

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital



EASTER MESSAGES INSIDE!

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Shock Taking on More Duties at Synod

BY RICK KAZMER
The Lutheran Letter Editor

Pastor Kevin Shock has been named the director of evangelical mission and assistant to the bishop for the Allegheny Synod.

Shock, pastor of St. Mark in Pleasant Gap, answered some questions about himself and his new role for The Lutheran Letter.

Shock, 46, grew up in Altoona, but has lived in Howard for seven years.

He is married to Lisa Bahr. They have three rescue dogs, Luna, Zanzi and Monkee.

(See SHOCK 1 Page 11)



"Ein' feste Burg."

POWER IN SONG

Synod Music Experts Offer Insight on "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." PAGE 4



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

The LUTHERAN Letter

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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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OUR MISSION

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.)

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CONTACT US

Newsletter: r9remzak@hotmail.com

Bishop Schmitt: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

Michelle Bossler: Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com

Reflections on Lent

A Message from Bishop Paula Schmitt

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As you receive this edition of The Lutheran Letter we are making our start through the season of Lent toward the celebration of Easter. As I write this, the mornings are still bitter cold, but the bright sunshine reminds me that the dark of winter is soon ending.

That's the beauty of this season. We are in a mood of anticipation or expectation. We are waiting not only for spring to arrive, but also for the glorious celebration of Easter; of Christ's resurrection from the dead.

One of my favorite poems is by Wendell Berry titled "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front."⁽¹⁾

It's an odd title for sure, but its last line continues to transform me: Practice resurrection. The gist of the poem is that the world continues to tempt us with the "latest and greatest" things, but they have no long-term or lasting value. Berry invites readers to invest their time differently. He says, "Love someone who does not deserve it . . . Be joyful though you have considered all the facts." The last phrase of the poem, "Practice resurrection" calls us to remember that we are witnesses to Christ's resurrection; that we can demonstrate the power of God's redemption of the world in how we live and love. For Berry, practicing resurrection is obeying Jesus's call to love our neighbors and our enemies.

I read Berry's poem each Lent as a reminder of what this season — and this life — needs from me: to give and receive love in the way Jesus's death and resurrection have revealed it to me.

(See BISHOP, Page 10)



EASTER MESSAGES

Pastors from around the Allegheny Synod shared these short messages for this important season.

"**EMBRACE** the perplexity that comes from **WITNESSING THE RESURRECTION**. Embrace the grief and the joy, the fear and the amazement.

— *Pastor Kevin Shock, assisant to the bishop*

Out of death — **LIFE!**

— *Pastor Doug Knupp, interim at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Windber*

"Death, **THOU SHALT DIE!**"

This is kind of unique. I don't re-

member where I heard it (probably in seminary), so I don't know the source. It's probably from a poem, or something. But it is a phrase that has stuck with me, and seems appropriate this Easter as we come out of the pandemic.

— *Pastor Glenn Foster, Mountain Saints Lutheran Ministries*

I'm thinking about, "**CHRIST HAS DIED. CHRIST IS RISEN. CHRIST WILL COME AGAIN,**" with a focus on each. What difference does any one or all make in your life NOW?

— *Pastor Evelyn Wald, St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, Petersburg*

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'A Bulwark Never Failing'

Commentary on Martin Luther's Widely Known Hymn

(Editor's note: This continues the feature from last issue on Martin Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God.")

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Martin Luther left the faithful of future generations a strong song of inspiration in "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," or "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," in its original German.

Music leaders in the Allegheny Synod said the song, though 500 years old, can still be a source of strength, a battle hymn against Satan and evil in the world.

Old hymns are often assumed to be stodgy, but Laurel Sanders, who is in charge of music and arts at Grace Lutheran Church in State College, said the hymn, and others by Luther, are unique.

She noted the irregular, dance-like rhythms used in the original version. The song has been redone throughout the centuries.

"Many people seem to think of Luther's hymns as slow and stodgy . . . some would say dirges . . . but if we dig into the writings about Luther by his contemporaries, it seems his hymns were very lively and sung with conviction. Learning them in their original rhythms — especially the strong 'A Mighty Fortress' — can reintroduce their intended vigor and life . . . and that, in turn, that can inform and reinvigorate even the singing of the hymn in

equal meter," she said.

In 2017 Lutherans celebrated the 500-year anniversary of the Reformation. Luther's teachings, his messages and hymns were a focus.

Grace Lutheran had a special concert that included a massed choir singing the hymn in its original rhythms. Sanders said it was a good time to introduce the church's youth to the original form. They typically sing a more modern version.

Nicholas Carroll is the music director at Trinity Lutheran Church in Somerset. He said "A Mighty Fortress" is written like a military song.

"(W)hich matches the theme of the text perfectly," he said.

"A bulwark never failing: Our helper He, amid the flood/Of mortal ills prevailing. For still our ancient foe/Doth seek to work his woe; His craft and power are great, And armed with cruel hate, On earth is not his equal," part of the song's lyrics read.

"Musicologists often refer to it as "the Battle Hymn of the Reformation" because of this battle-song quality. Personally, what has always struck me about the hymn is how strongly Luther acknowledges the presence of evil and Satanic forces that oppose God throughout the text," Carroll said.

The song points to direct loss people face, even today, including losing a spouse, possessions and life.

(See HYMN, Page 5)

Remember in Prayer

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

MARCH

Week 1: Luthersburg-Rockton Parish: St. John, Luthersburg; and St. Peter, Rockton

Week 2: Bethany Lutheran, Altoona

Week 3: Zion Lutheran, Clearville

Week 4: Curwensville Area Lutheran Ministry: Grace Lutheran, Curwensville; Olanta Lutheran, Olanta; and Salem, New Millport

APRIL

Week 1: First Lutheran, Altoona

Week 2: St. Luke, Rockwood

Week 3: St. David's Lutheran, Davidsville

Week 4: St. Clairsville Parish: Messiah, Bedford; and St. Peter, Osterburg

HYMN

(Continued from Page 4)

"Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever!" the hymn concludes.

"In my view it is Luther's way of writing about real worldly dangers and pain and then juxtaposing that with God's grace and protection that makes the hymn so powerful. Luther does not sugar-coat the challenges we face and that makes the unconquerable love of Christ and God more poignant," Carroll said. "The notes fit the music quite well and it is easy to sing despite having rather complex lyrics. The grandeur of the music and the unwavering faith in God's ability to rescue us makes the hymn inspiring rather than depressing despite the bleak portions of the text.

"'A Mighty Fortress' is a hymn I never tire of playing and still moves me powerfully each time."

Lyrics to "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work his woe;

His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.
Did we in our own strength
confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our
side,
The Man of God's own choos-
ing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth is his name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.
And though this world, with
devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath
willed
His truth to triumph through
us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,—
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! His doom is sure,—
One little word shall fell him.
That word above all earthly
powers—
No thanks to them—abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are
ours
Through him who with us si-
deth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also:
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is for ever. †

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

Bishop Paula Schmitt visited congregations throughout the Allegheny Synod in January and February.

She visited with the congregations of the Stonycreek Parish, including at Grace Lutheran in Stoystown and Trinity Lutheran in Hooversville.

"Once again God reminds us of His delight in us," was the message on Facebook with one of the photos.

She also visited with St. John in Millheim, Salem Lutheran in Aaronsburg and St. Mark in Pleasant Gap.

"It was good to be with you all," she posted.

Take a look at the unique sanctuaries of these churches. **Photos from the Allegheny Synod Facebook**



St. John in Millheim.



Grace Lutheran in Stoystown.



Salem Lutheran in Aaronsburg.



St. Mark in Pleasant Gap.

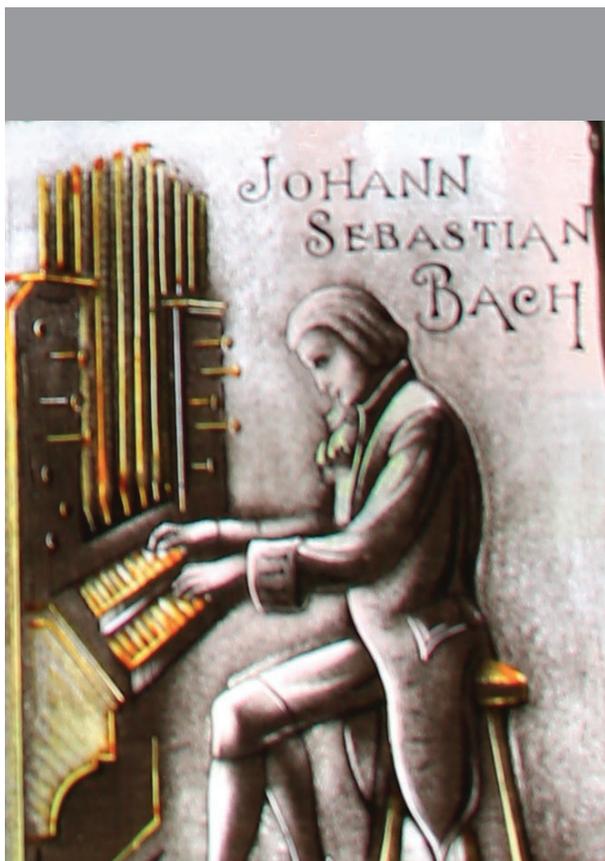
Trinity Lutheran in Hooversville



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AN ABIDING PRESENCE

Johann Sebastian Bach

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

(Edited from a piece written by Mark Bangert in the Journal of Lutheran Ethics on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's website. Bangert, at the time of writing, was the John H. Tietjen Professor of Pastoral Ministry, Worship and Church Music, emeritus at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. He was also the St. Luke Bach Choir Artistic Director and Scholar in Residence, according to the ELCA website.)

Johann Sebastian Bach is well-known outside of Lutheran circles for his historic musical accomplishments.

According to Mark Bangert, a professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, who wrote about Bach in the Journal of Lutheran Ethics,

Bach didn't leave much behind about himself other than music, noting the void of information regarding the behavior and ambitions of the historic figure from the 1700s.

But, some interesting, even comical, stories exist.

"There was, for instance, that incident in Arnstadt when at the age of twenty Bach publicly called student bassoonist Johann Heinrich Geyersbach a 'greenhorn,' prompting Geyersbach to respond with similar insults, upon which, according to the Consistory's records, Bach drew his sword and struck out at him. Or, consider his behavior a few years later while in Mühlhausen.

(See BACH, Page 9)

Students Create New Synod Logo

The Allegheny Synod was selected to participate in Pennsylvania College of Art and Design's Design-A-Thon 2022.

Three talented designers created a logo for the synod, along with a website refresh idea.

At right is the new logo.

Synod staff is excited about the possibilities. In the coming months, look for the new logo on some synod print materials and on Facebook.

"If you or someone you know works for a nonprofit and could use some free design work, sign up to be part of Design-A-Thon 2023. It's free and fun to work with the amazing students and their advisers," was the message on the Allegheny Synod's Facebook Page with the update.

Pennsylvania College of Art and Design is located in Lancaster. †



Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



CAMP SEQUANOTA



2022 SCHEDULE

WEEKS	DATES	CAMP PROGRAM & AGE/GRADE COMPLETED	COST *Tier I / Tier II / Tier III
	May 24-26	Lifeguard Training (Ages 15 +)	\$300/residential \$200/commuter
Week 1	June 13-17	Day Camp (Elementary: K-6)	\$150 / \$175 / \$200
Week 2	June 19-23	Confirmation Camp (Jr. and Sr. High: Grades 6-12) SaLT - 2 weeks, (Senior High)	\$380 / \$480 / \$580 \$695 / \$795 / \$895
	June 24-26	75th Anniversary Weekend Celebration - All are welcome! Find more information at www.sequanota.com	
Week 3	June 26-July 1	Cabin Camp (Elementary, Junior High, Senior High: Grades 2-12) 1/2 Week Cabin Camp (Elementary: Grades 1-6) - June 26-29 Mini +1 (Elementary: Grades K-5) - June 30-July 1 SaLT continued (Senior High)	\$380 / \$480 / \$580 \$230 / \$305 / \$380 \$130 / \$170 / \$210
Week 4 (4th of July Fun)	July 3-July 8	Cabin Camp (Elementary, Junior High: Grades 2-12) 1/2 Week Cabin Camp (Elementary: Grades 1-6) Bethesda (Adult)	\$380 / \$480 / \$580 \$230 / \$305 / \$380
Week 5	July 10-15	Day Camp (Elementary: Grades K-6) Grandparents & Kids / Friends & Family Camp (All ages)	\$150 / \$175 / \$200 Visit sequanota.com for prices
Week 8 (Theme Week)	July 31-August 5	Cabin Camp (Elementary, Junior High, Senior High: Grades 2-12) 1/2 Week Cabin Camp (Elementary: Grades 1-6) - July 31-August 3	\$380 / \$480 / \$580 \$230 / \$305 / \$380

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BACH

(Continued from Page 7)

He asked for and received permission to leave his newly won parish position for a four-week trip to Lübeck in order to study with the great Dietrich Buxtehude, only to stay for nearly four months, oblivious apparently to the needs in Mühlhausen during the Christmas season. His explanation upon returning: he wanted to 'comprehend one thing or another about his art,'" according to Bangert's report.

Those less-than-flattering details don't give us a complete picture of Bach, but quarrels seem to appear throughout his life. Bangert noted that records of his personal accounting reveal a man who paid every debt to the penny.

"In September 1723 Bach stirred the waters by claiming his right to direct music at the university-related church for a specified fee. He was allowed only half, but he subsequently appealed to the elector and won," Bangert notes.

Other contentious situations include charges Bach brought against a sub deacon over who was selecting hymns and vespers. In 1730, Bach was rebuked by the council for St. Thomas for being absent without leave, among other infractions.

"Present-day readers may look at this history and, if they have any experience whatever in congregational administration, will likely roll their eyes, recognizing a familiar pattern of behavior commonly attributed to controlling church musicians," Bangert writes.

Other accounts note more admirable traits, including modesty, despite his immense musical gifts.

For Bach, music had deep meaning, according to this excerpt from Bangert's report.

"When it comes to perfection Bach is not after perfection as a negotiable chip in the game of life. Rather, for him the issue is a relentless pursuit of the 'uncanny secrets' of harmony . . . mission rooted in a centuries old understanding of music. As formulated by Anicius Boethius in the early sixth century, the meaning of music emerges from the threefold interaction of the music of the heavens (the mathematical relationships of the planets, etc.), the music of the human body, and the music sung and played. His views, honed from one generation to the next, prevailed right into the eighteenth century."

Bangert concludes that Bach was concerned about being clear about his gifts and using them to benefit others.

"In an age when individuals are encouraged to find fulfillment in their work or when vocation is transformed into (a particular) job, Bach's deep understanding of what's primary in his life refreshes. Keeping a clear head about one's gifts and then using them for the benefit of the other trumps the messiness of daily interactions and proves at the same time that such messiness is an unexpurgatable given of the Christian life." †

BISHOP

(Continued from Page 1)

The words we hear in the invitation to Lent on Ash Wednesday, "I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent — self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love — strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament" are the road map for how we might practice resurrection not just during Lent, but always. There is no limit to Jesus's love for us. He went to the cross for us and rose from the dead so that we don't have to endure that kind of pain and separation from the One who loves us most.

How might you practice resurrection during this season? What ways will you find to "love those who don't deserve it"? How will you allow the transformative love of Jesus reshape you so that you continue to be a bold witness to his resurrection power in a hurting world? Those probably sound like heavy questions — and they are — but they are not impossible. I always encourage people to start with what you can do rather than see all that you might not be able to do. Practicing resurrection might look like pausing each day for 10 minutes to give thanks to God for something good in your life. It could mean you start making an extra effort with a grumpy co-worker. Or, it might begin with being kinder and more loving toward yourself and allowing yourself to experience grace in a new way.

My prayer for all of us during this Lenten season and Eastertide is for the extraordinary love of Jesus to fill us and

inspire us to be living examples of resurrection's new life to all those we encounter along the way.

May peace be yours. †

+Bishop Paula Schmitt

(1) *"Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front" from The Country of Marriage, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. 1973. Also published by Counterpoint Press in "The Selected Poems of Wendell Berry," 1999; "The Mad Farmer Poems," 2008; "New Collected Poems," 2012.*

P.S. From the Bishop

I hope you will take the time to read this edition's interview with our new Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Kevin Shock (**Page 1**). We are looking forward to welcoming him to our staff and being in partnership for the sake of the Gospel in our synod.

Thank you for your prayers and support. It is greatly appreciated.

SHOCK 1

(Continued from Page 1)

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: Can you describe the journey to your new post? What drew you to the new challenge?

PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK: The journey toward this new call really began back in June 2021 when I was one of the candidates in the bishop's election. (The synod elected Pastor Paula Schmitt as bishop last year after Michael Rhyne decided not to seek another term.) That process threw me into some general discernment about my call and pastoral identity. When I returned home the day that Bishop Paula was called, my spouse asked me if I would be applying for the assistant position. My answer was a swift "no." Several months later, when Bishop Paula asked me if I would consider applying, my answer was closer to a hesitant "maybe." A few people said things to me during that time, both related to the position and not, that had me thinking that I should be open and listening to what the Spirit might be saying to



Pastor Shock

me.

TLL: Can you describe your new responsibilities?

PKS: One day soon I hope to be able to describe my new responsibilities! Seriously, though, because of the change in synod office staffing during the years and the changes coming to the DEM position because of the Future Church Initiative in the ELCA, Bishop Paula and I will be working with a coach to determine how our gifts complement one another and fit into the current priorities of the office and then work at determining what our respective responsibilities will be. I know that I will be working with others around the synod on

building up our Mission Table and our Stewardship Table. I also expect to be working with people and ministry sites in the areas of mobility, candidacy and faith formation.

TLL: What's your biggest goal in your new role?

PKS: The most important thing from the beginning will be building relationships, both with Bishop Paula and Michelle Bossler in the synod office and with my colleagues and the congregations across the Allegheny Synod. My family moved to this synod's territory just a few years before the formation of the ELCA. I have served many roles as a staff assistant, seminarian and pastor in this synod, and I know lots of people from my involvement. There are still many people and congregations I do not know, and those I do know, I still have much to learn about them. Putting energy into "fully knowing and being fully known" will enable us to do unexpected things together in Jesus's name.

(See **SHOCK 2**, Page 12)

SHOCK 2

(Continued from Page 11)

TLL: What do you think your biggest challenge will be?

PKS: I'm not sure there is a person alive who could fulfill all the responsibilities of this combined position. Recognizing that reality, I look forward to discerning with Bishop Paula the priorities for our common ministry.

TLL: What's the Bible verse you are referencing most often so far this year? Why do you think it's been calling to you?

PKS: My life verse is Philippians 2:12: "... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Not that we have to figure out how to get saved, but since Jesus has given us salvation and life, we take seriously the call to the ministry of the baptized and figuring out how God is working in us. Lately, I have also been meditating a lot on Jesus's words to the disciples in John 16:12: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." I feel like both of these verses are going to be awfully applicable to my life in the coming months. Come, Holy Spirit!

TLL: Are you excited for this new chapter?

PKS: Excited and nervous and eager and sad and ...

TLL: Do you have any unique hobbies or talents you'd like to share? What do you like about them?

PKS: Thanks to my spouse, Lisa, my other passion is animal rescue. After I thought I bombed my interview for this position, I regretted that I hadn't talked about my volunteer work at Centre County PAWS. I have learned so much there about leadership and organization and patiently work-

ing with dogs and with people. Working at PAWS has made me a better pastor in some ways, and has also shown me what is possible for the Church when people gather together to use their gifts toward a common purpose.

TLL: Anything you'd like to add?

PKS: If you see me in the synod office or out and about, say hello and tell me how you have witnessed God working in or around you, or if you have found it difficult to sense what God is doing. A significant part of evangelism is sharing our lives and our thoughts with one another in honest, plain and natural ways. Often, when we are figuring out the fear-inducing things that God is calling us toward, we find that God has been preparing us for a long time. I look forward to figuring out our common ministry with all of you. Let's start with "hello" or "peace be with you" or something simple like that. †

"If you see me in the synod office or out and about, SAY HELLO and tell me how you have witnessed GOD WORKING in or around you." — Pastor Shock

Trinity Players are Returning to Stage

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

After a two-year hiatus, Laurel Trinity's Trinity Players will be entertaining audiences with their hysterical theatrics.

The players, a part of Laurel Trinity Lutheran Church in Jennerstown, are looking forward to being back on stage again, doing what they enjoy — making people laugh. They began 2020 meeting for weekly rehearsals — then COVID struck, which put activities to a halt.

During 2020 the group lost two cast members, Betsy Kaufman and Tim McQuaide, beloved members of the players, according to the group.

They had expectations of getting back on stage in 2021, but COVID guidelines prohibited the play from happening. As 2020 ended, 2021 brought sorrow once again for the small theatrical group as well as the church family, losing two more cast members, Keith Barnick and Nancy Kaufman.

"We continue to grieve their loss, not only on stage, but in our church family. Betsy, Tim, Keith and Nancy were all very active in the life of Laurel Trinity. They were choir members, council members, worship committee members, and the list goes on. Being back at rehearsing is bitter-sweet so this performance will be dedicated in their memory," the group said in a press release.

The upcoming play is called "Drinking Habits" — accusations, mistaken identities and romances run wild in this traditional, laugh-out-loud farce. Two nuns at the Sisters of Perpetual Sewing have been secretly making wine to keep the convent's doors open, but Paul and Sally, reporters and former fiancées, are hot on their trail.

They go undercover as a nun and priest, but their presence, combined with the addition of a new nun, spurs paranoia throughout the convent that spies have been sent from Rome to shut them down. Wine and secrets are inevitably spilled as everyone tries to preserve the convent and reconnect with lost loved ones.

Cast members include Terri Albright, Carol Barnick, Bill Blough, Cindy Bumbarger, Bruce Horner, Wilma Horner, Deron Koontz and Nancy Wojnarowski.

Performances are scheduled for 7 p.m. May 13; a spaghetti dinner will be held at 5 p.m. May 14 at Laurel Trinity, with a performance at 7 p.m.; a spaghetti lunch will be held at noon May 15, with a performance at 2 p.m.

A freewill donation will be accepted to help defray costs for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America National Youth Gatherings for the church youth. The performance venue has yet to be decided, but the group is hopeful to return to The Mountain Playhouse in Jennerstown. †

BEFORE *you* GO

Around the time you are reading this an amazing thing is happening — and you just have to look at the trees for proof.

Fresh buds, soon to be leaves, are forming. Soon, little green sprouts will grow, the start of big sunlight-catching leaves.

I always try to mark a few new leaves on the trees in my yard, and follow them throughout the summer. They have short, yet meaningful lives.

They are crucial in supporting the life of the tree from which they grew.

Catching sun rays is vital to the tree's existence, and that's the leaf's purpose — to catch light.

I am no botanist, but I can recall my grade-school lessons on photosynthesis. Leaves turn light into food for the plant.

Sure, the experts in the textbook had a great scientific way to explain the process, complete with chemical reactions and big words.

But a more important book describes God's work with light at the very beginning — he created it, and eliminated darkness.

Perhaps the sun is a physical representation of that early work, that we can look to, to remember God's lasting presence.

We all need the sunlight. Without it, nothing would grow and life on earth would perish. Light comes from God.

There is perhaps no creation on earth that marks this lesson better than the leaf. From the day it is formed, it starts searching for light. It will convince limbs and branches to grow and bend around obstacles to find it. In dense forests, lower trees will form bigger leaves so they can catch more light with less opportunity.

It's an exciting time of year. It's a bright time of year. Take note of a few new leaves being formed in your yard this spring. They are beginning important work.

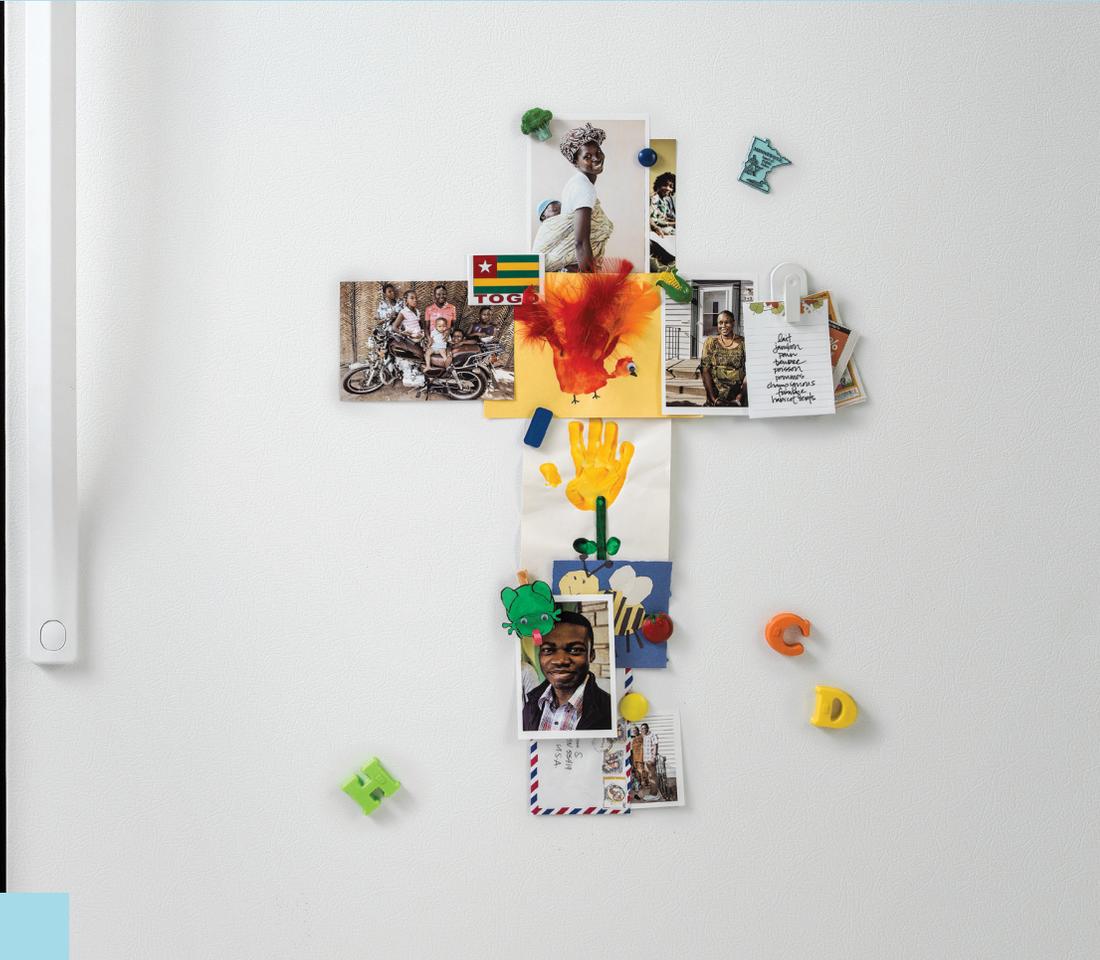
It's certainly work worth noting. †



Photo by Courtney Kazmer

— Rick Kazmer

In addition to paying interest, MIF Term Investments also pay it forward.



Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis, Minnesota

Used an MIF loan to remodel the low-income apartments the church rents to Togolese refugees, thus making their new homes a whole lot homier.

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