

Wayfarer

STORIES FROM THE ROAD.



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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



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NeONBRAND on Unsplash

*Do not be afraid. I bring you
good news that will cause
great joy for all the people.
Luke 2:10*

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← Changing Soon!
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ADVENT, THE NINTH MONTH



Bishop Kurt F. Kusserow

Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Bishop

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The Church has long celebrated December 25 as the birth of Jesus and has just as long identified March 25, precisely nine months earlier, as the day on which he was conceived—the day that the angel Gabriel announced this news to Mary (Luke 1:31). This year, more than any other, as we make our strange way forward through “The Covid” into our celebration of Advent, we may find inspiration by holding both of these dates in our hearts and minds.

Two disclaimers: Human pregnancies are way more personal and organic than any calendar can capture! And the dates identified by the Church to celebrate the Nativity of Our Lord and the Annunciation are best understood as liturgical history.

Why hold a date in March in our hearts and minds as we plan for Advent and Christmas? Because March was when the world changed for all of us. My calendar has a note on March 15, “Church cancelled across our synod b/c of Covid-19.” The next Sunday reads, “Church cancelled again,” as though it were something of a surprise that the global pandemic had not been resolved within a week!

Mary’s world changed, too, on the day it was announced to her that she would conceive and bear a child and name him Jesus. Her

situation was not resolved within a week! But as pregnancies tend to go, her new reality grew and developed within her. It began to change who she was. It changed her relationships with others. It took on a life of its own to which she had to relate in constantly changing ways. Her experience on any given day could not predict what would come next, but on nearly every day of her pregnancy she had to ask, “Who am I now? Who am I becoming?”

Our celebration of Advent tends to focus our liturgical attention on the pending birth of Jesus more than Mary’s experience of a roughly nine-month pregnancy. Like the happy work of decorating the new baby’s room or like having a baby shower with close friends, Advent normally feels like getting ready for Christmas.

But this year, our significantly changed life experience may compel us to focus our Advent attention on what the last eight or nine months have been like for us and to answer for ourselves, "How have we been changed along the way? How are we being changed? Who are we now? And who will we be when the situation we are currently in does resolve in something like a delivery, like the birth of a new way of life for us?"

It is not necessarily Christian work to reflect on our lives and to strive for clarity of identity; it is human work to do this. Luke tells us that Mary "pondered all these things in her heart," (Luke 2:19) even "treasured" them (Luke 2:51). What makes Advent Christian work is to connect the human work of narrating our reality and striving to clarify our identity to the Gospel proclamation of what we believe God is doing through Christ our Lord in and

through the experiences we encounter.

And here is where the Church's liturgical history can help us. While not precisely the spring and winter equinoxes, March 25 and December 25 intend to connect what we believe God is doing through Christ our Lord with the natural world's cycle of life. In the northern hemisphere, the spring equinox marks the restoration of life after winter. The winter equinox marks the end of the advance of darkness and the return of ever-increasing daylight. The Church declares that fully within our experience of darkness and death, God is working through Christ our Lord to bring life and hope and light.

This Advent, let us ponder and treasure what redemptive work of Christ is being born out of our life-changing experiences over the last nine months. 💧

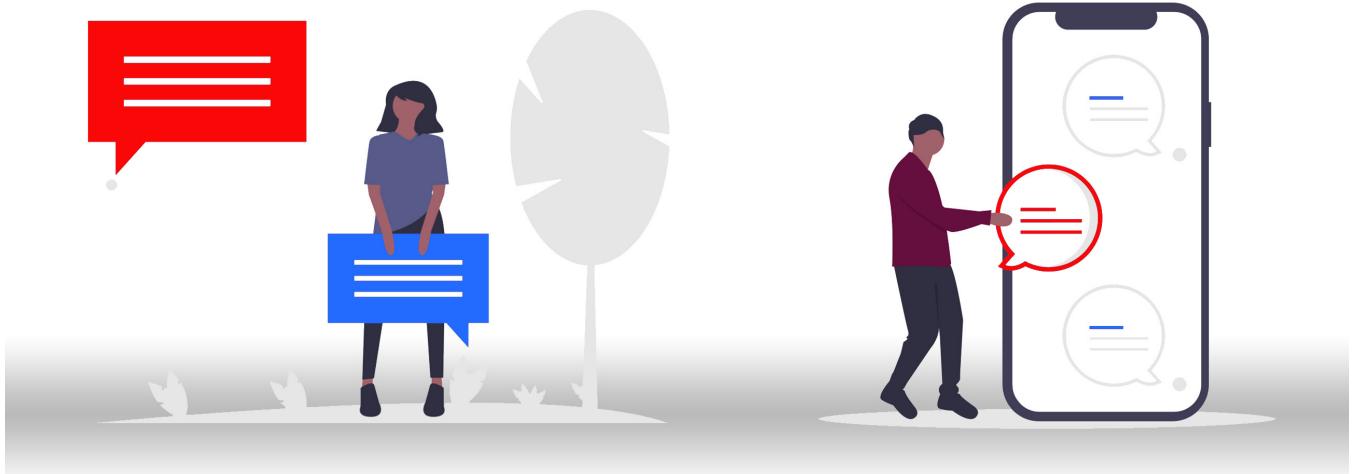
SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2020

ONLINE VIA ZOOM

SAT, NOV 14 | 9 AM - 5 PM

Watch LIVE on Facebook:
FACEBOOK.COM/SWPASYNOD

Documents & Downloads:
SWPASYNOD.ORG/ASSEMBLY2020



GRACE-FILLED CONVERSATIONS



Pastor Melissa L. Stoller

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So many of our conversations today, political or otherwise, are filled with frustration, anger and disdain. We see this in long wait lines at the grocery store, passionate comments on Facebook, disagreements at church council meetings or rising tempers at family dinners. In these days, as our cultural anxiety grows facing a deadly pandemic, societal change, and political unrest, the temptation to scorn our fellow human beings makes it difficult to reach for the common humanity that connects us all.

Diagnosing the Problem

This past February, Arthur Brooks, former head of the American Enterprise Institute, a Washington based conservative think tank, addressed lawmakers at the National Prayer Breakfast. “I am here today to talk about what I believe is the biggest crisis facing our nation—and many other nations—today. This is the crisis of contempt—the polarization that is tearing our society apart.”

After reading from Matthew 5:43-45 about loving our neighbors, Brooks continued, “In the words of the 19th century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, contempt is “the unsullied conviction of the worthlessness of another.” In politics today, we treat each other as worthless, which is why our fights are so bitter and cooperation feels nearly impossible.”

Martin Luther recognized this temptation in us all as he encouraged us to think of our neighbor in the best light possible in his explanation of the eighth commandment. This is, of course, easier said than done. But it is not impossible. When we ground ourselves in love, patience, and kindness, we will find the path to grace-filled conversations. This year, as we face a contentious election season, impossible decisions about school, worship, and family gatherings, we have the capacity to grow our relationships with one another with grace and harmony rather than contempt or discord.

Begin with Yourself

In their book, *I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening)*, Sarah Stewart Holland & Beth Silvers, two friends, came together across

the political divide to see if they could ground their conversations in grace. These two Christian women share the strong belief that even though we disagree politically, we can: respect the dignity of every person, recognize that issues are nuanced and cannot be reduced to political talking points, listen in order to understand, and choose gentleness and patience. They offer clear and helpful tools to engage in grace-filled political conversations.

They begin with the very important reminder that the only person's behavior you can truly influence is your own. My 10-year son and I regularly have this conversation as we navigate his school friendships, homework, and house chores. He and I both find we must work at remembering we cannot control another's actions. But our behavior does have consequences that affect others. And so when we enter into conversations with others about tough topics, it is important that we know what we value and why so that we can begin to understand the impact our actions have on others. Brene Brown, in her work with non-profit organizations and companies, provides a tool that invites us to think about the core values that provide our foundation. When we understand these better, we can understand what moves us to action or keeps us immobile.

Actions have Consequences

Some years ago, I was invited to give the invocation at a political rally in a town about an hour's drive from my congregation. While I am still not quite sure how the local organizers got my name, I was incredibly flattered, especially as a relatively new pastor, to be invited. I accepted the invitation and then called my council president to let him know and then immersed myself in preparations. It was an amazing event and even more so to see congregation members in the crowd as I lifted our country and our election processes in prayer.

Not everyone was thrilled, however. The next day I received some angry calls at my home and at the church from those who identified

with the 'other' side and from council members who felt they should have been notified. Some learned of my participation from their coworkers and were irritated that I did not share this information with them ahead of time. They were not wrong. The actions I take while serving as the pastor of a congregation affect the whole congregation and the whole church.

The glow of the event faded as I began the process of calling members of my council to apologize for not letting them know in advance. Even though I felt I was eating crow, many of these calls led to really good conversations about politics, religion, and the intersections between them. As a congregation, this became the impetus for discussions about ELCA social statements and the history of the Church's involvement in civic life. While we all never agreed fully on political matters, we were able to lay a foundation of respect for our conversations and built a framework for listening and engaging.

I'd like to tell you that all of my relationships were repaired through this process, but that is not the case. There were a few people who left the church during this time. Perhaps it was because of my speech, perhaps it was because we worked to speak openly about faith and politics. I will never know, because I was unable to meet them in conversation. These broken relationships still grieve me.

Culturally, we are in a different place right now as our country has become much more polarized. I recognize that if my actions from over 10 years ago were to take place today, the responses might be quite different. But the process would still be the same. The way we can begin conversations on difficult topics is by grounding ourselves in the relationships, the faith and the community we share. If we start from a place of love and respect, we can escape the trappings of contempt.

Grace-Filled Conversations

We are relational beings. That is why this time of pandemic isolation has been so difficult,

even though technology keeps us connected by phone and digital gatherings. We see the fraying of relationships in social media and newspaper comments where screens cannot take the place of human interactions. And while digital conversation is what many of us have to work with these days, our online conversations should not and cannot be only with those who think and believe like us. If we stay in these echo chambers, the problem of contempt for the thoughts and ideas of others only grows.

As Christians, we are called to engage the whole body of Christ, to love our sisters and brothers with whom we disagree, and by doing so, we can overcome the crisis of contempt.

When we engage conversations with grace, empathy, nuance, and curiosity, we find our own world view may expand as our relationships with others take priority over our ideologies.

HOW DO WE DO THIS? WE PRACTICE.

We practice our conversations, intentionally grounding ourselves in prayer and God's word, reminded that we have been recipients of the grace we are called to show to others.

We cultivate trust with our family and friends, nurturing the relationships that have given us life in the past and do not all have to be broken to move us to the future we value and hope for.

We apologize. We apologize again and again for mistakes we make, words said in anger, and assumptions made in ignorance, and we forgive as we have been forgiven.

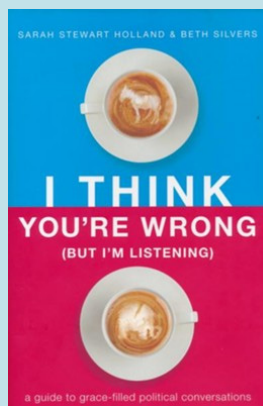
We try again. Every Sunday in our worship we are reminded that we are sinners in need of Grace. We confess this, receive forgiveness, and then we are sent out to this world God loves so much to share the good news of reconciliation and grace.

This season, as we navigate difficult conversations with our sisters and brothers in Christ, we remember the message of the Gospel that casts out all fear and contempt. 💧

KEEP PRACTICING GRACE-FILLED CONVERSATIONS...

Are you interested in a workshop on Grace-Filled Conversations?

Single or multi-session workshops are led by Pastor Melissa Stoller. Email: melissa.stoller@elca.org



A synod-wide zoom book discussion on *I Think You're Wrong (But I'm Listening)* will be offered this winter. This will be a three-part discussion held over three weeks which will model the ways you can use this resource in your congregation. Watch the Tuesday email (sign up at swpasynod.org/wayfarer) and the synod Facebook page for more information.

APOSTLES IN ACTION

GRANT OF THE SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD, ELCA

NEW GRANT SPOTLIGHT



Pastor Jocelyn Johnston

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We are reminded often in Scripture to care for the poor and hungry. The majority of our SWPA Synod congregations have been active in hunger ministries for many years. When the global Covid-19 pandemic began, the need for hunger relief rapidly increased, and our congregations recognized and responded to this need in new and creative ways.

Last year, the synod's Hunger Elimination and Advocacy Team was surprised and excited to learn that we would receive a generous gift of funds from the closing of Apostles Lutheran Church in Verona. After careful thought and discussion, the team decided to set some of the money aside for events around hunger education and training, but to utilize the majority of the funds to establish a new grant for congregations in our synod, aptly named "Apostles in Action."

For our inaugural year, the team offered five matching grants of up to \$500. It was a difficult decision to make regarding grant recipients, as we received more applications than available awards this year. Ultimately, we decided to award six grants, with one of the \$500 grants divided into two \$250 grants, given to two similar ministries.

As of early September, all six recipients had raised enough funds to be matched in full, and many raised more than their goal. Though this is a difficult time of heightened need, we have also seen an increase in generosity. We are so grateful for the gift from the faithful congregation of Apostles, Verona, which has enabled us to extend the generosity to several communities experiencing need around our synod. 💧

AWARDEES FOR 2020

- **Emmanuel, Etna:** daily to-go meals for adults in the community, in partnership with local restaurants
- **Good Shepherd, Monroeville:** emergency food pantry, providing much-needed supplies to those who pass through this high traffic area
- **Redeemer, Monaca:** the Little Food Pantry providing emergency supplies to their low-income community
- **St. John's, North Versailles:** MA's Pantry, which has seen an increased need, especially for home delivery
- **Trinity, New Brighton:** provides daily lunches delivered to families in need in the community
- **Trinity, Verona:** Blessing Box (also known as a Little Food Pantry), providing emergency supplies to those in the community.



WHAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS MUSIC?



Deacon Elizabeth Caywood

Resource Ministry Director

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We've sacrificed much in this liminal season, but our creativity continues to thrive! As we approach the next months, how do we best incorporate beloved Christmas music into our online worship services?

If the thought of trying to fit a crash course in mixing sound and video editing to create virtual choral music makes you wish you could take your well-earned vacation time during the month of December, repeat after me this very appropriate angelic biblical saying: "Do not fear!"

I went in search of helpful resources I could offer you during this unusual time, fully aware that music and/or technology don't fit neatly into my wheelhouse. In other words, if I can make sense of this, I trust you and your music team can, too!

I enjoyed speaking with our resident expert, Pastor Bob Schaefer (Good Shepherd, Monroeville). He has explored, experimented with, and perfected many tools necessary to provide beautiful music online.

What do you need to get started creating a virtual choir? The obvious answer is a choir, but if you have no experience, start simple.

- Focus on a quality **solo** piece. You can choose to be the soloist singing a hymn,

allowing yourself the opportunity to experience the entire process first-hand.

- Or, maybe you are feeling adventurous and would like to gather a portion of your bell choir (safely distanced, of course) and try an **instrumental piece**.
- As you gain confidence and expertise, try a duet, and then move on to a **familiar four-part harmony**.
- Save a **four-part choral piece** until last.

And the actual process? The accompanying music (e.g. piano) is played, recorded, and a copy of the file is sent to each choir member. The choir member listens to this music through their headphones (so it doesn't come through on the recording) and records their singing portion. The file is sent back to

the person doing the editing and there you have it! Simple?

So you're ready to add the choir, now what? Your chancel choir is not necessarily your best choice as you assemble your virtual choir. A certain amount of tech knowledge (with good headphones) and musical confidence is required on the part of your singers. This may be the time to bring in a member who sings beautifully but isn't in the choir because commitments preclude them from participating in weekly choir practice, or perhaps a college music major in town for the holidays. Selecting appropriate music is very important. Choose music they know!

Tip #1 from Pr. Schaefer: As the person playing accompaniment records the file, they may end the recording with a "thanks," look at the camera, smile, (count aloud) 1, 2, 3 and say, "Start recording now." Then the important tip: Clapping three times making it easier for the person who is producing the final piece to line up the audio. Everyone is synchronized!

Important Tip: #2: Allow sufficient time to pull this all together. Pr. Shaefer recommends a two-week time span. Week 1 send out the file, member records and returns by following weekend, allowing week 2 for final editing.

Let's talk a little technology now. More expensive is not necessarily better. Consider free or low-cost video editing software such as DaVinci Resolve for video editing and Audacity for audio mixing, both of which are free. Another budget-friendly option is Reaper (~\$40). Choose from the vast array of products based on your needs, comfort level, and budget.

This is a very abbreviated overview! For more detailed instruction consider:

The current webinar series offered by Practical Resources for Churches (PRC) that covers all these steps in detail. Synod members have free access through a Resource Ministry subscription. Contact prcli.org for registration info and links, or you may also contact me directly for assistance. 💧

THE SYNOD OFFICE IS MOVING!



Update your records with our new address beginning in November! →

Learn more about our move at:
swpasynod.org/synodnews/perrysville

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EXTENDING THE TABLE



Pastor Peter D. Asplin

Assistant to the Bishop

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When Bethel Lutheran Church, the ELCA congregation located in the middle of a triangle between Ligonier, Latrobe, and Donegal, stepped out in faith to host a detached intern, the now Reverend Eric Damon, one of the challenges they quickly discovered was that they were no longer able to celebrate communion every week. Like many congregations throughout western Pennsylvania, Bethel, Stahlstown, was accustomed to celebrating the sacrament of Holy Communion weekly. Interns in our synod do not preside at Holy Communion. So a different path of care was needed for the good and faithful people of Bethel.

Happily, in 2011, a group of pastors in our synod had worked to think clearly through how it might be possible for neighboring congregations to develop relationships of care when one congregation desired Holy Communion but did not have a called pastor.

With the support of Bishop Kusserow, myself, then-Vicar Damon, Pastor Jeff Schock and Pastor Dave Clement, a path was forged to both care for our Lutheran understanding of the sanctity of Holy Communion and the spiritual needs of the people of God who desire and deserve the Eucharist.

Trinity Lutheran Church in Latrobe has a Saturday night worship service. On Saturday nights, a member of the Congregation Council of Bethel traveled to Latrobe and worshipped with the people of Trinity at their regular Saturday service. They carried with them empty communion vessels from their congregation. During the service of worship at Trinity, the vessels were filled with communion elements from that Eucharistic liturgy, and a prayer of sending prayed over the council member from Bethel. The following morning, after the offering had been given, the council member from Bethel led a liturgy of distribution, sharing the elements from the worship at Trinity with the congregation.

Fred Schenk, president of Bethel, often performed this ministry out of love for his

congregation. He had this to say about their experience: "I really think we had a very close relationship with Trinity. And those of us who went got a great experience. I myself got to see another Lutheran church service. Bethel was my first. It showed that other congregations cared for their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ."

But the spiritual impact didn't only bring blessings on Bethel. The act of caring, of sharing, and of brotherly love also impacted Trinity, Latrobe. Pastor David Clement put it this way: "The experience of sharing the Eucharist with Bethel was one of partnership. An experience of another congregation's witness to the Gospel through the sacrament. And the congregation at Trinity was honored to be a part of it. We were part of their Sunday and they were part of ours."

Eucharistic sharing occurs not only at congregations hosting interns, but also at congregations facing a future without a regularly called pastor in the pulpit. During these months when congregations throughout the synod have faced difficult times, with the help and advice of Bishop Kusserow, I have been advising congregations who desire the Eucharist more regularly on this practice, on our Lutheran understanding of Christ's real presence in the sacrament and on the joys that might come from greater partnership with other congregations. 💧



INSIDE CAMPUS MINISTRY



Pastor Brian Bennett

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The ELCA has affiliated campus ministries serving over 240 colleges and universities. Every single one of them is unique. They serve different student populations in different geographies and in different settings. Finding a common thread among them other than the typical age range of its constituents is a challenge. But I suspect among most there will be one: Questions.

There are some great questions throughout scripture that get at the heart of the story. "Who told you that you were naked?" "Am I my brother's keeper?" "If they ask me 'What is this God's name?' what shall I say to them?" "What is truth?" "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

We ask many questions in the campus ministry. Sitting around the dinner table every Thursday evening, we will often do introductions and ask questions about everyone. What is your name? At which school do you study? What is your major? Are you a Marvel or DC person? What is your favorite candy? If you were an animal what animal would you be and why? These questions begin to help us get to know one another. These questions are important.

They lead to new folks being welcomed in. They help us go deeper. The questions also begin to help us create an environment in which everyone knows questions are valued. I am consistently amazed at the people within the church who treat questions as enemies. Luckily, in the campus ministries I have been part of, questions are vital. Student questions often drive our main weekly study, *GodTalk*. We have wrestled with many questions. "What does 'subdue the earth and have dominion over it' mean?" "Does Baby Yoda need Jesus?" These questions lead us into many fruitful discussions and often lead to more questions. Amid it all, faith deepens and grows.

Every time we get new people connecting with the campus ministry, I make it a point to sit down over lunch or coffee with them.



Again, I ask many questions. And they get to ask questions about me, or the campus ministry, or whatever. We are engaging in Christian community. But there is one question that I have come to love asking. This question sets this conversation apart from just regular getting to know one another.

I frame it as an open question—the person I am asking might not have an answer, but this question is never closed. Over our lunch or cup of coffee I ask, “What do you need for your spiritual life?” This question might be the question that is the center of my understanding of campus ministry. First, the question allows students to understand that they are able to speak for their own faith life. For some, to be fair, this question is the first time they are confronted with the ability to speak to their own need. This question can then cause some blank stares and a moment of quiet. I might get an immediate “I’m good.” I tell folks, there really is no wrong answer. The question itself is an invitation for them to consider what their spiritual needs are.

Others, however, have indeed pondered their own spiritual needs, but have had no one ask them, and so they believe they are left on their own. So often protestant Christianity, with its focus on the individual and Jesus as the sole mediator, can leave people feeling unable to voice questions to others. When I ask these people this question, their response might

begin as a trickle, but it soon leads to much more. Still waters and all.

The answers to this question are often beneficial to the larger Pittsburgh Students Active in Lutheran Ministry (PSALM) group. Some people ask questions that can be the very thing others need. One young woman, Lindsey, once started to answer but then stopped, saying she wasn’t sure this was something I could help with. I encouraged her to just say it and we would see. Her single word answer was “prayer.” She didn’t know how to pray, a common concern among many folks. With her permission and with the assent of the rest of the group, we spent a semester exploring different styles of prayer.

Questions can drive so much of our faith journey. Especially within a pandemic, we might do well to regularly ask folks, “What do you need for your spiritual life?” Ask college students who are separated from their school communities this question. Ask senior citizens what they need. Imagine what might happen if a property committee asked its members that question.

PSALM is a community among the universities we serve where questions are at our center because they urge us to go deeper. We ponder what God is up to in our lives and how our faith is being encouraged. What do you need for your spiritual life? 💧

TIME FOR REST



Pastor Kara Propst

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As rostered leaders, the yoke of expectations we labor to satisfy can weigh heavily upon us. That's under normal life circumstances and conditions that we expect in the ministry. Add to that the increasing polemical discourse of an election year, social unrest, and protests over racial injustice and inequality, the loss of worship and Holy Communion as we are used to celebrating them, an unrelenting pandemic taking its toll on individuals, families, communities, churches, and the world—and the yoke of ministry we bear can feel more like a millstone around our necks.

At least, that's how I felt by the end of June. I was weighed down in body, heart, spirit, and mind, asking the questions: How much longer do we have to Zoom for Sunday morning worship? How much longer do I sit in isolation, a shepherd physically distanced from the flock? How many more will become ill and die from Covid-19 or from sheer isolation? What part can I do to advocate for racial justice? How do I keep God's people engaged? And the question that weighed on me the most: What shall I say to God's people again this week in this time of global pandemic and social reformation?

My brothers and sisters, I felt like singing the blues, and did so, along with Mahalia Jackson:

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen...
Sometimes I'm standing crying
Tears running down my face
I cry to the Lord, have mercy
Help me run this all race.*

Then in preparation for preaching on July 5, I came across a legend about St. John the Apostle that one day a hunter found him playing with a tame partridge and criticized such an exalted, learned man for not being



at work, but “wasting time” with something so simple. Using the example of the hunter's bow, St John responded, **“The bow that is always at full stretch will soon cease to shoot straight.” In other words, we need rest; we need renewal; we need restoration—for our bodies, our minds, our hearts, and our spirits.**

I needed a break. What a blessing that around this time the synod staff presented our ministerium with a Summer Sermon Series on Women in Ministry. Three worship services and sermons were developed and recorded by Pastor Melissa, Pastor Peter, and Bishop Kurt, along with other staff and

leaders in the synod, lifting up the biblical stories of Deborah, Ruth, and Mary.

They saw a need in our ministerium, and invited us to use the resources as we were able to rest and to renew our spirit. I decided to utilize all three for the remaining Sundays in July and took a break from preaching. I presented them each week on our Zoom church. Not only was I able to rest and to worship with the people in a way I was not accustomed to doing, I was able to celebrate with my congregation 50 years of Lutheran women being ordained in the United States as well as milestones of women leadership in our congregation's context!

I give thanks to God for our synod staff, deans and leaders who lent their time and talents to producing the summer sermon series. It was amazing. My congregation

enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. It connected us to faces and voices around the synod. I found rest, renewal, comfort, and inspiration. The sermon series was life-giving to me and my congregation. I experienced an unexpected, but much welcomed mini-Sabbatical. Dear colleagues, if you have not taken advantage of this resource yet, I encourage you to use it for a time of rest and restoration of your spirit. It's also a great tool for celebrating 50 years of ordained women and women's leadership in your contexts.

Thanks to Bishop Kurt, Pastor Melissa, Pastor Peter, and everyone! Through their offering, God's grace and love came down to me (and my congregation). Through them, Jesus answered and gave respite to a soul who cried out for relief: "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." ♦

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 or 412-367-8222.

Ordination Anniversaries: November & December

55 Years: Pastor Kenneth Ofslager

10 Years: Pastor Tara Lynn

5 Years: Christine Rotella

Prayer Requests:

Pastor Janice Altenburger, Brad Ferko, Gene Fozard

The most up-to-date list of prayers requests is online at: swpasynod.org/prayer

Births:

Pastor Erin Jones and Tim welcomed Griffin Alfred on July 26

Pastor Amy Michelson and Jay welcomed Eleazar 'Eli' Steven on August 28

Retirement:

Pastor Karen Battle
September 1

Pastor Paul Lubold
August 1

Pastor Bruce Nordeen
July 1

Pastor Jeff Schock
September 1



SEND *Wayfarer* TO YOUR NEW COUNCIL MEMBERS

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A VERY CLERICAL CHRISTMAS

We asked several ministers in our synod what traditions they have adapted to make Christmas special for themselves and their families when holidays are also work nights:

“We treat Dec. 23 like our Christmas Day - opening gifts in the morning and big family dinner in the evening. Then Christmas Eve dinner is always crock pot chili sometime in the midst of the four services between us.”

–Pastor Kerri Clark
Trinity, Connellsville

“As a single pastor during my six years of ordained ministry, I have been blessed to serve in congregations where at least one family has “taken me under their wing” and fed me a feast between worship services on Christmas Eve.”

–Pastor Martha McCreight
Zion, Penn Hills

“We have been blessed with a flexible extended family, understanding congregations, a three-year-old who loves to go to church, and parishioners who bring us a special and rare beverage each year. We share a beer or two at midnight and give thanks for all these things quietly in front of the tree, and then collapse into bed.”

–Pastor Erin Evans
Peace, Greenock

“Christmas Eve services are at 2:30, 4:30, 7:00 and 11:00. We get take-out Chinese for Christmas Eve dinner between the 4:30 and 7:00 services and eat at church. Since this has become known, a member gives us a gift certificate for the Chinese restaurant every year.”

–Pastors Ann Schmid
and Steve Broome
Our Redeemer,
McMurray

“‘The Feast of the Blessed Contractions’ where on December 23 we eat spicy food in honor of the tradition that spicy food can bring on contractions! We’ve hosted potlucks where folks, particularly church folks, can bring their favorites to share in a pre-Christmas Eve deep breath.”

–Pastor Melissa Stoller
Assistant to the Bishop

“With my family, we try to do something special to mark all twelve days of Christmas. Christmas doesn’t end on December 26th!”

–Pastor Sarah Rossing
St James, Youngstown

“We adopted a practice we learned on internship of making a birthday cake for Jesus and singing “Happy Birthday” before the kids were allowed to open their presents, a simple reminder of whose day it was, that our kids fondly remember.”

–Pastor Joel Benson
Trinity, Butler

“We would always eat boiled shrimp at my grandparents’ farm in Wisconsin. They’re both gone now but the tradition was resurrected last year with my parents and girlfriend frying up coconut shrimp here in PA.”

–Pastor Ryan Pusch
Hebron, Leechburg /
St. Paul, Highfield

“After late worship we would come home and open gifts, including the present from Santa who came during church. Then in the morning we would open our Christmas stockings which were filled overnight. (So yes, Santa had to stop at our house twice for some reason.)”

–Pastor Peter Asplin
Assistant to the Bishop

Calendar of Causes

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL MINISTRY PARTNERS

November



Promising Futures

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BETHESDA1919.ORG

December



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← *Changing Soon!
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Issue No. 4 STORIES FROM THE ROAD



MORE STORIES & CONNECTIONS:
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Devotional: MY NEW COWORKER



Pastor Ryan Kobert

Pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sewickley
pastorstpaulssew@gmail.com

If you have been working from home in any capacity these past few months, you may have noticed that your coworkers are a bit different from those of pre-Covid times. Having a cat on my lap for several hours a day while my son asks to play Minecraft is certainly a change from the stillness of the church office or the busy activity of visiting shut-ins.

As challenging as working remotely can be, a single Zoom call is all it takes to know that we are not alone! Pets, children, and spouses have all made their way into the frame at some point, reminding us that remote work is something new and unpredictable for everyone.

This unforeseen challenge gives us a chance to assess why and how we do things and prompts us to find creative ways to accomplish the mission we are called to. My coworker son has asked me many questions about what I am doing, and together we decided to lead a weekly evening prayer. We have adapted it to our purposes, making the service accessible for a five-year-old to help lead while we lift our praises and prayers to God. It has been a joy to lead a service together and help develop his faith life at the same time.

Sitting with our new coworkers—whether they are children, pets, or even spouses—gives us a chance to see God at work in new ways. Their questions help us refine who we have been called to be. Their insistence in going for walks helps keep us active. Their presence reminds us that God is with us wherever we are and is always seeking new ways to show up in our lives. 💧