

# Wayfarer

STORIES FROM THE ROAD.

# 50 YEARS OF Lutheran Clergy Women

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**SOUTHWESTERN  
PENNSYLVANIA  
SYNOD**  
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
CHURCH IN AMERICA

## MISSION:

TO SERVE, CONNECT,  
AND EQUIP ELCA  
CONGREGATIONS  
IN SOUTHWESTERN  
PENNSYLVANIA TO TELL  
THE STORY OF JESUS

Cover Photo by Megan Yelley  
Photography

Pictured: Pastors Sue Devine,  
Brenda Henry, & Beth Siefert

Calligraphy by Pastor Kerri Clark  
(IG: @kerri\_letters)

*I will pour out my spirit on  
all flesh; your sons and your  
daughters shall prophesy.*  
Joel 2:28a

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## SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

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# NURSES ON THE FRONT LINES



**Bishop Kurt F. Kusserow**  
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Wikimedia Commons

**A** happy belated 200th birthday (May 12) to Florence Nightingale! Though you may have missed giving thanks for her life on that day, plan to do so on August 13, the day our church commemorates her life and work as a renewer of society.

Florence Nightingale was called “Lady with the Lamp” by British soldiers in the military hospital in the Crimea because of her practice of making evening rounds to comfort and care for them. Her work to combat the unsanitary conditions of that facility resulted in reducing the death rate by two-thirds. But by age 38, she herself had become homebound because of the brucellosis infection she contracted there. She continued to advocate for sanitary conditions in hospitals from her home in England by receiving visitors at her bedside and by writing on the subject – a testimony to the potential power of working from home when necessary!

She was an 1851 graduate of the nursing school of the Institute of Protestant Deaconesses in Kaiserswerth, Germany—the same community from which William Passavant brought four deaconesses to Pittsburgh in 1849 to support hospital work here. The pioneering work that Florence Nightingale advanced in providing quality care for hospital patients reflects the same creative pursuit of a better future that led William Passavant to found the Old People’s Home in Zelienople, now Passavant Community.

These days, when we hear how so many nursing homes across the country have been devastated by the coronavirus, we rejoice that as of this writing the residential facility in Zelienople that bears Passavant’s name

has found no cases of Covid-19 among its residents.

I talked with Laura Roy and Debbie McMurdy to learn more about that. Laura is the Executive Director of Passavant Community and Debbie is the Independent Living RN and Infection Preventionist for the residents and staff. They described how their 20-year working relationship helped them make the difficult decisions to restrict visitation and require staff to use personal protective equipment some time before these became common practices.

I heard in their voices how the power of trusting teamwork and full concentration on the mission makes bearing the pain of hard decisions possible for those in leadership. And I recalled reading that Florence Nightingale did not work alone. In 1854, when she was charged by British Secretary of War Sidney Herbert to tend to the hospitalized soldiers in the Crimea, she assembled a team of three dozen nurses from a variety of religious orders to answer the call.

As we commemorate the life and work of Florence Nightingale this August, let us also give thanks for the dedicated teams of nurses and directors and all leaders whose difficult and diligent work continues to renew our society.



Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton at 2019 Churchwide Assembly 50th Anniversary Celebration

# WOMEN MINISTERS & THEIR STORIES



## Pastor Ann Schmid

Pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church & Women's Ordination Anniversary Chair  
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*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Joel 2:28a*

In 1970, the prophecy of Joel came to fruition in the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) when, on November 22, **ELIZABETH PLATZ** was ordained into the ministry of Word and Sacrament. She was the first Lutheran clergywoman in this country. Before the year ended, the American Lutheran Church ordained its first woman pastor, **BARBARA ANDREWS**.

Pastor Platz never intended to be a trailblazer. She grew up in our synod, at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Carrick. She entered Gettysburg Seminary in 1962. She had no desire to become a pastor at that time, but she wanted to study systematic theology, and the only way to do so was to pursue the Bachelor of Divinity degree.

And so it was that, when the church voted to ordain women, Elizabeth Platz was one of a handful of women who already had the necessary degree for ordination. Upon ordination, Pastor Platz became the chaplain at the University of Maryland-College Park. She retired after 47 years of service to the university.



In 1979, **EARLEAN MILLER** became the first African American woman ordained by the LCA. **LYDIA RIVERA KALB** became the first LCA Latina clergywoman that same year. As women of color, Pastor Miller and Pastor Kalb had to overcome not only sexism, but racism in the whitest denomination in America. Pastors **KAREN BATTLE** and **BRENDA HENRY** still serve as trailblazers as the only clergywomen of African descent who have ever served in our synod or its predecessor bodies.

**CAROLINE MENDIS**, our synod's longest ordained clergywoman, entered seminary



in 1970. "I went through seminary with the synod hardly being aware of my presence. There was very little contact with people from the synod. ... I did not feel welcomed in the synod... there wasn't a sense in which I knew there was going to be a place for me."

The support from Gettysburg Seminary wasn't much better. When the first-year field assignments were made, she called the pastor at that church and spoke briefly with him. The next day, the wife of that pastor called the seminary placement office and said, "No. We can't have this person." Pastor Mendis continued, "So, I didn't have a placement. [The seminary] talked about getting me a different one, but they never did."

The internship assigned to Caroline Mendis was in the middle of nowhere, on East Swamp Road in Potter County, New York. There was no pastor at that church. "Hardly anybody knew I was there." Fortunately, the bishop knew, and saw her gifts. "When I was ready to be ordained (in 1974) that synod opened the doors to me and said, "We would be happy if you came up here."

Before she began her call in Mayview, New York, Pastor Mendis came home to be ordained. However, when she called the synod office the day before her ordination,

the bishop asked, "What's your name again? Who are you?" She replied, "I'm one of the ordinands!"

After some years, Pastor Mendis and her husband, Pastor George Mendis, returned to our synod and served together at Christ Lutheran Church, Millvale, from 1989 until their retirement in 2014.

**SUSAN DEVINE** is our synod's most recently ordained pastor. Her experience of support from the synod and seminary is far different from Pastor Mendis'. For 23 years, Pastor Devine worked in banking, but she had a sense that she was being called to serve the church. She kept telling herself, "I have a family to raise. I'm too old. I'm a woman. But the Holy Spirit kept nagging. My husband, Keith, said 'You've been thinking about this for over 20 years. You just need to do it.'" So, she talked with Pastor Ed Sheehan, then an Assistant to the Bishop, who helped her work out a distance learning program with a seminary that allowed her to continue to work full time.



On February 15, 2020, Pastor Devine was ordained and called to Pittsburgh Lutheran Urban Ministries. The support of Pastors **BETH SIEFERT** and **MELBADIBBLE**, and the camaraderie she now shares with Pastor Brenda Henry and Vicar **MANDY GILBERTI** has been a blessing. "One

of my favorite pictures from my ordination is when Pastor Beth and Pastor Brenda put the chausible on me. They didn't just drape it on me. They took care to adjust my collar, make sure that my hair wasn't stuck in it. It was a caring moment... we're in this together and we're going to take care of each other."

In thinking about how much things have changed, Pastor Mendis reflected, "It sounds as though Sue has had much more camaraderie with women pastors in the sense of being together in that journey. I don't think I ever had that."

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When **MARTHA WALDKOENIG CLEMENTSON** was appointed as an assistant to the bishop in 1987, she became the most visible clergywoman in the synod. "I felt like every time I went into a situation I represented every female pastor in the church. No one meets a male pastor and says, 'I don't like you, so I don't like male pastors,' but that's what was happening for female pastors."

A generation later, that is still happening in some places. When her daughter, Pastor **BETH CLEMENTSON**, interviewed for a call she was told that the congregation had negative experiences with two women pastors, so they weren't sure they wanted another woman.

When Pastor Martha Clementson went to seminary, there weren't many role models for clergywomen. "I'm the third generation of ordained people in my family, so I had family support, but not overwhelming family support." All the pastors in her family had been men. They didn't know what it would be like for a woman pastor. "As I went through the process it felt risky."

For Beth Clementson, it was never a question if becoming a pastor was possible for her. "Not only did I have my mom, but I had so many other strong women pastors in my life." Interns and associate pastors who served

with her father "were wonderful examples of women in ministry and so it was never a question of whether I could, it was a question of whether I should.

I started feeling called to ministry around high school. What I had to wrestle with was, am I feeling this call because God is calling me to this or because everyone around me is saying, 'Your parents are such good pastors. Are you going to be a pastor too?'"

"I am thankful that so many women paved the way so it is easier for me and the women who will come next. It took a lot of work from a lot of strong women to get us here."



Pastor Martha Clementson served as Assistant to the Bishop under Donald McCoid for 20 years. During that time, through her work with the Candidacy Committee and in the way she lived out her calling, she was an important and influential role model for women discerning a call to ordained ministry. Currently she is co-pastor with her husband, Pastor Kevin Clementson, at Grace Lutheran Church in Westminster, Maryland. Pastor Beth Clementson serves Stewart Avenue Lutheran Church in Carrick.

The Clementson clergywomen had been slated to serve as co-chaplains at our synod assembly in 2020, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women pastors. Instead, they will fill that role in 2021. Pastor Beth Clementson is looking forward to it. "I think it will be fun to be chaplain with my mom... to get to do it with someone that I love and admire is really great." Pastor Martha Clementson agrees, "For me the biggest attraction is working with Beth. And having been away from the SWPA synod for 12 years, I look forward to being back."

- Photos:
1. Pastor Elizabeth Platz
  2. Pastors Sue Devine & Brenda Henry
  3. Pastors Martha & Beth Clementson



Photo by Alex Gruber on Unsplash

## POD BE WITH YOU



### Dr. Wendy Farone

Synod Council & Member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Glenshaw

[www.belc.org/backchat-podcast](http://www.belc.org/backchat-podcast)

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**W**elcome to Bethlehem Backchat where we talk about the background and backstories of our worship and community as Lutherans. This is the backstory of the *Bethlehem Backchat* podcast.

I travel a lot and enjoy listening to podcasts to pass the time and maybe even learn a thing or two. I had been a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Glenshaw for about a year and had found a new interest in understanding Lutheranism, Scripture, and learning all about the worship service.

I had been listening to a podcast from Central Portland called *The Church Basement*. Its premise was for the pastor to answer questions on a variety of topics. I thought, "We could do that!" Plus, what a great way to get my ever-expanding questions answered!

Pastor Dan Smail and I had a discussion over coffee about some of those questions and without hesitation, I asked, "so, Pastor Dan, how would you feel about doing a podcast?" His response was, "funny how the Spirit works, I was going to ask you the same thing!"

I had no idea how to do a podcast and now I'm the producer?! I watched every YouTube video I could find on podcasting, what equipment to buy, which editing program to use and how to upload it so people could hear! It was a big learning curve, but we have improved over time.

Each month, I write a script around one of my many questions. I research the answers and offer the script to Pastor Dan. He reviews his part and adds, tweaks, and deletes. On recording day, I hit "record" and the conversation flows. First, I had to learn to say "Luther-ans" rather than "Lutherns." (My whole family says it that way!)

We don't always stick to the script per se, but just talk about the topic. We laugh, learn, and

mess up. I press Pastor Dan to define “churchy words” and other things I don’t understand. I ask those questions that people are often hesitant to ask.

At present, we have recorded 27 podcasts over a period of more than two years on topics such as the eucharistic table, the 23rd Psalm, and fear. Our most popular podcast on Bible journaling has over 600 downloads.

We once recorded using a laptop out of the back of the pastor’s Subaru once while at North Park for Fit Church; we have recorded on a mission trip in Appalachia; and now have learned to record remotely due to Covid. I recently went to Portland and co-recorded an episode of *The Church Basement* with Pastor Amanda Zentz-Alo and Dawn Miller, who have helped me from the beginning by sharing their experience and insight.

**For every podcast recording, it is our hope that my questions are your questions, that Pastor Dan’s answers make you say, “I knew that!” That the story of Jesus becomes clearer and more embedded into your heart and mind.** The leap of faith that was taken, the relationship that has been built, the depth of better understanding of Lutheranism, and the extension into the congregation and beyond our church walls are the whole point of this podcast. As we grow in Christ, we pray that you will also as you listen and engage in learning more about our lives together as Christians.

## PODCAST MINISTRIES IN THE SWPA SYNOD

### BETHLEHEM BACKCHAT

*Pastor Dan Smail & Dr. Wendy Farone*  
belc.org/backchat-podcast

### CHURCH OF THE GEEK

*Pastor Brian Bennett*  
http://geekchurch.blogspot.com

### DAILY PRAYER FROM THE GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH

*Pastor Bob Schaefer*  
anchor.fm/lutheran-daily-prayer/

### PASTOR ERIC’S PODCAST

*Pastor Eric Damon*  
iheart.com/podcast/269-pastor-erics-podcast-52372652/

### WEEKDAY CHRISTIAN

*Pastors Nathaneil Christman, Brandon Johns, & Angela Smith*  
weekdaychristian.buzzsprout.com

*These can all be found on most major podcast platforms; search for the names wherever you like to listen.*



Pastor Dan Smail



Photo by Austin Distel on Unsplash



Dr. Wendy Farone



# SERVING, CONNECTING, AND EQUIPPING IN A DIGITAL WORLD



**Pastor Melissa L. Stoller**

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In this time of the pandemic we have learned to tell the story of Jesus in new and varied ways. As congregations have moved worship, Bible studies, coffee hour and fellowship gatherings online, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod's mission of serving, connecting, and equipping congregations has moved online as well.

Ministerium Mondays provide weekly check ins, announcements, guest speakers, and small group discussions for all the pastors and deacons of the synod. Using the newly reformed synod website, Facebook notifications and events, and a Slack space for shared learnings and resources, new and innovative ways have emerged in the last six months to connect people. **"In many ways, we have gathered together more often as a ministerium during this time of the pandemic than we ever had before," remarked Bishop Kurt Kusserow. "We are always thinking about what is good for each week, as the world changes quickly around us."**

Indeed, even in the midst of trying times, the members of the synod staff, synod council, committees and conference deans have found creative expression and a renewed sense of mission in our work together. Innovative outreach has come in the form of worship services, webinars, book discussions, and synod-wide conversations on tough topics.

In May, the stewardship committee began a four-week synod-wide book study on *Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks* by Diana Butler Bass. Meeting on Tuesday evenings and Thursday afternoons, the groups gathered on Zoom, with large group discussions and small group guided conversations. "I think this is great and I'm sorry it is ending," shared Mary Ann Novak, stewardship committee member and a member of Christ Lutheran Church

in Duquesne. On the final evening of the study, her question echoed many others who participated: "What's next? I hope we do more!"

While many are choosing to remain close to home, the opportunity to gather using online platforms has opened opportunities in accessible and cost-effective ways. Parents with young children are now able to join evening conversations after bedtime. Individuals who have been unable to attend worship due to health and mobility challenges, can now join Bible studies and prayer services with fellow congregants. Speakers who would have traveled across country can now present online and engage listeners with questions and small groups, saving on travel and lodging expenses.

This fall, the synod will host webinars, book discussions and study days across a multitude of disciplines for rostered ministers and congregation leaders. Topics will include adaptive leadership, stewardship and generosity, online evangelism and community building, faithful and just responses to racism, and self-care during these difficult times. All events will be announced on the synod website, Facebook, and in Tuesday emails.

Telling the story of Jesus in new ways has always been the challenge and joy of the Church. Even in this time of uncertainty, we are connecting and caring for each other through the creative work of the Holy Spirit.



## MISSION ENDOWMENT SPOTLIGHT: ST. JOHN, CARNEGIE



**Pastor Sarah Irwin**

*Pastor of Saint John Lutheran Church, Carnegie*  
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**W**hen I began serving at Saint John in Carnegie just over two years ago, one of the things that struck me most about the congregation was their passion for outreach. Our “Comforters” quilting group has been sewing for more than half a century in service with Lutheran World Relief, and food ministries, in particular, have always been part of their work. Carnegie’s Meals on Wheels program was hosted at Saint John for years, and when that came to a close, the congregation knew they’d be ready for the next project. **Four years ago, with assistance from synod granting programs, the congregation launched “Cup and Portion,” a monthly community meal that goes above and beyond the usual church dinner fare of pasta and instant potatoes.**

Our incredible volunteers would scour for donations, ready to trim 50 pounds of green beans at a moment’s notice. Guests can get take-out or eat-in and have an opportunity to visit with neighbors and volunteers over a delicious meal. One unique feature is the meal’s connection to those who live in Carnegie’s senior housing facilities, to whom meals have been delivered or picked up for those who are unable to leave their homes. The usual meal count would be over 200—that’s a lot of fresh vegetables! Most importantly, those who otherwise might eat alone had connections to their neighbors. Souls hunger, just as bodies do. Rob Windhorst, who was Council President when

the ministry began, put it this way: “Being part of the Cup and Portion team, serving members of the congregation and the community gave us an overwhelming sense of fellowship and allowed us to turn scripture into action: ‘Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out of the darkness, and the darkness around you will shine as bright as noon.’ Isaiah 58:10”

Unfortunately, Cup and Portion is on hold at the moment, given the pandemic. That passion for feeding bodies and souls, though, continues in our summer meal program, which started in 2019. We had been contacted by the Greater Pittsburgh Food

Bank due to the high child food insecurity rate in Carnegie's city limits—79%. Most of those children receive free or reduced-price lunches during the school year, but over the summer might be forced to skip meals.

With that invitation, the Saint John Council did what it has always tried to do: serve our neighbors. With our local faith partners—Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Muslims, and even some other Lutherans—we moved forward to offer sandwich suppers every day throughout the summer. Given our close proximity to the Carnegie Boys and Girls Club, day campers could come over at the end of the day for supper. As with our guests from Cup and Portion, souls and bodies were both fed (and, again, both volunteers and guests).

This year during the pandemic school closure, we picked up right where we left off in offering daily meals. Last year, when a child commented that they were glad to be



eating because they didn't know what they'd have at home over the weekend, we added a weekend grocery bag program as well in partnership with St Paul's Episcopal Church in Mt. Lebanon. During the pandemic, our grocery program has expanded to serve not just our guests, but our senior housing friends we used to gather with for Cup and Portion as well.

In this pandemic tide, I've missed our Cup and Portion meal. As our lunch program has become a bagged meal program, I've missed the tiny condiment cups, the shy request for a second serving of chocolate milk, the six-foot-tall teenager who sheepishly comes back for a whole second meal. I miss the Eucharist, too, and am all the more aware of how Christ sits with us whenever we eat.

Photos:  
Top Right: School Lunch Program  
Bottom Left: Cup & Portion Ministry



## WITHIN, YOU WILL FIND COMFORT



### Pastor Christina Hough

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*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me  
welcomes the one who sent me. Matthew 10:40*

On the edge of our campus stand two stone pillars that once marked the entrance to Glade Run. On the pillars the inscription reads, "Within, the orphan shall find compassion." This same inscription hung on a London orphanage that provided William Passavat shelter from a storm over 165 years ago. The care, compassion and the welcome he experienced shaped his ministry here in western Pennsylvania and led to the development of countless social service ministries across the United States. The power of a simple "welcome" sparked an idea, launched a ministry, and created a movement.

Today, Glade Run Lutheran Services is one of Western Pennsylvania's largest social service agencies and a leading provider of mental and behavioral health services. Glade Run provides services in homes, schools, and community-based settings in 18 counties. St. Stephen's Lutheran Academies, Glade Run's licensed, private K-12 schools, serve students from over 50 school districts who have not been successful in their home public school because of emotional/behavioral health issues and/or autism. Last year Glade Run served over 4,300 individuals.

Each one of us knows the importance, value, and comfort of feeling welcomed in a space. But for every experience of welcome, we've also encountered close-mindedness, selectivity, and the heavy feeling of being

unwelcomed or outcast.

**As a trauma-informed sanctuary agency, we are called everyday to welcome—to see people as more than their behaviors, diagnoses, and traumas.** With the care and compassion that William Passavant established, we look to learn the stories of those we serve and to create safe places. We strive to look with eyes of compassion, not judgement—to see all people as whole and beloved children of God. To ask what has happened—not what is wrong with you. To accept people for who they are and where they have been—free from judgment.

I know as a parish pastor that is what we as the church strive to do as well. Welcoming is not just a value but what we have been

called to do. This one simple thing is often so hard to do and often we make people feel anything but welcomed. Despite our best efforts, people still don't feel the church is a safe and welcoming place for them. When this happens, we feel defeated and overwhelmed. We begin to feel defensive—putting up more barriers, clinging to the way we have always done things or what makes us comfortable. We may not make everyone feel welcomed, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't start.

Taking just one step toward creating a welcoming space can make all the difference, for a simple thing done in the name and love of Christ has the power to change lives. William Passavant once said, "There are no little things with God. What men call little, he uses to shape the purposes and lives of men and nations." Welcome in the name of Christ. Welcome the stranger. Welcome children. Welcome our siblings on the margins. Welcome those with mental illness. Welcome those whom the rest of the world has cast aside. Welcome!

## 5 SIMPLE STEPS TO CREATING WELCOMING SPACES

### **SAFETY**

Take a walk around your space from the point of view of someone else, better yet with someone else. A fresh perspective helps us to see how valuable signage, inclusive language (i.e., consider using siblings in Christ vs. brother and sister), accessibility, and more are to creating a safe and welcoming culture. What does your liturgy say? Is it clear to someone unfamiliar with who you are and what you are about?

### **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS/ BE ENGAGING**

Get to know the person for who they are beyond their diagnosis/behaviors. We all have a story, a past influenced by people and experiences that shape who we are today. All too often, we make judgements about people's behaviors (not with words but an eyeroll, a look, etc.). Practice being reliable, trustworthy, and hospitable. Listen more than talk. Be mindful of your body language.

### **RESPECT**

We don't always have to agree, but respect another person's opinion and point of view. Each of us has our own mental models/mindsets (the way we view and respond to the world) and sometimes they conflict with that of another. Different is not always wrong. Respect boundaries and differences in personal space and interactions.

### **DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY**

Often something outside of our control or something we would not think of can trigger a behavior and take us back to a previous negative behavior. Sometimes a change in routine can trigger a negative response. Take time to listen, learn, and understand how the individual is feeling and what may have led to the feelings.

Everyone's personal interactions are different (i.e., eye contact/personal space). When a person does not make eye contact right away, they may not be being disrespectful but, because of their mental illness, they are not comfortable or able to interact in that way.

### **OPEN COMMUNICATION**

Communicate changes and provide explanations. Teach and explain the meaning behind the activities and traditions in the church. Help someone understand why we stand in worship or pass the peace. On the other side, help those familiar with these practices understand why someone may not stand or not be comfortable passing the peace. Talk, teach, educate! You cannot overdo this.

**For more on how to create safe and welcome spaces or other mental health training and consultations, contact Pastor Chris Hough.**



## MINISTERIUM MONDAYS



### Pastor Peter D. Asplin

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“We can do this.” Pastor after pastor in early March talked to me, talked to Bishop Kusserow, talked to organists and church councils and worship committees and said, “We can do this.” And then they went and did it! In the space of two weeks, the pastors and deacons and congregations of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod moved from regular, in-person, singing and chanting and shaking hands to on-line worship by Facebook or YouTube or Zoom.

But it was hard, hard work, occasionally complicated and frustrating. And that was just getting worship going. When pastors and deacons began to talk about funerals, and nursing homes, and surgeries, the discussions turned from frustrating to agonizing. People needed to talk, and needed to know they weren't alone.

Out of those needs, and a desire to share the resources of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, our synod, and the rich resources of our strong ministerium, “Ministerium Mondays” was born.

Each week during this global pandemic, we gather via Zoom to hear a word of gospel from the bishop. We continue to share resources and advice regarding all things online and pandemic related. And we have

heard from our seminaries and our insurance plans, from our camps and from our social ministry partners how their ministries, too, are changing.

As we have continued through Pennsylvania's various phases of gathering restrictions and we have struggled together to hear how each of us is discerning, with our congregation's leadership, what “re-opening” looks like and what “normal” looks like in the age of coronavirus. We've argued, we've disagreed, we've encouraged, we've shared, we've challenged ourselves and each other.

And together, through these weekly gatherings, we have strengthened each other and the congregations of our synod “among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity.”

# Colleague Connections

*These listings are complete to the best of the knowledge of the synod staff. If you feel there has been an omission, please contact Sandy DeLorenze at [sandy.delorenze@swpasynod.org](mailto:sandy.delorenze@swpasynod.org) or 412-367-8222.*

## Ordination Anniversaries:

### August–October

60 Years: Pastor Louis Nagy

50 Years: Pastor Paul Koch

45 Years: Pastor John Aupke

35 Years: Pastor Larry Mort

Pastor Michael Robinson

Deacon Jean Sontag

30 Years: Pastor Gordon Hills

10 Years: Pastor Jocelyn Johnston

## Ministry Interns 2019–2020:

### Blessings to you as you continue this journey!

Tricia Christman, Luther Seminary  
Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod  
Serving Grace, Rochester  
Supervised by Pastor Gregg Clagg

Chris Combs, United Lutheran Seminary  
Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod  
Serving Good Shepherd, New Castle  
Supervised by Pastor Peggy Suhr-Barkley

Ryan Fitch, United Lutheran Seminary  
Upper Susquehanna Synod  
Serving Holy Trinity, Chicora and Camp Lutherlyn  
Supervised by Pastor Joe Boomhower and  
Deacon Deb Roberts

Mandy Gilberti, United Lutheran Seminary  
Northwest Pennsylvania Synod  
Serving P.L.U.M.  
Supervised by Pastor John Gropp

Hallie Siebert, Luther Seminary  
South Central Wisconsin Synod  
Serving First, Pittsburgh (Downtown)  
Supervised by Pastor Brian Evans

## Prayer Requests:

Eric Love, son of Pastor Barb Love; Brent Wadzita, brother of Pastor Kerri Clark; Deacon Dianna Wentz

The most up-to-date list of prayer requests is online at: [swpasynod.org/prayer](http://swpasynod.org/prayer)

## Births:

Pastor Allyn Itterly welcomed three grandchildren:

Twins, Avery Jessica and Zoey Bethany, May 29, 2020

Enzo Salvatore Isabella  
June 30, 2020

## Weddings:

Pastor Peggy Suhr-Barkley's daughter, Natalie, was married on July 12, 2020

## Leading Our Church:

Pastor Jim Engel will serve on Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) Policy Council

Pastor J.J. Lynn received the LAMPa Serve.Pray.Speak award for advocacy in honor of his congregation's care for an immigrant family

ELCA Fund for Leaders Scholarship Recipients:

DaMisha McFarland-Pollock

Roger Randolph

Jamie Ulrich

## Retirement:

Pastor Jerry Nuernberger  
March 31, 2020

Deacon Denise Hegemann  
June 30, 2020

## In Memoriam:

Pastor Gary Koch  
(formerly served in our synod)  
June 3, 2020

Mrs. Betty Itterly  
Mother of Pastor Allyn Itterly  
June 18, 2020

Kenneth Luttner  
Father of Pastor Susan Luttner  
July 5, 2020

Rev. Dr. David Rakotonirina  
President of the Malagasy Lutheran Church (Madagascar), July 11, 2020

# SYNOD STAFF PRESENCE | APR-JUL 2020

## Supporting Congregations, Supporting the Ministerium:

Bishop Kusserow, Pastor Stoller and Pastor Asplin were, like everyone else, stuck at the beginning of quarantine: How do we “serve, connect, and equip” the congregations of our synod while we are staying at home with our families?

And that’s how Bishop Kusserow became a Zoom expert! By attending pericope studies and cluster groupings of clergy on a regular basis via Zoom. By calling pastors and checking in on how they’re doing. By holding Zoom meetings with congregations and social ministry organizations and committees.

The work of ministry continues in our synod, and the Office of the Bishop continues to aid congregations and leaders by phone call, email, Facetime or Zoom, and, of course, now and always, by prayer

## Calendar of Causes

### SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL MINISTRY PARTNERS

*August*

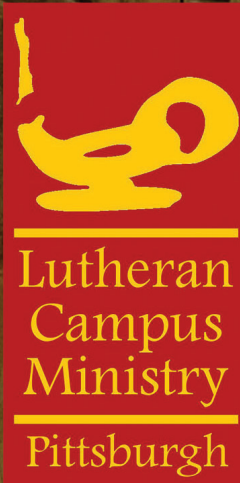
The image features a large photograph of a brick building with a steeple, likely a seminary building, set against a blue sky with white clouds. In the foreground, there are green trees and a paved path. Overlaid on the image is the United Lutheran Seminary logo, which consists of a stylized 'U' with a cross inside, and the text 'United Lutheran Seminary'. Below the logo, there is a paragraph of text and a URL.

United Lutheran Seminary is a welcoming and diverse learning community equipping people to proclaim the living Gospel for a changing church and world.

**UNITEDLUTHERANSEMINARY.EDU/GIVING**



## September



Lutheran Campus Ministry provides opportunities for fellowship, service, worship and education at Pitt, CMU, Chatham and Carlow universities. All of these opportunities seek to deepen relationships with God and neighbor.

[LUCPGH.COM](http://LUCPGH.COM)

## October



A worshipping community in the city neighborhood of Brookline. Hearing the call of Christ to feed His sheep.

[COMMUNITYTHREE4ONE.ORG](http://COMMUNITYTHREE4ONE.ORG)



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SYNOD** EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
CHURCH IN AMERICA

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MORE STORIES & CONNECTIONS:  
[facebook.com/swpasynod](https://facebook.com/swpasynod)

## *Devotional*: COVID AND CONTEMPLATION



### **Pastor Joseph Murdy**

*Pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church, McKees Rocks*

[jmurdy@gmail.com](mailto:jmurdy@gmail.com)

Several months ago, it felt like someone hit the pause button. The normal pace of life came to a stop when the light turned red. We were confined to our homes with minimal contact with others. Work, study, prayer, everything had been limited to singular space. It seemed like it was overnight that we were suddenly cloistered, by choice or necessity. For many, this can be seen as a burden. But, I wonder, might this shared pause be an opportunity for renewal?

Some of the most profound and meaningful moments I have experienced in prayer have been at those unexpected stops in life. When the Holy Spirit catches your attention. The sudden realization of God's presence while on a hike, sitting in church, the slow decent of the sun behind the ocean, in the embrace of a loved one or in a moment of reconciliation. God has a way of interrupting our lives and drawing us close through prayer. There is no denying that Covid-19 has interrupted our lives, but it has also given us the opportunity, space, and time to pray.

If there is one thing the saints and mystics of the church can teach us, it is how to pray. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Clare of Assisi, and others like them, past and present, have reminded us of the simplicity of prayer. Oftentimes people like St. Clare would find the intimacy and communion with the divine in the quiet stillness of their surroundings. They have shown us how accessible our great God is and how easy it can be to commune with the divine.

It has not been an easy time, but it has been renewing. We have been reminded of the essential, the significance of self-care, quality time with family, the inclusion of others, care for our neighbor, and the importance and impact of prayer. Prayer is an essential part of who we are as God's children. But we don't often take time to pray and spiritually recharge. Over the past few months, and in the months ahead, we are developing new habits. Why not make prayer one of them? When the light turns green we must remember to take time to pause and pray. The simplest way to pray...is just to pray: as you are, where you are.

*Pax et Bonum + Brother Joseph Murdy, Order of Lutheran Franciscans*