

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

# Digital

Volume 17, Issue 1 • [www.AlleghenySynod.org](http://www.AlleghenySynod.org) • Winter 2022



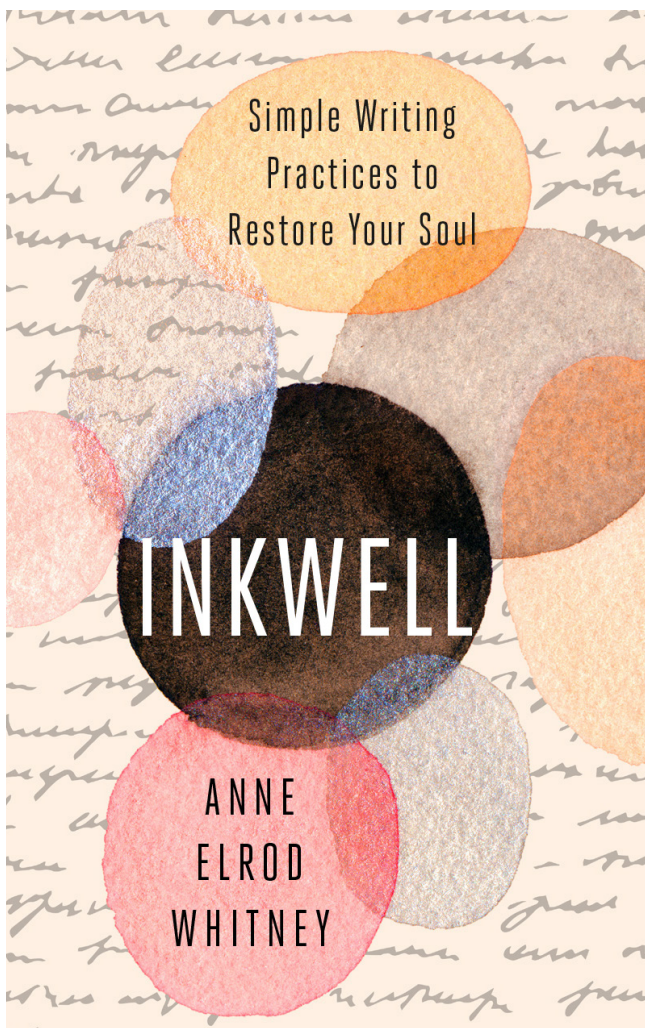
## Writing Your Faith Journey

*Grace Lutheran Member, Penn State Professor, Writes New Book*

**BY RICK KAZMER**  
*The Lutheran Letter Editor*

A Penn State education professor and a member of Grace Lutheran Church in State College has a new book geared to help people deepen their spiritual life through writing.

(See BOOK Page 6)



Submitted photo

*This is an image of the cover of Anne Elrod Whitney's new book.*

## THE SPOKEN WORD

*It's important to continue telling stories from the Bible, says Pastor Williamson. It's part of the way we enjoy — and remember — God's words*

**BY PASTOR SUSAN WILLIAMSON**  
*Ferguson Township Lutheran Ministry (Gatesburg and Pine Hall Lutheran congregations)*

What was the first Bible story you remember being told as a child, and who told it to you?

Before any of us learned to read, I am confident we listened to stories told to us.

(See WORDS 1 Page 3)



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# 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.

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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.

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# Happy New Year!

## *A Message from Bishop Paula Schmitt*

I hope you will have a renewed sense of your identity as God's precious and beloved child in this new year.

When a new year starts, we often state intentions or make resolutions about how our lives will be different in the coming year. Most of the time our resolutions are about physical things we would like to change about ourselves, like losing weight, quitting smoking or not biting our nails.

Inevitably, a few months or even a few weeks in, we lose our enthusiasm for those goals — especially if we don't quickly see results — and then give up. I have been guilty of setting those goals and then not following through on them.

Because I know that about myself, in the last couple of years, I have been working on the same goal. I find I have to keep renewing my commitment to this goal because it's something I need to keep learning and growing into.

Here's my goal: I want to be the best me I can be — the person God created me to be.

I want to embrace the gifts I have been given and use them with confidence in the work I have been called to do. In order to do that, I know I need to make changes in me — and that is an ongoing process. As soon as I think I have one thing mastered, I see that I don't and I need to keep working on it. Most of us don't want to look at the ugly parts of ourselves too closely; we don't want to admit that we need to do something differently; it's easier to blame the yuck on someone else and say that person needs to change, not us.

(See BISHOP, Page 5)

# WORDS 1

(Continued from Page 1)

I remember stories being read out of a book, but the ones I remember best were the stories that were told in the oral tradition.

I have always been a kinesthetic learner with a little bit of auditory style mixed in. Knowing what I know now about styles of learning, I understand why during the years I often felt left behind in the traditional classroom. I never knew that God's children learn in different ways until, as an adult, I became the adult Christian education coordinator in my home congregation of St. John Lutheran in Clearfield, and also a substitute teacher in a religious school in DuBois.

The more I worked in the Christian educational world (with all ages of learners),

I became interested in Biblical stories, telling them and having students retell them. The amazing thing about all of this is that I noticed that each time the stories were retold, the story became a part of each student in a new way. Most notably, the stories were told from the heart and not just the mind. There was integration, growth, expression and connection happening with each other and with God all at once. How humbling it was to be a part of each rooting and blooming flower, so to speak.

In my mind, we all are storytellers.

As Christians, we have wonderful stories to tell, and when we are authentic in our telling, we are truly doing the work that God has given us to complete.

(See WORDS 2 Page 10)

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Photos by Rick Kazmer and Michele Mihoerck

*These trees were made quickly, based on the outline of an existing craft.*

# Woodwork on a Whim

BY RICK KAZMER

*The Lutheran Letter Editor*

There's something to be said for not reinventing the wheel.

Recently, my mom spotted a cut-out pine tree next to our television stand. Knowing that I have been into wood crafts, she said, "make me some."

It didn't take long to realize that the project would be rather simple. I just placed the existing tree on a pine board and traced it. For the smaller versions, I just traced a

shorter part of the craft.

After that, the trees were easy to cut out with a jigsaw. I then cut out bases, drilled some holes and screwed the bottoms on.

My mom took care of the painting.

This particular project is a good one for practicing jigsaw cuts. Make sure you have a blade meant for making turns.

Only light sanding was needed to reduce splinter risk.

Sometimes the patterns we need are right in front of us. †

Remember  
in Prayer

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

JANUARY

**Week 1:** Ferguson Township Lutheran Ministry: Pine Hall Lutheran and Gatesburg Lutheran, State College

**Week 2:** St. John Lutheran Church, Sinking Valley

**Week 3:** St. James Lutheran Church, Huntingdon

**Week 4:** Benscreek Lutheran; St. Andrew, Boswell

FEBRUARY

**Week 1:** Trinity Lutheran, State College

**Week 2:** Christ Trinity Parish: Christ Casebeer, Somerset and Laurel Trinity, Jennerstown

**Week 3:** St. James, Altoona

**Week 4:** Mt. Calvary Lutheran, Johnstown

BISHOP

(Continued from Page 2)

You may have heard the saying from Anne Lamott, “Not forgiving is like (you) drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die.”

I have heard that quote using the words hate, bitterness and resentment in place of not forgiving, but the root concept remains the same: if we want to see change in the world, it begins with us. When we get comfortable with the way things are and don’t see a need for things to change for the good of others and our world, it becomes harder for us to let go of the way of the world and be the people God intends us to be.

There are forces at work in our world that contribute negatively to our health and well-being. During the last couple of years, that negative impact has grown and has now spread even into our churches.

The Church is a place set apart from the world where people gather to learn how they can live generous, creative, full, satisfying lives as followers of Jesus. We are called to a different way; that way is hard work; that way requires us to

make changes in ourselves because we cannot change other people. Real, lasting change begins with us and our commitment to living into our baptismal identity as God’s precious children. Friends, as you consider how you will live differently this year, consider asking in prayer what needs to change in you so that you, too, can be the person God created you to be.

And know this, you are not alone. We just celebrated the season of Emmanuel, God with us. And, God IS with us — even in the challenges we face.

God walks with us and sends us people to support us along the way as we seek to live into this new way of being.

You are God’s precious, beloved children. I give thanks for all the ways you demonstrate that in your congregations and communities.

I look forward to how we will change and grow together as a community of faith that boldly witnesses to the Gospel. I pray you will have a productive and healthy new year. †

+Bishop Paula



**BOOK**

*(Continued from Page 1)*

Anne Elrod Whitney's latest work is called "Inkwell: Simple Writing Practices to Restore Your Soul."

She said it's a book of informal writing activities that help readers reflect.

"This book has been such a gift to write! It comes from the spot where my professional life and my church life meet," she said in a email about the project. As a professor, Whitney said she has spent her career studying writing and writers. There are many benefits to writing. Whitney said research shows that it is good both physically and psychologically, even lowering heart rates, decreasing stress and reducing the impact of trauma.

"My own teaching and research, including my past books, has built on this to show how writing can be a useful tool for learning and reflection. When we write about an experience, we not only recall it, we also learn from it anew, and sometimes we even transform the experience into something we need," she said.

Writing has also helped Whitney to deepen her own faith. She has led retreats and workshops during the years, focused on writing as a spiritual practice.

"'Inkwell' grew out of those experiences. What a gift it is to have my church world and my work world come together in a book that can bless others," she said.

Whitney has been published before, as part of her job, with educational

publishers.

"For 'Inkwell,' I wanted a publisher that I knew put out high-quality books and could reach the audience I wanted. I started with Augsburg Fortress, which is part of 1517, our ELCA-affiliated publishing house. They happened to be starting a new imprint just then called Broadleaf Books, and they accepted the book for it. It's an honor to be with Broadleaf alongside so many thought leaders I've admired, from the Lutheran church and beyond," she said about the process. "Most books, like 'Inkwell,' begin with a prospectus. This is like a preview of what the book will contain, explaining why the book is needed now, the audience for whom it's written, a detailed table of contents and one or more sample chapters. I wrote one of these, looked up the names of the appropriate editors online, held my breath and sent an email! Emily King, the editor at Broadleaf who eventually handled 'Inkwell,' expertly coached me through writing and revisions from there."

**(See BOOK 2, Page 9)**

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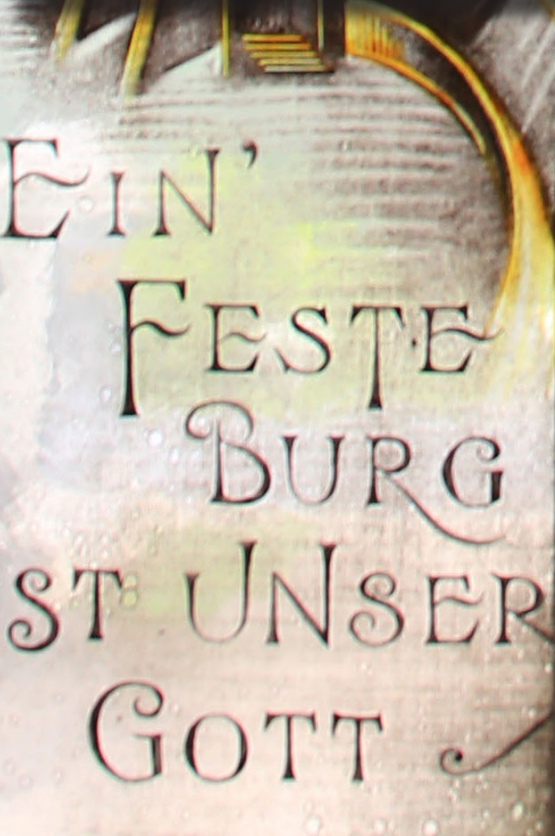
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# AN ABIDING PRESENCE

*A Mighty Fortress is Our God*

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



*(Editor's note: This information is from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Website.)*

Music is intrinsically linked to the Lutheran liturgy. As the ELCA resource "What Is the Role of Music in the Lutheran Liturgy?" explains: "Luther regarded music first and foremost as a gift, one of the principles of music listed in Principles for Worship: 'God creates music as part of the whole creation and gives it to humankind to develop and shape.'"

Luther himself was a musician and composer who penned the iconic hymn "Ein Feste Burg Ist Unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God").

It is remembered in the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg on the stained-glass window pictured at left. †



# ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

***Messiah Lutheran Church in Bedford County is pictured. It is part of St. Clairsville Parish.***

***Bishop Paula Schmitt spent All Saints Day there. "It is one of my favorite days in the Church's year. It gives us the opportunity to give thanks for the saints who have died, but also the ones who continue to be light in our lives," she said on Facebook.***



Photos from the Allegheny Synod Facebook page



***It was a good day (Nov. 21) for the church, according to the Allegheny Synod's Facebook page. Pastor Ruth Jensen was installed as pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Somerset. "We give thanks to God for her ministry in the congregation and community," the post reads. Jensen, center right, is pictured with Bishop Paula Schmitt, center left.***



# ALSM at Home: Offering Care Services in the Comfort of Your Home

*(Editor's note: The following article was submitted by Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries.)*

Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries provides services that span generations, from child care to senior programs and residential communities throughout the Allegheny Synod. ALSM at Home assists individuals in maintaining their independence and ability to remain in their homes.

ALSM at Home provides in-home personal care and companion services. To some individuals, the caregivers become like extended family members. For others, the caregivers are there for a short time to offer support, including respite care and shopping, while overcoming an illness or injury. Services are tailored to the individual to make daily life easier and flexible for the client.

Wendy Jo Bollinger has been a caregiver with ALSM at Home for 12 years. When asked what she likes most about working for ALSM, she said she likes helping people. "My work does not feel like a job. At the end of the day, I feel rewarded knowing that I helped someone," she said.

Marge Gampe is one of Wendy's regular clients and a resident at the Hillcrest apartments at The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg. "I couldn't be without the assistance of Wendy," Gampe said. "Wendy and ALSM at Home provide the best service. They are so professional and caring. Some tasks are challenging for me because I have a difficult time walking. Wendy helps me with my laundry, housekeeping and with little odd jobs." ALSM at Home is available in Blair, Cambria and Somerset counties. For more information on ALSM at Home, call 814-696-4568, or 855-280-2576. †

## BOOK 2

*(Continued from Page 6)*

Whitney faced a familiar hurdle during the process: COVID-19. But she said the pandemic made the project more meaningful.

"I saw in a new way the need for spiritual discipline, and for introspection, just as I teach in the book," she said.

The book, Whitney hopes, will help readers with writing practices that will enrich their walk with God. She said it could be used alone, or be the point of focus during a church group or retreat.

"It's my gift back to the church that has nurtured me so much along my own way," she said.

"Inkwell: Simple Writing Practices to Restore Your Soul" can be ordered anywhere you order books, such as Bookshop.org, Barnes and Noble or Amazon. †

# Joel 1:3 *(New Revised Standard Version)* **TELL your children of it, and let your children TELL their children, and their children another generation.**

## **WORDS 2**

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*(Continued from Page 3)*

When we tell the stories of God, we learn together with others.

This form of storytelling has become known as Biblical/scripture storytelling.

The performance of and teaching of Biblical stories encourages individual styles, as well as an appreciation for the stories in the form they've been "traditioned" to us.

As part of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, International, and through the experiences it has provided me to tell and hear Biblical stories, I have been inspired and transformed in my own learning, teaching and preaching as a pastor within the Lutheran tradition.

If you are still thinking about those questions I asked at the beginning of this article, then you may be feeling a push to focus deeper into your own storytelling.

Maybe we can help and encourage others to tell Biblical stories from the heart, and as the Network of Biblical Storytellers International says: "Encourage EVERYONE to learn and tell Biblical stories."

Storytelling is fun and rewarding, and being a listener is every bit as rewarding as telling, especially since a good teller draws the listener into each and every narrative.

As we enter these long winter days, let us delight in the wonderful stories that we have from the Bible and begin to tell them to others using the oral tradition.

Tell them from your hearts and listen to them with enthusiasm, just as we did as children, hearing those first Bible stories that we remember so well.

We are never too old to learn, and we are never too old to enjoy listening and telling stories — especially stories from God. †



# BEFORE *you* GO

Well, we are about to head into the most depressing time of the year for me — the end of football season.

It has been a rough season (to this point) for Steelers fans. But it has been a fantastic season for Pitt fans.

I realize that the majority of this audience probably roots for the Nittany Lions. I am a bit of a black sheep in the family when it comes to college football, being the lone Pitt fan.

But they did it this year. After decades of mediocrity, they won the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Man, it was a long time coming. It helped having a star quarterback who was one of the best in the country.

Yes, I have been wearing my Pitt gear proudly this winter. I have even been rubbing the success into some of my family and friends who are Penn State fans.

Already, the team is announcing new recruits and planning for next season. The luster of success sometimes doesn't last long.

I take football rather seriously, probably too seriously.

And as satisfying as the big season was, like everything else down here on planet Earth, it's only temporary.

We just ended the Christmas season, when people typically reflect on their lives and commit to changes.

Unfortunately, the warmth and spirit of the holidays, in many cases, doesn't last long. Life continues and we start our pursuit of the next thing.

The constant throughout the year is Jesus — he is with us after big wins, devastating losses and long after the Christmas season is over.

His victory won't fade like others in life — and that's worth remembering.

There is one person in our house who is happy that football season has passed — my wife. She now won't have to sit through college football on Fridays and Saturdays and NFL football on Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays.

Maybe I could use break, as well. †



Photo by Rick Kazmer

— Rick Kazmer



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Or you could invest in an IRA that lends a helping hand.



### Faith Lutheran Church in Lavallette, New Jersey

Financed a major renovation with a loan from the Mission Investment Fund. When Superstorm Sandy severely damaged the new addition, MIF deferred Faith's loan payments until the congregation got back on its feet.

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