

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

Volume 21, Issue 5 • www.AlleghenySynod.org • Autumn 2026

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We Are Lutheran



Submitted photo

Carl Deal felt God's call to be a nurse as soon as he started studying to be one. He recently retired after 51 years.

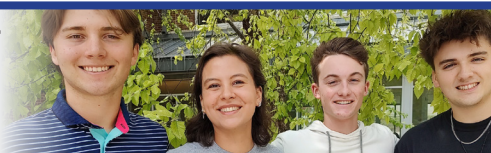
A career story that started in Meyersdale has ended in Meyersdale five decades later. Carl Deal details how he ended up back in the Maple City.

Story on Page 6



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

A new semester
at Penn State,
Page 3



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

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Afternoon hours by appointment only.

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Note: The Office of the Bishop reserves the
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Please contact the editorial team (above) with
your comments and story ideas. We look
forward to hearing from you.

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Inviting people to love one another.

OUR VISION

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Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Let it Be Acclaimed!



Photo from the Allegheny Synod Facebook page
Jennifer Lynn Bobolsky is a called and ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament. She has been called to serve as Pastor of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Mundy's Corner. Congratulations and blessings on your ministry. Bobolsky is pictured with Bishop Kevin Shock.

KEEP READING

A message from Bishop Kevin Shock
is on Page 24.

A New Semester for Campus Ministry

By **DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON**
Campus Minister for Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State

Students arrive on campus with myriad of emotions: eager for a year of discovery and growth, apprehensive about new places, people and responsibilities, overwhelmed by change and new situations, uneasy and lonely in an unfamiliar place and looking for places to connect.

Lutheran Campus Ministry offers a welcoming community for students as they experience these and other emotions in the first weeks, and all through their college years.

Weekly worship on campus with other students invites them into a place apart – where they can center themselves in God’s love and presence, explore scripture, pray, and grow into faith as adults.

Dinner together after worship provides authentic community and a safe place to share the challenges and the joys of their lives with each other.

(Continued on the next page)

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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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(Continued from the previous page)

Students can ask questions and learn to think more deeply, build friendships where they both receive and give support. It's all grounded in the context of God's unending love.

This fall, student leaders Luke Kromholz, Lynda Franca, Brady Schurchert, and Ayden Sivik are making plans for the Student Involvement Fair, hiking Mt. Nittany, monthly gatherings to learn about Lutheran teachings and practices, watching movies or other social times together, and serving the world through feeding programs and volunteering on campus.

The early weeks of college are the hardest for both new and returning students. There is so much to adjust to and countless unfamiliar things. Please pray for students at Penn State and at colleges and universities everywhere as the academic year begins.

Pray that students find caring and supportive communities. Pray that students find their classroom buildings and make it to class on time. Pray that students learn to manage the new responsibilities that college brings. Pray that students see and experience the presence and love of God each day. Pray for Lutheran Campus Ministry as the year gets underway and students find all that LCM has to offer. †

Speaker Series

Investigates

Relationship Between AI, Faith, and Humanity

By PASTOR CAROLYN HETRICK
Grace Lutheran, State College

I hope the last bits of summer are treating you well. Here at Grace Lutheran, we want to share details about an exciting four-week series starting Sept. 16 as we try to frame the conversation about artificial intelligence, our humanity, creativity, innovation, and faith.

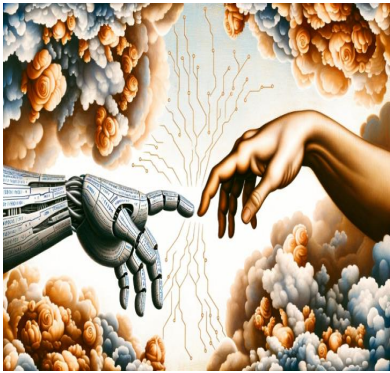
Each week, we will be meeting from 6:15 to 7 p.m. in person at the church with speakers from across the country.

We hope many folks can be in the room with us. We are also offering live-streaming.

Sessions will be on our YouTube channel, as well.

We are blessed to have some great folks to help us along the way.

Please reach out if you have questions and please feel free to share with anyone regardless of faith who would like to ponder with us along the way. †



This is My Body: AI and Humanity

- How does humanity matter in an age of Artificial Intelligence?
- How do we balance faith, ethics, innovation & justice for all?
- How do we retain real relationships in digital spaces?
- Can we trust ourselves to be human?

Moderated by Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

WEDNESDAYS FROM 6:15- 7:00 PM

ATTEND LIVE In our Sanctuary at Grace Lutheran Church,
205 S Garner Street, State College, PA

ATTEND LIVESTREAMED <https://tinyurl.com/AlandHumanity>

WATCH LATER at: <https://www.youtube.com/@gracelutheranstatecollegep1835>



SEPTEMBER 16TH “Framing the AI conversation from a Lutheran faith lens.”

OCTOBER 7th “Take aways for engaging AI faithfully and wisely”

The Rev. Dr. Roger A. Willer is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) who retired recently as the Director for Theological Ethics in the ELCA Office of the Presiding Bishop. He is on contract with the Theological Ethics desk in the Office of the Presiding Bishop to support engagement with AI on behalf of the ELCA.



SEPTEMBER 23RD: DATA CENTERS, JUSTICE AND CARE OF CREATION: What is the harm to our bodies especially the poor and marginalized?

Rob Altenburg brings more than 30 years' worth of environmental, climate, and energy expertise to advance clean energy solutions for Pennsylvania. He works with regulatory agencies and clean energy industry experts on climate and energy issues across the Commonwealth and has provided testimony to the White House, the U.S. Senate, the Pennsylvania Legislature, and numerous state and federal agencies.



SEPTEMBER 30TH: CREATIVITY, COMMUNITY, DIGNITY: How do we retain the beauty and imperfection of human community?

Ryan Panzer is an author and speaker exploring the intersection of technology, ministry, and vocation. His work in the church examines how ministries can engage emerging technologies while remaining grounded in theological reflection, human dignity, and practices that cultivate trust, belonging, and meaningful community on topics including ethical AI adoption, digital community-building, and vocational formation in a rapidly changing world. Author of *Grace and Gigabytes*: "Grace and Gigabytes" (2020) and "The Holy and the Hybrid" (2022).

Deal Describes 51-Year Nursing Career

By RICK KAZMER

Editor

Career nurse Carl Deal has book-ended his professional journey with service at a small rural hospital in Meyersdale.

The 71-year-old West Salisbury resident started in 1973 as a nursing assistant at Meyersdale Community Hospital, now part of the Conemaugh Health System. He recently retired after 51 years.

“During this journey I served in several roles and enjoyed each of them very much,” Deal, who is a part of Living Waters Lutheran Parish, said.

A lot has changed since the 1970s, especially in the medical profession. But Deal has navigated the profession well. In 1975 he graduated as an LPN from Somerset Hospital’s program. In 1983 Deal became a “proud” graduate from the Shadyside Hospital School of Nursing as an RN. Less than a decade later he earned his critical care certification and in 1998 obtained a bachelor’s of science in nursing from Carlow University.

It has been a five-decade career that has included stints as surgery, ICU, managerial roles, and as an educator. Starting and ending his career in what is now called Meyersdale Medical Center is the “hallmark” of the journey, according to Deal.

“The profession has never been a job for me. It was my life,” he said.

Deal enjoyed caring for critical patients and providing support for their families. Teaching and mentoring new staff members was also a highlight during the years.

“Teaching at the LPN program was so rewarding to see students come fresh and one year later be proficient care givers,” Deal said.

He added that keeping up with the rapidly changing field was one of the biggest challenges. Helping families navigate difficult times was also a tough part of the work.

“Being sure they understood to the best of their ability what was occurring. Additionally, in those cases when we entered the comfort-care-only situations. Huge challenge to assist the family to make decisions comfortable for them, as their life would continue to move forward beyond that point,” he said.

One story from his career stands out.

“A young girl when I worked ICU ... she suffered severe head trauma from an auto crash. She was months in ICU with all the tubes and devices we use. The family ... was so afraid and would pray often for recovery. It was many weeks into months with her being unresponsive. They were so afraid that if/when she woke up she wouldn’t remember them.

(Continued on the next page)

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The mother so often would say ‘the best Mother’s Day gift is if she would wake up. As God would have it on Mother’s Day she awakened and recognized every family member in the room at that time. Needless to say everyone had tears of joy flowing,” Deal said, crediting God for the healing. His faith was a core part of his career, leading his way. Deal feels that God led him to be a nurse, from the moment he sat in a classroom chair for the first time in 1974.

“The minute I sat in that seat I knew I was where I was supposed to be. I treasure every experience during this 51-year journey,” he said.

Deal said that he also enjoys attending a rural church. It’s the same one he has attended his entire life.

His parents, who have both since passed, attended the church as children as well. Deal serves as the council president and has held numerous other roles during the years.

Each year he heads a mission to collect funds for children’s education in Malawi, Africa. Deal has

spent time there and remains in communication with the local pastor.

“I like the family atmosphere and the unspoken support of our church family. I totally enjoy the sermon every Sunday,” he said.

“It’s a more traditional format with a “reverent service,” he said.

Deal has three siblings and several nieces, nephews and great nieces and nephews. His favorite Bible verse is John 3:16.

WE ARE LUTHERAN

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What’s your earliest memory of attending a Lutheran Church:

CARL DEAL: One of my first memories is how the pastor was dressed in the vestment and the alter candles always had me fascinated. But I so remember the choir entering behind the pastor and how beautiful they sounded.

TLL: What are you praying for the most lately?

CD: Our wonderful nation. It’s filled with so much hatred, battling and overall negativity. I pray so much for God to touch the hearts of people to find themselves to our one true God. Once that acceptance occurs, I feel we would see a nation so much more united and less battling. †

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A Travelogue

Visiting the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church

(Editor's note: This is Bishop Kevin Shock's report from his trip May 20-27 to Kenya.)

By BISHOP KEVIN SHOCK

My car was packed early, in order to not forget the gifts, liturgical vestments, and other necessities of international travel.

Concerned about Pittsburgh traffic in

the morning, I stayed near the airport the night before my flight. Arriving at the airport in plenty of time and speeding through check-in and security gave me time to consider the excitement of what was to come and how far away it still was.

Involved international travel requires leaving certain airports, using

certain planes.

First stop was Boston with a long layover, then to Paris, another long layover, and a longer flight to Nairobi. After getting through customs, a familiar face emerged from the crowd. Daudi Msseem-maa is our ELCA representative to East Africa.

(Continued on the next page)

Registration is now open!

Visit

<https://www.alleghenysynod.org/youth-resources>

to download the registration packet

The Weekend.

Allegheny Synod Youth Event

December 11-13, 2026

St. James Lutheran Church & Comfort Inn
Huntingdon, PA

(Continued from the previous page)

He greeted me, took all my bags, which would become a regular practice, and escorted me to a small restaurant where a group waited.

They insisted I sat down for a tea after long travel. I opted for the very strong ginger and lemon tea others were drinking.

The rest of our ELCA delegation was there: the Rev. Lucille “Ce-Cee” Mills, secretary of the ELCA; and the Rev. Khader El-Yateem, executive director of the Service and Justice Unit. The group welcoming us included retiring Bishop Johnes Ole Meliyio; Secretary General Jonathan Kapanga; Evans, who was driving us; and Klaus, who is a KELC partner with the Lutheran Church in Bavaria. I was surprised that such important KELC representatives were greeting us so late at night, yet hospitality is a theme with Kenyans and KELC. Struggling to fall asleep in this new environ-

See photos from the trip as the story continues

ment, I unpacked all my things before finally getting a few hours of sleep in.

The First Day

The first full day began early with breakfast in the hotel. Uber is the primary mode of transport for people looking for nonstop rides between locations.

Daudi has mastered all of the particulars of staying in Nairobi and was an indispensable guide for us. We first went to the KELC compound, where we met with Ole Meliyio, Kapanga, and leaders of various departments who explained their ministries to us.

(Continued on Page 11)

WE are LUTHERAN

Is looking for people to feature!

Know someone in your congregation who is doing unique things, has a cool hobby, or is making a difference? Email contact information to Editor Rick Kazmer at **r9remzak@hotmail.com**.

Effective 4/1/2026



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20-YEAR PATRONS

Special 20-year Patrons is a year-long opportunity, running through the May/June 2027 issue. Funding collected through this project will be sent to ELCA World Hunger work. Email Michelle Bossler at Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com to become a 20-year anniversary Patron, or mail this form to the Synod office

(Continued from Page 9)

Diakonia deals with training for lay church leaders and congregational ministries. KELC is growing and currently has 182 congregations organized into 52 parishes, which are served by 38 pastors, 23 evangelists, and a number of deacons. KELC is moving toward a diocesan model to oversee this structure. There will be various bishops with new Bishop Catherine Ngina Musau serving as national bishop. The Women Department does extensive work to train women for jobs, to encourage education and literacy, to raise up entrepreneurs, to save girls from arranged marriages, and to advocate for gender justice.



Photos submitted by Bishop

The Youth Department works to build relationships through gatherings; educates and organizes on issues of climate justice, peace, and faith; and offers mentorship and sports programs as a part of their evangelism. Bishop Catherine had not been feeling well and was therefore resting ahead of the consecration service. Secretary General Kapanga was in her stead leading a presentation to clergy on challenges the new bishop perceives clergy facing. They asked us to speak several times. As the time went on, more clergy were finding voice and having deep conversation in Kiswahili. That was our cue to leave, and we went to an office for tea, where we welcomed a delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). ELCT has 26 dioceses, and several bishops were present for the consecration service. KELC began as an outreach diocese of ELCT. Bishop Mbilu, whom we greeted that day, became a quick friend and translator for me in worship.

We went to lunch, often eaten later at a local restaurant, where Daudi ordered for us traditional Kenyan food: grains; grilled meats; and plantains. We were able to rest for the remainder of the day ahead of the services.

The Second Day

The next day began with a visit to Nairobi International Lutheran Congregation (NILC). NILC had been served by missionaries until 2020 and is now served by Pastor Agnes Chomba.

(Continued on the next page)

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The women's choir greeted us with song as we pulled up, particularly greeting Secretary Mills as an honored guest for the women.

Again, all our bags and vestments were carried for us. We learned about the ministries of NILC, a building project that will help with sustainable income through office space for the congregation, and memories of previous trips from one member to the Allegheny Synod. Brother Dennis asked about Sequanota and told us of the fervent prayer of the Men's Fellowship. He inquired whether another men's group might become prayer partners with them. After a quick meal served by NILC, we returned to the KELC compound for the blessing of vestments service.

Only certain bishops needed to vest for this service, so I remained with our delegation in the crowd next to the previous retired Bishop Zachariah Kahuthu. The service lasted three hours, followed by another three hours of greetings from all of the visiting delegations and gifts for both incoming Bishop Catherine and outgoing Bishop Ole Meliyio. After a rehearsal for the consecration service, we retired in preparation for an even longer day.

We left the hotel early to arrive at the KELC compound, which had been transformed to accommodate people traveling from all over the country and beyond. Different delegations were asked to plant trees in

the compound yard, reflecting the need for climate justice in Kenya. We went to prepare and vest, then began to line up in waiting for the procession to begin. The first two female Lutheran bishops in Africa traveled from South Africa and Namibia to support their sister bishop. Bishop Hilja from Namibia and I befriended each other as two of the non-Kiswahili-speaking bishops.

The procession began from the streets with a large cross, a marching band, and choir after choir. The women were out in full force celebrating this historic event with singing, shouting, and ululating. The bishops followed behind and were led to the stage. We were all asked to participate in various ways with readings, prayers, and laying on of hands. We heard from the Tanzanian bishops that Bishop Catherine is not Mama Askofu (Mother Bishop), but simply Askofu. She carries the responsibilities and respect of any other bishop in the church. She was not elected because she is a woman, but because she has the gifts to lead a growing church.

Because she is also a woman, she is a sign of the church becoming a just and holy body for all people. During her installation, Bishop Ole Meliyio took Bishop Catherine by the hand and guided her to the bishop's seat, as a sign of unity and peaceful transition of leadership. It was an incredibly meaningful gesture for those who were gathered.

(Continued on the next page)



Photos submitted by Bishop Shock

Kenyan children playing in a playground.

(Continued from the previous page)

After the three-hour service we divested and were led to a meal in an upper room but were quickly told that it was just the first course. A larger meal was downstairs for visiting delegations and for most of the other 1,000-plus who were gathered. We were stuffed by the time we left. Daudi took us out for a late dinner to a food court where we were inundated by people trying to sell us their various delicacies.

The Third Day

The next morning after breakfast we were picked up by Ole Meliyio, Bishop Catherine, and Secretary General Kapanga to visit the Pangani Lutheran Children's Center. PLCC is no longer in the Pangani neighborhood of Nairobi, but still

serves children there through social services and support for families to keep children in school and off the streets. PLCC has its own land in Ongata Rongai, just outside of Nairobi. There they run their own school, Maarum School, and currently house 43 children onsite. Teachers there are both Kenyan and from partners in Bavaria. PLCC serves an additional 70 children who are living at home and enrolled in local schools. The director, Mary Mshana, has also visited Allegheny Synod and was pleased to welcome our delegation.

They are continuing to build both more dorms and greater services to help children. From PLCC, we traveled two hours to Kajiado county and the small parish of Oliorum.

(Continued on the next page)

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This parish is in a Maasai village. Much of the church came to greet us, even though it was the middle of a weekday. We all went through a receiving line and were fed a huge meal. Some of the food I did not recognize nor ask others to identify. The singing and dancing of the Maasai women was mesmerizing, as they used rhythmic movement to animate their large necklaces. We received gifts of Maasai cloth from them and were blessed in our travels. We arrived back at the hotel just around nightfall, exhausted but full of joy from our visits.

Rhinos, Lions, and a Vision for the Future

Early in the trip Pastor CeCee let it be known that she hoped to see some animals while in Kenya, and Daudi delivered. I woke at about 5 a.m. to repack my vestments, new gifts, and clothes to get in the lobby for an early morning trip to Nairobi National Park. There we saw lots of rhinos, some hippos, a few giraffes, ostriches, a crocodile, and a brief glimpse of a lion.

It was an exhilarating trip through the park, then a short ride to Eastleigh Lutheran Parish. We were again fed, this time twice in the same visit, and welcomed with singing, shouting, and palm waving. Eastleigh will become a cathedral for a new diocese, and they have been involved in a “brick-by-brick” building project for years.

KEEP READING

A message from the Director of Evangelical Mission and other news is in this edition

As members donate labor and materials, they use them to build what they can. It is a much different approach to how we build in the U.S., but one that results from faith in a vision and faith that God will provide for the ministry that God has called them to.

After our second meal there and an exchange of gifts, we sat down with representatives from KELC, including Bishop Catherine, to talk about her plans for ministry, goals for KELC, and future relationship between KELC and the Allegheny Synod and ELCA. It was a hopeful and fruitful conversation that was reflective of the new connections we made during the trip.

We then went on a walking tour of the busy neighborhood that Eastleigh parish serves. It is a majority Muslim neighborhood, and the call to prayer rang out all during our walk. There is much commerce that happens in the neighborhood through stores selling all kinds of products. We visited a mall, much different from our own malls, that sold nothing but cloth.

The cramped building was filled with kiosks run by different vendors.

(Continued on the next page)



Schock's journey included a colorful immersion in Kenyan culture, food, dress, and worship.

(Continued from the previous page)

Some in our group asked the pastor to take us around to every kiosk owned by women from Eastleigh Parish, so we could support their business. One of them gifted me with a shawl for Lisa. We returned to the parish compound, then back to our hotel, where we debriefed. For the last ride of our trip to the airport we were again met by Secretary General Kapanga, retired Bishop Ole Meliyio, and Bishop Catherine, who all accompanied us to our terminal. I was glad to arrive home after almost 30 hours in transit, encouraged all along my journey, and in the journey to come, by the people of KELC and their hospitality, abundant welcome, and faithfulness. †



Photos submitted by Bishop Shock

Worship for Every Body



Photo frame from Grace Lutheran's video/Submitted photos

Pastor Carolyn Hetrick poses with a congregation member who is participating in one of the church's unique opportunities. More photos are on the following page.

Grace Inclusion Program Highlighted at Gathering

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Recently, Grace Lutheran in State College was contacted by the planning team for the ELCA Youth Gathering to offer a five-minute video about their ministry with and for people living with disability.

Grace's [website](#) uses the tagline "Grace is a Place for Every Body."

Over time the congregation's ministry has expanded their approach to how they see the idea of disability to more fully encompass compassion for invisible disabilities such as neurodivergence.

"There are many ways to share in being a faith community where every person's dignity as created in the image of God is not only welcomed but celebrated," Associate Pastor Carolyn Hetrick said. "We hope that someday every church is a place for every body."

Their video, which can be found [here](#), will be a part of the welcome curriculum for people preparing to attend next year's Youth Gathering.

(Continued on the next page)



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The video includes two members, Thomas Verdame and Becky Rogers, both whom are adults living with disability and active members. Becky was once involved in the planning team for the Table event that is a part of the Gathering. It also talks about locating or creating adaptive resources to teach communion and baptism for folks like recent member, Will.

Grace pastors and Director of Faith Formation Cindy Fritz shared a peek at the newly created Zen Den, which offers a space for people experiencing sensory overload to reset their minds, whether to seek calming or tactile activity. Grace also offers fidgets and a Pray-Ground to support those who want other ways to engage in worship.

“We hope to normalize that we all find grounding differently,” Hetrick said.

The staff and volunteers at Grace are happy to share what they have learned as they continue to engage with anyone who seeks out Jesus there.

“We have found that many of the ideas we are using do not cost a lot of money but make a huge difference in showing God’s love to others,” according to Grace Pastor Scott Schul. †

Initiative Update

By **PASTOR JOHN KRATZ**
Initiative Director

The Go Tell It IN The Mountains Initiative continues to grow and change throughout this journey. Therefore, it is a good time to be reminded of our core goals.

These are:

Goal 1: Ordained and lay preachers will be equipped to utilize traditional and non-traditional techniques, including different modes of delivery to develop skills and practices that will communicate the Gospel message in more compelling ways.

Goal 2: Aspiring preachers will be recruited and engaged in a variety of compelling preaching strategies



Pastor
John H. Kratz

that educate, empower, and support competency in their ministry.

Goal 3: Existing members of congregations and new community audiences within our three Lutheran partner synods will respond to compelling preaching opportunities and content by integrating the gospel message into their attitudes, actions, and ministries in daily life.

(Continued on the next page)

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(Continued from the previous page)

In addition, we are to look forward. What work has been so successful that it is very important for it to continue? What did we try that we can let fade away? Conversation was scheduled to be held by many of our steering committee and task force people relating to our future on Aug. 21 and 22. This is the first time that our groups met in person. In addition, we are blessed to have a Lilly Endowment consultant to be with us through this conversation and planning.

Please keep us in prayer through this time. It is a tremendous blessing to have received these funds and we pray to be faithful in using them in good order with the grant, but most importantly for the work of the kingdom of God. Your prayer support is genuinely appreciated. †

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Wanted: Pencils for Love Letters

By DEACON SUE ELLEN SPOTTS
 Director of Evangelical Mission

I was standing on a grassy plot adjacent to the gate of the federal prison in Lewisburg. I had been invited to hear about someone who is incarcerated there and join in a prayer vigil for him. His name is Omar. Fleeing threats and violence in Peru, Omar and his wife, Laura,

were granted permission to enter the United States with their 5-year-old son and given authorization to work while the asylum case proceeded. One day, Omar received a traffic citation in the mail for an incident that was not his. When he showed up at court to plead his case against the misdemeanor violation, with evidence

confirming that he was not driving, ICE officers were waiting for him. The charges were subsequently dropped by the district attorney, but Omar has been held in detention for over six months, first at the Moshannon facility and now at FCI Lewisburg. His unjust detainment, like that of so many others, has brought a young family no end of grief and hardship. At the recent synod council retreat, Bishp Kevin Shock led us in reflecting on the mission and vision statements of the Allegheny Synod. Our vision is, “All creation living in harmony with Christ.” Living toward that vision, our mission is, “Inviting people to love one another.” This invitation calls us into the world, into encounters with other people.

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Pericope Study

Go Tell It IN The Mountains



Date
2026 NOVEMBER 18



Time
09:00 - 3:00PM



Location
ZOOM



With
REV. DR. ALLISON DEFOREST

(BREAK FOR LUNCH)

 <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0A4EA4AE29A5F8C34-65426316-pericope>

Pericope Study Series Continues!

Go Tell It IN The Mountains invites you to the 2nd of 4 Zoom sessions with Rev. Dr. Allison DeForest — **a deep dive into text study** that helps us read with clarity, context, and courage.

Come ready to learn, listen, and grow.



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A vision of all creation in harmony calls us to walk through the doors of the church and continue loving one another in the world.

I am inviting you to love Omar, Laura, and their son.

Even if you cannot meet them in person, I am inviting you to love them. Remember the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). After instructing people to love their neighbor, Jesus is asked, “who is my neighbor?” He tells a story of an injured man lying on the road who was passed over by many religious people. Finally, someone who could have been understood as an outsider or even an enemy, helped him. This is the person Jesus identified as the neighbor, the one who demonstrated the love that Jesus invited them to show.

Omar and thousands of others have been left, not by the side of the road, but in detention centers and prisons.

One of those centers is in our synod territory. When we don't pay attention to what is happening there; when we don't ask questions; when we don't get to know the stories of those who are in Moshannon, then we are like the religious people who crossed to the other side of the road to avoid the Samaritan.

“I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you

love each other.” (John 13:34-35)

I am inviting you to be a disciple; to love another who is outside your circle; to love the immigrants in our midst.

To learn more about refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers, I encourage you to read the stories that Global Refuge posts. ([Global Refuge I Welcome & hope since 1939](#)), Global Refuge is the ELCA affiliated organization focused on ministry to refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers.

I am inviting you to love through your words, to speak in love about those who seek refuge in our communities. AMMPARO, the ELCA's office for accompanying migrants, has a resource that helps explore how our words shape our perceptions. [Words Create Worlds.pdf](#)

The Samaritan not only bandaged the hurting man onsite, but looked after his healing long term. I invite you to love the immigrants by taking actions that bring about healing to a system that treats them unjustly. You can learn about actions in support of immigrants in our state by reaching out to Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania ([Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania](#)).

If you are interested in exploring with others in the synod how we might love our immigrant neighbors, I invite you to send me your name (sueellen.spotts@elca.org) to join a synod conversation.

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Sue Ellen Spotts,
Director of
Evangelical
Mission

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 from the pre-
 vious page)

Over the next several issues of The Lutheran Letter I am going to lift up other ways we may continue to love one another inside and outside the walls of our church buildings. Who do you feel invited to love in the way of Christ? Let me know if you have a story to share. †

Community is a Gift, But Living in Community is Not Always Easy, Writes Pastor Waltermire

“For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” – Romans 12:4-5

By LAURA WALTERMIRE
 St. Mark, Pleasant Gap

There are certain times and places in our lives when we are reminded of the gift of community.

We gather with family and friends, sometimes seeing people we know well and see often, and other times reconnecting with those we may see only once in a while.

We share stories, remember the past, catch up on what has happened since we were last together, and create new memories.

There may be tears as we remember those who are no longer with us, and there is often laughter as we remember the moments we have shared. In these gatherings, we are reminded of the relationships that connect us and give us a sense of belonging to all the communities.

Our faith communities can be places where we experience that same gift of connection and belonging.

When we gather as the body of Christ, we come together not simply because we share a building or attend the same worship service, but because God has gathered us into a community of faith.

We come together in fellowship, in prayer, in times of joy and sorrow, and in the ordinary moments of life. Through these relationships, we come to know one another more deeply, care for one another, and recognize that we do not walk through life alone.

Community is a gift, but living in community is not always easy. We do not always agree, and we do not always see things in the same way.

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Yet Scripture reminds us that our differences do not diminish our belonging.

Instead, they are part of what makes the body of Christ whole.

We are many members, but we are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another.

Being members of one another means that our lives are connected.

As members of the body of Christ, we belong to a community, and being a part of it reminds us that we are not alone on this journey. We belong to one another and are called to live in community with one another, even through all the hills and valleys.

We are called to live out this gift of being in community by bearing witness to God's grace, love, and mercy through the ways we care for our neighbors and for one another.

Sometimes that care takes place in ordinary and seemingly small ways – a conversation, a phone call, a card sent, a visit, a shared smile or kind word, or simply being present with someone in times of sorrow or even during a joyous time.

These simple acts remind us that community is not something we experience only when we gather for worship, where God gathers us, feeds us, and nourishes us with grace, love, and mercy.

Our life together continues beyond the four walls of the church when we cross that threshold. Christ sends us out to live as the Church wherever we live, work, serve, and care for one another.

To live as the body of Christ is to recognize that our belonging is rooted in Christ's life, death, and resurrection. We do not create this belonging for ourselves; it is a gift from God. In Christ we are named and claimed as beloved children of God, and Christ says, "You are mine." We are called to live as part of God's wider community, where each of us has a place within the body of Christ. We give thanks to God for the gift of community and belonging to Christ and to one another.

Let us pray: God of community, you build your Church up as a community of faithful witnesses throughout the generations. Continue to weave us together as your body, in community with you, and with one another. Deepen our awareness of the ways you connect us to you, and to one another.

Enliven within us the hope of your good news as you draw us closer to you and to one another, that we may be strengthened in faith toward you and fervent love toward one another. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. †



Grief and New Life

Friends, as I was going through my list of topics, on which I would like to reflect for this column, nothing felt quite right.

There has been a “not quite right” feeling for some aspects of my ministry during the past few months.

In conversation with others I have come to realize that I am grieving. Since October in our Synod, three pastors have died unexpectedly. Two of them were still in active congregational ministry, and one was recently retired and still active in Synodical ministry.

Additionally, a layperson who had been currently serving on Synod Council, Candidacy Committee, LAMPa Policy Council, and in other ways died suddenly.

Beyond no longer seeing their faces around the table, I had shared personal history with all of them in various measure, and I miss their wisdom, their humor, and their presence.

When this grief creeps up, or maybe when I can feel it looming, it naturally affects me. I think about my own health issues this summer, the cause to which still remains somewhat of a mystery, and which has



Bishop Shock

me thinking on my own physical abilities and how I push limitations in some ways I shouldn't.

I think on a dear friend who has been diagnosed with a serious illness and about a possible outcome that grief has forced me to think about, even if I refuse to name it.

I also think about how grief affects the church. We are all mourning someone in our lives, and we are also mourning the death of a life, culture, and church that we grew up in. Church will never go back to what we knew, and grief forces us to remember that reality when we still do not want to face it.

I also know that grief can be a process that results in an openness to new possibilities. I have witnessed grieving people discover new joy while still remembering the joy of what was.

One place where that possibility became real for me recently was at the closing liturgy of Trinity Lutheran Church in Confluence.

There were laments and tears at that gathering.

There was also the joy of gathering, some relief at having come to a faithful decision, the support of neighbors and clergy and friends, and hope at what God can do in and among the people that still called Trinity their church home.

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BEFORE YOU GO

Slightly Different Format

Attentive readers will notice a little tweak to the design format this month. After some discussion during our last Lutheran Letter Committee meeting, we decided to run stories on consecutive pages until they finish, instead of jumping them deeper into the issue.

This shouldn't be a problem for readers who like to print the edition out and read a hard copy. The change should make the experience much smoother for readers who like to open the digital version and scroll through it on their phones and devices. Stories will start and finish in succession, instead of pages apart. It's part of the publication's ongoing evolution following the switch to an all digital format several years ago. Since then, the design has shifted to accommodate both print and digital readers. Most printers should be able to print the pdf for each issue. The design is built to look well on phones and devices, as well. Jumping stories was a holdover characteristic from the print version. It's impossible to start and finish stories on one page, so they were typically jumped deeper into the issue.

But it created some finger-scrolling gymnastics for many readers. Hopefully you will enjoy the new format. The plan is to include some teasers throughout highlighting content that is deeper in the edition. Readers who enjoy scrolling can still scan the issue before deciding where to dive in.

Thanks for reading, and sticking with The Lutheran Letter for 20 years. The digital edition will continue to evolve with minor changes to improve the experience. If you have any questions or suggestions, feel free to reach out. You can email me at r9remzak@hotmail.com.

See you in the Holiday Edition.

– Rick Kazmer †

(Continued from the following page)
 Martin Luther, as a theologian of the cross, tells his people that we have to call a thing what it is. Death is real. Pain is real. Grief is real. God does not shield us from these things in this world. Yet, God most certainly transforms us in the midst

of grief to find hope and love and faith, all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some days are currently hard for me, for us. Even on those days, I can still somehow perceive that God is making all things new.

– Bishop Kevin Shock †