpa tree, located on the battlefield. The United Lutheran Seminary campus is in the background to the right of the tree. The famous cupola atop the Seminary Ridge Museum and Education Center is visible. These trees, located primarily in the South, are located all around the battlefield. There are at least two in the Somerset County Memorial Park, located next to Trinity Lutheran Church in Somerset. More images of the tree, and seminary are below.



Upcoming events of note

6-8 p.m. Friday, July 16: Farewell for Pastor Becca Ehrlich

Pastor Becca has received a call to serve as the associate dean for community life at General Theological Seminary (Episcopal) in New York City. She will be starting her new post in August. The synod is holding a drop-in event to say farewell from 6-8 p.m. July 16. There will be light refreshments and it will be held indoors due to the heat. Some of those who are attending have continuing health issues. If you are unvaccinated, please wear a mask, or if you are bringing children under 12, please have them wear a mask as well. Vaccinated people do not need to wear a mask. The event will be held at the Synod office, 701 Quail Ave., Altoona.

2 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 28: Farewell Liturgy for Bishop Rhyme

There will be a service of farewell and godspeed at Evangelical Lutheran in Duncansville at 2 p.m. on Aug. 28 for Bishop Michael Rhyme, whose term is up.

Clergy are invited to vest and process. Aug. 28 is the Commemoration of St. Augustine of Hippo, so the color of the day is white. The people of Duncansville have offered to host a reception after the service.

3 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 19: Installation of Allegheny Synod Bishop Paula Schmitt

Presiding Evangelical Luther-

an Church in America Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will join the synod to install Bishop Paula Schmitt on Sept. 19. The service is being held at First Lutheran Church in Altoona. The color for the day is red. The service will be streamed online live. There will be a reception following the service, hosted by partners at Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries. †

Fun Summer Ahead



Photo courtesy the Allegheny Synod Facebook page

Bishop Michael Rhyme visited Camp Sequanota near Jennerstown in June to bless the staff ahead of a fun summer. "I was blessed to join the Sequanota Staff for closing worship of staff training and was able to commission the staff for the summer. May God bless our Sequanota staff and all who spend time in God's creation this summer," the bishop posted with this photo.

SAUL

LORD, WHAT WOULDST THOU HAVE ME DO?

(Editor's note: This article was published in Living Lutheran and is being republished here with permission.)

BY TIFFANY CHANEY
Living Lutheran

In a lectionary reading for the

third Sunday of Easter, Saul has a life-altering encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6, [7-20]). Light from heaven shines down, then Jesus' voice knocks Saul off his feet, confronts Saul for persecuting him and sends him on a new mission. Everything Saul had planned was

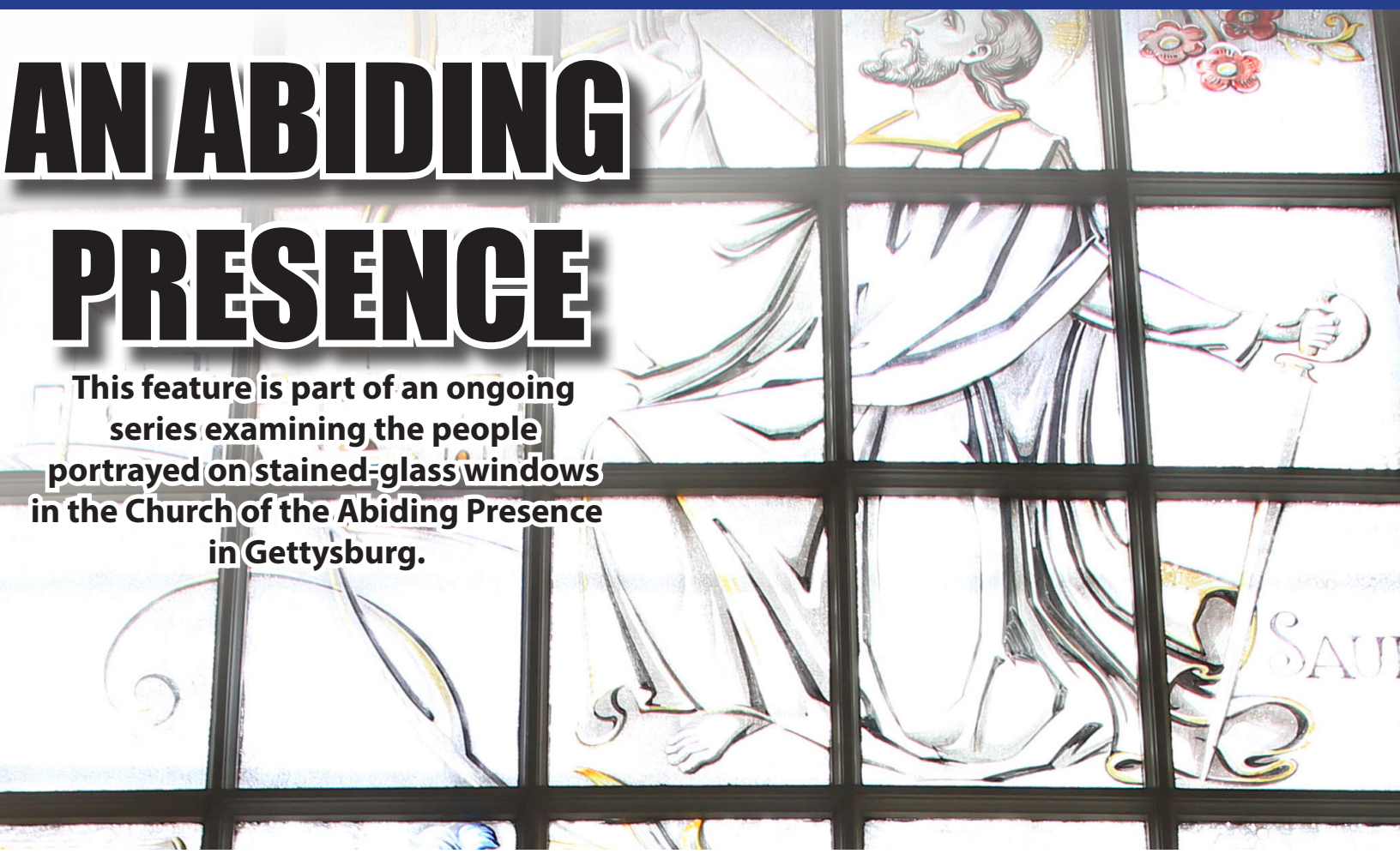
interrupted. He found himself without sight and no instructions other than "Get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Jesus also speaks to Ananias, asking him to lay hands on Saul and restore his sight.

(See SAUL, Page 9)

AN ABIDING PRESENCE

This feature is part of an ongoing series examining the people portrayed on stained-glass windows in the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg.



Q&A with the New Bishop

Former assistant to the bishop Pastor Paula Schmitt has been elected bishop of the Allegheny Synod. She answered a few questions about her return and her new role.

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What did you most miss about the Allegheny Synod while you were gone?

BISHOP-ELECT PAULA SCHMITT: I most missed the people of the Allegheny Synod. When I began watching the Assembly on Facebook, I was not prepared for how emotional I would get seeing all the faces of people I served in different ways. The people of the Allegheny Synod are second-to-none in my book. I value the relationships I built here and am glad to have an opportunity to reconnect.

TLL: What are you most looking forward to as bishop?

BEPS: I think my answer to this question is the same as the first! I am most looking forward to reacquainting myself with our leaders and people. I believe the Allegheny Synod is moving toward an amazing future. We are blessed to have a fabulously gifted group of pastors and deacons who will encourage us into that future with love and grace. I am excited to be able to support them in that call.

TLL: You will be the Synod's first female bishop. Is this an important milestone for you, the synod and the ELCA? What does it mean to you?

BEPS: I can honestly say, I didn't think about that during the Assembly. I was reminded of it following the Assembly. When I met Elizabeth Platz at our beginning celebration of the 50th Year of Women's Ordination in the ELCA, I listened to her story with great interest. She was "the first" and she didn't set out to be; she was encouraged by others. Two years before the Assembly, when we contacted Bishop April Larsen to be our guest, she was "the first" and she didn't set out to be; she, too, was encouraged by others. Now I find myself in that same position as "the first" and I didn't set out to be, either. I give thanks to God for those who encouraged me along the way. I have been privileged to know many outstanding women in leadership who provided me with support, care and encouragement. Being "the first" is a special honor and one I feel deeply privileged to hold. These kind of "firsts" come with great expectation and hope — and there's some pressure in that. In my closing thoughts at the Assembly I said there would be days I would absolutely dazzle you because I am a beloved child of God and there would be days when I disappoint you because I am a human, and that I would strive to have more dazzling days than disappointing ones. That is still true. I am excited to have become part of a growing group of women who have been called to serve as bishop in this Church. The faithful witness of women who have gone before us will serve as a guide for us as we walk together into a new and hopeful future.

(See Q&A, Page 9)

Q&A

(Continued from Page 8)

TLL: What do you consider the biggest challenge for the Synod in the coming years?

BEPS: In the more than a year of discernment toward this call, three words kept coming to me: rebuild, reunite and revive. As I prayed more, I sensed that Jesus was opening my eyes to what we as a Synod could do together. Rebuilding relationships, networks and resources; reuniting communities and partners; reviving the joy and excitement of serving Jesus in the Allegheny Synod.

TLL: What's your key message to Allegheny Synod faithful — in a nutshell?

BEPS: Jesus is here. That sounds very simple, I am sure. It can be hard to remember when the storms of life continue to rage all around us. A few weeks ago, the Gospel lesson from Mark was the story of Jesus stilling the storm and reminding the disciples that even in the midst of the storm on the sea, he had not left the boat. He was right there with them. We have some challenges ahead that may feel a little bit stormy, but Jesus will stay in the boat with us and get us to the other side. †

SAUL

(Continued from Page 7)

This command troubles Ananias. He didn't question whether his hands would bring healing. No, Ananias was shaking in his sandals because Saul had a reputation for "breathing threats and murder" against disciples like him. Ananias knew Saul had permission from the high priest to capture and bind Christ's followers and take them to Jerusalem.

Like Saul, Ananias had been minding his own business when Jesus interrupted his journey. Imagine what Ananias must have been thinking as he traveled to Straight Street. Oh, it must have been a long, long walk. Nevertheless, he heeded the Lord's call.

See, Jesus' instructions often make us uncomfortable, stretch our limits and interrupt our plans. The Lord desires that his disciples — then and now — lean into all we're capable of accomplishing, pushing beyond our comfort zones. Sometimes that call may leave us shak-

ing in our sandals like Saul or Ananias. Still we get up and go.

The Lord told Saul and Ananias to get up and go — and tells us the same. Their stories highlight how our calls are intertwined with those around us. Jesus didn't tell Saul somebody would come lay hands on him. He told him Ananias would come lay hands on him. After Ananias restored his vision, Saul joined with all the disciples, proclaiming Jesus throughout Damascus as the apostle Paul. What a powerful witness.

To fulfill God's plan, both Saul and Ananias had to push past doubt and act in faith together. The call for each was personal, yet their stories were connected. Likewise, God's call for each of us is personal and connected to the people around us. As individuals and communities, we act as God's hands in the world.

Toward whom and what is Jesus calling you today? †

THE ACTS

Of The Apostles

INTRODUCTION

ACTS

(Continued from Page 1)

At a critical juncture, almost exactly halfway through Acts, the church has important decisions to make, which will affect both the new thing God is doing in the mission to the Gentiles, and the feelings of those who come from and treasure the Jewish tradition.

The content of the decision is probably less important than how the church makes this decision. As we contemplate important decisions in the church today, it would help to look at how the church in Jerusalem made this decision.

First, the church looked for the movement of the Spirit in the world. They bring full attention to the decisions that seem to be indicated by the way the church is already changing, by the new things that the Holy Spirit is doing in the world, in this case, calling the Gentiles into faith.

Second, the church is very careful about considering the questions. They make their decision in community, they look for guidance to the larger church, they share freely their opinions and listen carefully to the opinions of others. All are heard, all are considered. A lively debate ensues and people

are not excluded because of their side of the debate. Instead, everyone comes to the decision with a commitment to making a decision.

And last, the church centers their decision making not on their own desires and comforts, but on what they see as what God wants. They recognize that God has already included the ones they are not sure about including, and they support what they see as God's movement. Their work is not to decide what they want, but what God wants, and discerning what God wants is the main task.

As we consider, in our local churches, in our Synod and in our larger churches, the important decisions we must make, Acts 15 provides us a wonderful model to follow. †

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Congratulations in Salisbury



Submitted photo

In June Pastor Tyler Graham (center, back row) was installed as pastor of the Salisbury Lutheran Parish. Congratulations.

BUCKETS

(Continued from Page 4)

This story is just one example of how these flood buckets are reaching out to touch the lives of our neighbors with love. This has inspired us to contact other local fire companies, New Centerville and Rockwood, to see if they want some of these buckets to keep on hand for emergencies. We also wanted them to know that we have these supplies available as needs arise. †

BEFORE *you* GO

I just noticed that the last of the gold chains from my neighbor's chain tree have fallen off.

Each year around Memorial Day the tree produces approximate 1-foot-long golden blooms that are seemingly strung together like golden chains.

They, like many blossoms, don't last more than a couple weeks.

Now, as we get deeper into the summer, different blooms will be popping up. In our yard tiger lilies are about ready to show their colors. Later in the year our rose of Sharon bushes will be blooming. Our red and yellow rose bushes typically produce all summer long. It all amounts to an impressive show that I likely don't appreciate as much as I should. Life is fast-paced and I am naturally "in a hurry to get things done."

I am about to write some time-tested advice that I hope I can follow myself.

Take some time this summer to enjoy God's simple gifts in your yards. Or, if you don't have many flowers, visit a public garden or enjoy your neighbor's flower beds.

Take time to stop and smell the roses.

— Rick Kazmer

ALSM Senior Daily Living Centers Provide Purpose for Participants and Respite for Caregivers

(Editor's note: This information is running verbatim from Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries.)

Jack had recently retired from the Altoona Career and Technology Center. He and his wife, Betsy, were looking forward to the free time that would allow them to go on new adventures. Unfortunately, Jack suffered a stroke, and their lives changed in a way they couldn't have imagined.

After returning home from rehabilitation, the Chilcote's knew they had to make some quick decisions so Jack could receive care when Betsy went back to work. They were referred to Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries Senior Daily Living Center. Jack and Betsy decided to learn more about the program. After doing their research and receiving positive reviews, they decided Jack would try it, and they are now very happy he did.

Jack started attending three days a week and soon became everyone's friend. Jack's favorite part of the center is helping others and being actively involved with the other clients. He says everyone on the staff creates an atmosphere of fun



Jack

and laughter. Their work with the clients is exceptional, and they do it with much care and compassion. "I honestly don't know what we would have done without the Senior Daily Living Center," Jack said. Jack also says the adult day program has been an antidepressant for him. It has given him something to look forward to and an opportunity to help other clients who need more assistance than he does. Recently, Jack has become more independent. He can stay home for longer periods alone but still feels he needs Senior Daily Living Center as his home away from home. He shares stories and laughs with others and

in doing so, keeps his spirit high.

Betsy agrees that Jack's attending the Senior Daily Living Center has made him more content and has given him a new outlook on learning how to live with the permanent damage from the stroke. The program has been a lifesaver for both Jack and Betsy. "Staff is always helpful. They have assisted with finding resources needed for additional care, transportation needs, and have given hope for the future," observed Betsy.

Our Senior Daily Living Centers provide adult day services for a safe and secure daytime "home away from home" for senior adults whose caregivers must work or tend to other responsibilities. With centers located in Altoona and Somerset, services offered at each location focus on the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of each person. We also welcome adults under 60 who have special needs. We invite you to call for more information or to schedule a tour.

- 814-946-4693 – Altoona location
- 814-445-8506 – Somerset location †

BISHOP 1

(Continued from Page 2)

It took me coming to the synod office before I was able to really see all that was going on. In the parish I was often amazed how God worked through the hearts of our people. But in the synod office you see the grace and mercy of God being poured out through all of you. We didn't just get to see what was going on in one congregation, but we saw God at work in 114. What I can tell you is that God is always working, always moving, always bringing about hope and peace in this world. Our Lord uses you to be part of that.

What I first noticed was the amazing generosity of our people. Whether it was collecting food, making quilts, responding to natural disasters at home or abroad, or responding to needs in our communities, the people of the Allegheny Synod give and share from the gifts God first gave us. I reminded the synod at our Assembly that our Synod Can Challenge gathered over a quarter of a million items in the years we participated. You provided motorcycles to our partners in Kenya so that pastors could carry the gospel to remote parts of the country. You built flood buckets for use in times of disaster. Those buckets were used in Clearfield when there was flooding, and when COVID began the N-95 masks were taken out to be shared with first responders. Over and over again I saw God working in and through you to help your neighbor.

But also, in you I saw great acts of kindness for one another. Especially in this last year I saw time and again where members

of the Allegheny Synod were going out of their way to care for each other. I talked to many congregations that were making sure their shut-in members had the food and the supplies they needed. You were finding ways to sustain your community by calling, Zooming and being creative in how you connected with each other. You made sure that the ministry of the church went on. In this last year you lived out the truth that the church is not a building, the church is God's people gathered together. I thank God for that and I thank God for you.

I bring this up because it is so easy to lose sight of what God is doing in our midst. It is like the way we can lose sight of the hills and valleys around us, because they are always there. I think sometimes we can lose sight of or forget just how much God is at work in us.

Part of that is because when we think of the way God works in the world, our minds first go to those great stories of the mighty saints of God. We think of God working through Moses and parting the Red Sea. We think of our Lord Jesus sending out the Apostles who perform great miracles and give their lives in service to the Gospel. We think of the saints of later days like St. Francis of Assisi, Martin Luther, and Mother Theresa, whose life and witness had a powerful impact on the world. We know that God is at work in these people. Since most of us aren't parting the Red Sea or starting the Reformation, we may be tempted to think that God is not moving as much in and with us.

(See Bishop 2, Page 14)

BISHOP 2

(Continued from Page 13)

I would like to remind you that most of the people who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ and carried on the work of the gospel throughout the centuries are people we have never heard of. Yes, there are the saints of God who have shaped the world.

But there are many millions more whose names we do not know but are part of the great cloud of faithful witnesses who have gone before us. The Holy Spirit who led and guided them in their lives is the same Holy Spirit and power of the most high God that is leading and guiding you and me.

The work of the church goes on not just in the big and amazing miracles of our Lord, but also in the millions who got up each day, loved their family, did their work and tried to follow Jesus in this world. As they did that, the Spirit worked through them to make this world a better place. We are here because of the work of the famous saints like Peter, Paul, Mother Theresa and Martin.

But we are also here because the Holy Spirit continues to work in people like you and me in all places and across time.

So, dear saints, you are doing the work of the gospel. You are being led by the Holy Spirit to show this world that there is a better way. You are living out the fact that God almighty is in your life. God is leading you and shaping you to be the person God wants you to be. Your walk with Christ is a witness to the world. It shows this world what the love of Christ looks like when lived out in regular and

ordinary people like us.

It has been my great honor to journey with you as your bishop for the last seven years. I continue to be amazed by the way God uses you. You have been a blessing to me. I thank God for you and will continue to pray for you and the Allegheny Synod.

I ask you also to keep our Bishop-elect Paula Schmitt in your prayers. She is in a time of major transition as she prepares to take office on Sept. 1.

We have been in pretty constant conversation since our assembly and have been meeting to continue the process of transition. I know that God will bless her as she leads our synod.

I am excited to see what God will do with Bishop-elect Paula and with you, the Allegheny Synod. This year is very different from 2014 when I began my term. The synod is in a different place and the world is in a different place. I was blessed to work with Bishop-elect Paula for six years.

I know that she brings her own set of gifts and skills to the Office of the Bishop.

You will find Bishop-elect Paula to be a person full of compassion and love for the Allegheny Synod and its people. You will also find that though we worked together, we are different people. I am excited how God will use her gifts, skills and abilities to take the Allegheny Synod forward.

May God's grace and peace be with you. I thank God for you. †

+Bishop Michael Rhyne

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Faith Lutheran Church in Lavallette, New Jersey

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