

# 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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## SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

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## SEND A FRIEND A LETTER



### **Bishop Kurt F. Kusserow**

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**D**ad, when the Corinthians do something bad, how come we're the ones who get in trouble? My family remembers that it was with some indignation that I asked this question at the dinner table one Sunday after church.

We were living in Singapore. My dad had preached that morning, striving to connect the witness of the Early Church to our daily lives. As I reflect back on it now, it was because that connection had been made that I felt somehow wronged. It mattered to me what the Corinthians did! That's what my question actually reveals.

**Letters connect us to each other, no matter the physical distance or even the time that separates the reader from the writer.** We find letters written home from the Civil War by people we don't know can touch our hearts as deeply as a sympathy card sent by close friends two days after a personal loss. And because that is true, what we write really matters.

Not long ago, when my parents were living with us, I came downstairs to find them laboring over a greeting card. They had a draft on lined paper in front of them and were discussing what to say next and how best to refine what they had already written. When the discussion was done, my mother

then carefully penned their greeting onto the fancy card, taking care to fit the text into the space available.

Writing letters and cards gives us a way to say things we seldom manage to say in person. Writing can give us more time to turn a phrase than our speaking typically does. And there is a kind of intimacy that inhabits the shadow of distance that nudges us to write things we might never have the courage to say face to face.

In our congregations, in our Women of the ELCA circles and in our synod's Retired Servants Committee, we hold a deeply shared desire to keep connected to each other through a card-writing ministry. We do this because we know that letters can hold people close when circumstances have pushed us apart.

No wonder that the Church has found its old family letters to be such a treasure that we read them every week! It really does matter to us what the Corinthians did. And

it really does matter what St. Paul wrote to them—for when we find our life reflected in their exchange, our sense of belonging in the same Church with them is confirmed.

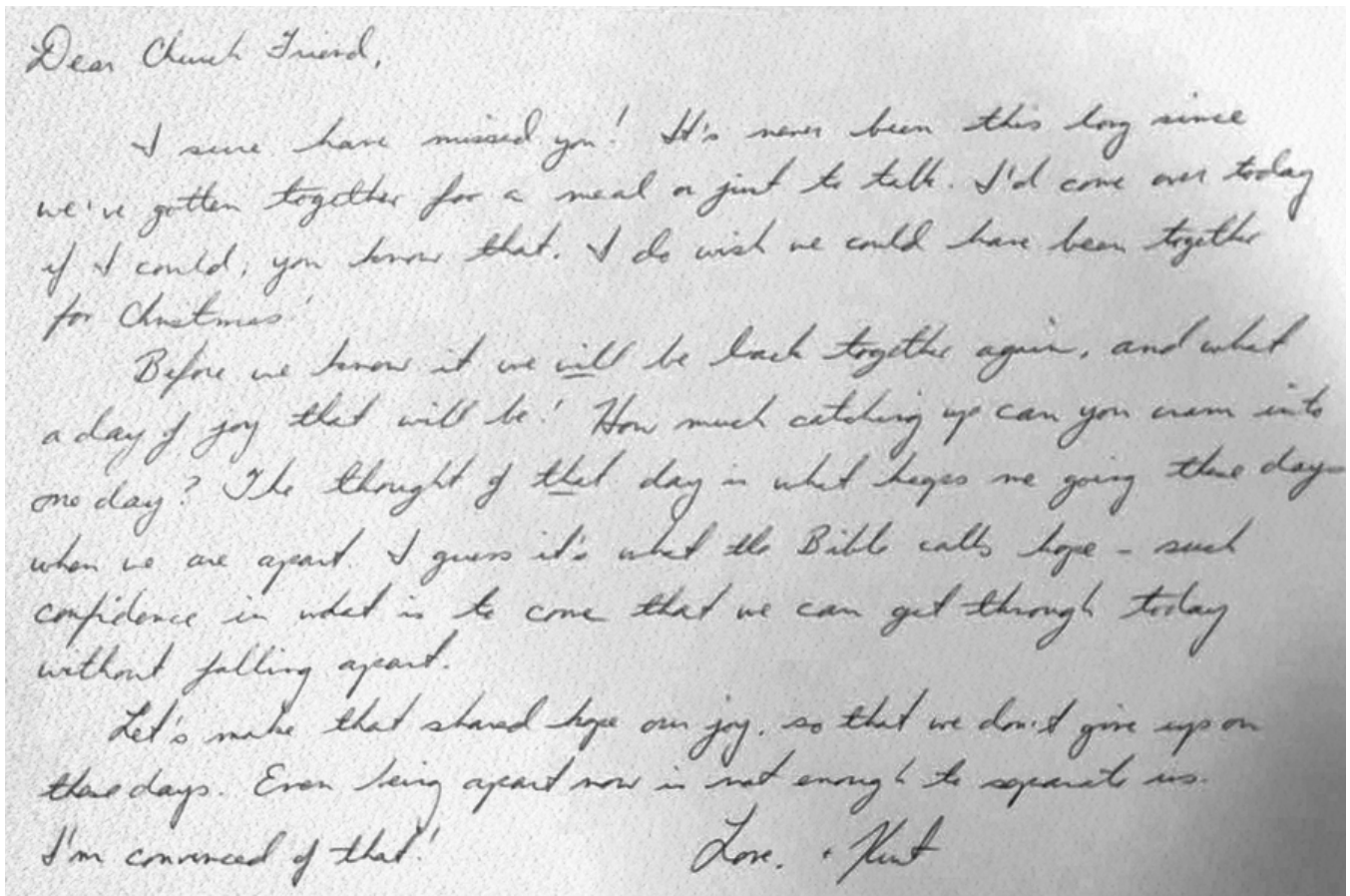
For coming up on a year now, we have been more isolated from each other than any of us can remember. Our weekly gatherings have moved online, where we can't really sing or share the handclasp of peace. We've even lost the proximity of the center-aisle-greeting-line where the eagerness of some to get home and the habit of others to dawdle pushes us closer to each other than we would normally stand!

We've lost something dear to us; we feel pushed apart these days! Not only by the pandemic but also by polarized politics and the growing distance between our convictions about what we believe would make things right. Our opinions about whether the changes that we see coming to our lives in church and as a nation are an improvement or a setback are yet one more

thing that increases the distance between us. We feel an urgency to hold on to each other these days.

**It may come as no surprise that the secular calendar has a day for keeping in touch by letter. Sunday, February 7, is national "Send a Card to a Friend Day."** Whether motivated by that fun invitation or by the long habit of the Church to keep in touch, why not take time, today, to write a letter to someone else? Why not light a candle of hope in the darkness of these difficult days and send a card to a friend whose company you miss, or compose a careful letter to connect with someone who doesn't talk to you any more.

Perhaps now is a good time to ponder all the distances that the Early Church faced and to take up a pen and write your version of "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you" to another member of the Church. (II Corinthians 13:13) Here's the letter I wrote to you today: ◆





## REV. JEHU JONES: THE FIRST BLACK LUTHERAN PASTOR



**Pastor Kerri Clark**  
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**Pastor Brenda Henry**  
*Authentic Diversity & Justice Task Force  
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Ministries*

In 2019, our ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to approve a memorial designating the ELCA as a sanctuary church. The initial memorial was centered around a discussion of how the ELCA could live out our Christian mandate to love our neighbors and be a hospitable denomination for immigrants. The designation was a public declaration by the ELCA to walk alongside immigrants and refugees as a matter of faith.<sup>1</sup>

What became clear was that while the word “sanctuary” had specific meaning in the immigrant and refugee community, sanctuary also carried different meanings based upon one’s context. The core message behind the designation was about being a welcoming church. Space was provided for future discernment of the larger context of sanctuary. Congregations and synods were also encouraged to contextualize the meaning of sanctuary. The designation did not mean that the ELCA was authorizing congregations to break the law, or that all congregations would be mandated to engage in immigrant and refugee ministry.

To provide some guidance, Bishop Kurt Kusserow wrote a letter to members of our synod sharing how he understood sanctuary.

In his letter, Bishop Kusserow reminded us that the more common designation of sanctuary was the space in which we worship. Within these holy spaces of worship (i.e. sanctuary), we strive for our best behavior as a church because “we respect our neighbors, who are truly God’s sanctuary, and to confess that we share that holy space with them.”<sup>2</sup> Bishop Kusserow went on to say that “respect for others means being attentive enough to notice if my behavior may cause my neighbor harm.”<sup>3</sup>

Acknowledging sanctuary in its broader meaning is a helpful framework for reflecting on what we have endured in 2020. As a nation, as a church, as a people we have navigated the effects of Covid-19. This public health crisis brought to the forefront the many

other ways in which we as a nation have been remiss in caring for our neighbors. We saw higher infection and mortality rates for black, indigenous, and persons of color (BIPOC). We witnessed police shootings of Black people and resulting protests and political uncertainty. We experienced the cessation of in-person worship. The longing for our sanctuaries, our sacred places of worship was heightened as we faced the seemingly unprecedented events of 2020. But we also learned to appreciate that the church is more than our buildings. Bishop Kusserow's statement on sanctuary that we, that our neighbors, are truly God's sanctuary, brings to light how important it is for us to remember that it's the people who constitute the sanctuary. How we care for each other matters.

**The need for sanctuary space, especially for immigrants, refugees, and people of color, is not new. A fitting example can be found in the story of Rev. Jehu Jones, the first Black Lutheran pastor in the United States.**

Jehu Jones was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1786. He worked as a tailor, and in 1816 (when Black people were first allowed to attend) became a member of the Lutheran Church of German Protestants along with his wife and children. At that time, members could rent pews, though Black members were limited to designated areas of the sanctuary.

After working with a group of Black community leaders in Charleston who were considering emigration to Liberia, Jones

sought to be appointed as a missionary and was ordained as a Lutheran pastor in 1832. When circumstances prevented Jones from traveling to Liberia, he settled with his family in Philadelphia, where he began to preach and provide pastoral care among the Black people of the city. Though there were other Black churches established in the city, there was not yet a Black Lutheran church. A physical building in which to meet

would be a sanctuary for the members of the congregation Jones had gathered. No longer would they be relegated to a few segregated pews in white churches, but could instead worship God together.

In February 1834, his congregation passed the following resolution: "That the congregation endeavor to build a suitable house to be dedicated to the worship of Almighty God"<sup>4</sup> and Jones soon set out on a fundraising tour, visiting congregations across central Pennsylvania and Maryland. Later that year, lots were

purchased and the cornerstone laid. Unfortunately, despite Jones's fundraising efforts, aid promised by the Synod of Pennsylvania was never paid, and creditors brought suit against Jones and the church. The building was sold in a sheriff's sale in 1839, though the congregation continued to meet for worship with Jones as their pastor at least through 1851.

In 1849, Jones requested help from the Synod of New York to establish a Black Lutheran congregation in New York City. His request was denied, and a committee submitted a report that, without cause, questioned the



*Artwork by Mary Button. Prints available at marybutton.com*

faithfulness and integrity of his entire ministry. Despite these unfair attacks, "Jones should be remembered, above all, for his unflagging commitment to his missionary calling and his steadfast faith in the teachings of the Lutheran Church."<sup>5</sup>

The established Lutheran Church was not a sanctuary space for Rev. Jehu Jones or his congregation in Philadelphia. While white Lutherans offered support with their words, time and again they failed to follow up with the necessary actions. This continues to be a struggle in our own times. Though we say that we value diversity as the ELCA, too often our words fall short when they are not accompanied by action.

If we want to care for one another well, we must approach this work with intentionality. The synod's Authentic Diversity & Justice Team was formed in early 2020 as a way to prioritize this work. One of our guiding statements is that "we build up disciples to proclaim through word and deed that the gospel of Jesus is one of liberating justice." Much of our initial work was focused on providing resources for individuals and congregations who were just beginning to come to terms with racial injustice and white privilege. In June, we joined in the ELCA's commitment to commemorate the Emanuel Nine and confess our complicity with racism

in our church on the fifth anniversary of the shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston. Later in the year we hosted a conversation on the "Unpacking White Privilege" article in *Living Lutheran* and offered a webinar on "The Language of Advent." We also began sending out a monthly email newsletter, with resource reviews and information about upcoming events. Going forward, it is our hope to lift

up the work of Black Lutherans across the Church.

As we strive to learn from our past, and respond to our present, the following quote from Bishop Kusserow's reflection on what it means to be a sanctuary church serves as a good reminder to us of what it means to become faithful witnesses of the visible church. "As I see it, a Sanctuary Church tends to its liturgy to be careful that its words and actions proclaim the faith faithfully. A Sanctuary Church preaches the Gospel of Jesus Christ as God's gift of salvation for all the world. A Sanctuary

Church feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, cares for the poor, provides education, speaks up against systemic sin that destroys human communities, advocates for human rights locally and globally, and treats all people as the Sanctuary in and among whom God chooses to dwell. I think of Sanctuary Church in this way – being our best selves."<sup>6</sup> 💧



1. *ELCA Sanctuary Denomination Talking Points* <https://download.elca.org>

2. Kusserow, Kurt. "Sanctuary Church: Being Our Best Selves," August 13, 2019

3. *Ibid.*

4. Johnson, Jr., Karl E. and Joseph A Romeo. "Jehu Jones (1786-1852): The First African American Lutheran Minister." *Lutheran Quarterly* X, no. 4 (Winter 1996)

5. *Ibid.*

6. Kusserow, "Sanctuary Church."

2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly  
March to Homeland Security and  
Immigration Offices



## MEMORIALS: THE WORK OF CHANGE



### Pastor JJ Lynn

Immigration Working Group & Pastor of Emmanuel, Etna  
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Standing in front of the congregation of Berkeley Hills Lutheran Church on May 15, 1994, I made public affirmation of my baptismal promises, which included “to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” In 2018-2019 I walked a pastoral journey at Emmanuel Lutheran Church of Etna providing support for a family facing an immigration crisis.

Through this journey, I was led to join the Immigration Working Group of the synod's Church and Society committee: a group of pastors and congregational members working in relationship around the question of how we assist the people of the synod in living out our baptismal promises regarding issues of immigration.

At our 2020 SWPA Synod Assembly, we made public witness of support for some of those facing immigration challenges with the adoption of the American Families United Act Memorial for advocacy in favor of the American Families United Act (U.S. H.R. 8708). This legislation seeks to provide the possibility for families of mixed citizenship to be granted permission to live together without fear of being separated internationally or barred from entering the United States. This advocacy, and the support for this legislation, came through the work of the Synod Immigration Working Group.

Through working relationships of the Immigration Working Group, we drafted the memorial. Through the active relationships within our conferences, and with colleagues in other conferences, we brought the memorial to the Assembly with conference support. It was through relationship and brainstorming that we together worked on the remarks. It was through an understanding that we are all bound together in relationship as God's diverse people that we relied on the Spirit to work through the assembly to grant our advocacy for the American Families United Act. In addition, these relationships have carried us through times of feeling as though we could not bring about change and support, feelings of isolation when the weight of the world seems about to overcome God's desire, and inspiration to continue working for that which is well-pleasing in God's sight. It is through our relationships in and of Christ that we are able to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. 💧





## LENTEN PARTNERSHIP



### Pastor Melissa L. Stoller

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The season of Lent is often a time for congregations to gather in distinctive ways, often with Bible studies, soup suppers, and mid-week worship services. Some congregations use this time as an opportunity to gather with other Christian communities to share fellowship and worship—but the struggle has often been the hesitancy people have to travel to unfamiliar places and the time it takes to do so.

As we approach the Lenten season this year, we are aware that we will again need to host much of our ministry online. **And while this is not the way many of us wish to gather as the body of Christ, opportunities for creativity, innovation, and collaboration have abounded in the past year. One example is the shared and strengthened ministry in the Beaver Valley.**

Prior to the pandemic, many of the rostered ministers and interim pastors who lead congregations in Conference 1 of the synod would gather monthly for ministry sharing and fellowship. When in-person gatherings were restricted, they moved their meetings online where new forms of ministry collaboration and partnership blossomed. The group began to meet weekly to discuss the upcoming Sunday preaching texts and to support one another. The creativity grew exponentially as they looked ahead to Holy Week.

“We decided we wanted to do something special for people. So, we started brainstorming ways to do the Easter Vigil virtually, since we couldn’t do anything else,” said Rev. Angela Smith, pastor of Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Monaca, and Trinity, New Brighton. **Seven parishes gathered together to share a continuous eight-hour prayer vigil on Zoom, which was also broadcast on Facebook Live.** Each parish took leadership of one hour of the vigil, with the final hour sharing the prerecorded vigil the synod had provided.

“To this day, I don’t even know how we pulled it off and how the tech worked for 8 hours straight! It was Holy Spirit blessed,” said Pastor Smith. “It brought a lot of comfort to people—especially at that time—because it was something people could leave on in the house all day.”

Even though they had not detailed their

plans, each congregation gifted the time with amazingly different and wonderful practices. Participating congregations were: Grace Evangelical, Rochester; Trinity, Ellwood City; New Hope, Freedom; Oak Grove, Zelienople; Good Shepherd, New Castle; Around the River Lutheran Parish in Aliquippa, Monaca, and Baden; and the parish of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Monaca and Trinity, New Brighton.

This collaborative experience necessitated by the pandemic has been an unexpected gift. “We have found a collegiality—even though we had it before—that has deepened and become special. This is the collaborative work that we have found a place for, where we see one another’s congregations online,” said Pastor Smith. And while the group had not yet planned Lent or Holy Week 2021 at the time of this writing, they did plan an online shared event for the 12 days of Christmas—with each parish taking a day to share a recorded message and a hymn.

Across the ELCA the need to move worship online, while initially unfamiliar and sometimes jarring, has been a chance to share with each

other the great gifts that congregations have. And this year, while we won’t be able to gather in person in the same ways, the opportunity for shared worship services, Bible studies, book discussions, prayer and fellowship is still very much a possibility as people gather online to congregation websites and Zoom links. The travel is now to the phone or the computer!

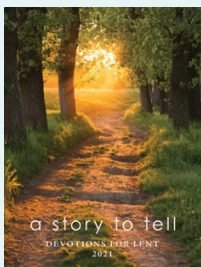
Collaborations can be with neighboring congregations or with congregations across the globe. Shared services with Global Mission partners, companion domestic synods and congregations, or even fellow “Good Shepherds” or “Trinity” congregations could be ways to connect the people of God in these liminal times. **Resources for these kinds of engagements can be found with the synod’s Resource Ministry.**

As we approach Lent of 2021, we know our gatherings as the people of God will not yet be what they once were. However, opportunity abounds for the Holy Spirit to lead us in new ways, and we are limited only by our imagination. 💧

# Resource Ministry

## LENT RESOURCES FOR 2021

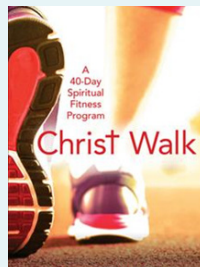
**Deacon Elizabeth Caywood**  
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**A STORY TO TELL: DEVOTIONS FOR LENT 2021**  
 Highlighting readings from the Gospel

of Mark, this devotional is geared to private devotions. However, each reading is accompanied by an engaging photo, a quote to ponder, a reflection on the text, and a brief prayer that may be incorporated in a group conversation of the text.

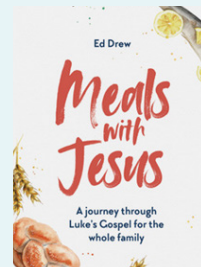
*Augsburg Fortress (2020)*



**CHRIST WALK: A 40-DAY SPIRITUAL FITNESS PROGRAM**  
 Groups and individuals

alike will appreciate this 40-day fitness opportunity for Lent. Whether you consider yourself beginner or advanced, there is a journey for you. Upon completion of each day’s walk there are questions and opportunities for written reflection.

*Morehouse Publishing (2015)*



**MEALS WITH JESUS**  
 Explore nine meals with your family with these discussion-based

devotions, suitable for children as young as three years old through adults. Each day contains suggestions for related activities, a prayer, and age-appropriate discussion questions. A unique way for your family to gather around a meal!

*The Good Book Company (2021)*



## CARING FOR KIDS AT BETHESDA



**Pastor James V. Arter III**

*Board Member of Bethesda Lutheran Services & Pastor of First, Leechburg*  
prjim@comcast.net

*"There's no such thing as a bad kid. But there are kids who need love, compassion, and care."*

**B**ethesda Lutheran Services was founded 101 years ago as a home for orphaned children. Since then, the agency has expanded to serve children in nearly every situation of need: foster care, adoption placement, special education, mental health treatment, young motherhood, truancy services, and after-school programs. Bethesda Lutheran Services continues to grow because it meets the needs of young people with the grace and compassion of Christ. Bethesda is able to provide promising futures because it will not give up loving the young people it serves—even when that love is difficult and demanding.

Sometimes, it's difficult to feel connected to an agency whose campus is located far beyond the geographic boundaries of our synod. But I recently answered a phone call from a resident of my community who asked if my congregation was collecting Christmas gifts for children in need—and I said, "Yes! We are collecting gifts for Bethesda Lutheran Services in Meadville." She knew all about Bethesda because her cousins grew up there after their parents died in a tragic house fire. She then asked how she could support them.

One of the easiest ways you can support Bethesda (and our other synod-affiliated agencies) is by recognizing them as public expressions of our Lutheran faith. Just as Bethesda will never reject a "bad kid," Jesus

will never reject you or anyone who is lost, broken, or in need.

Another way to support Bethesda is through financial donations. Visit [bethesda1919.org](https://bethesda1919.org) and click donate. You can also order clothing, books, toys, and furnishings directly through Amazon to support children living on campus. Numerous fundraising events are held throughout the year, including a scholarship gala, golf outing, mud run, and clay shoot.

Finally, please join me in praying for the staff of Bethesda, along with the children and families they serve—especially during this time of pandemic. 💧



## GRANT SPOTLIGHT: ZION FOOD PANTRY



### **Deacon Amy Santoriello**

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**O**n Thursday, March 12, 2020, I was texting back and forth with the leadership of our food pantry team. Normally, on a Thursday evening, there is a team of folks at Zion converting our community room into a grocery store, pulling our shelving units and pallets of dry goods from the storage room. And this month there was even more to do, because March falls at the end of a grant cycle, which means it's stock up the pantry time! We prepare for our clients to take home 10 to 14 bags full of groceries, health and beauty products, and household items, such as toilet paper. But that morning, we had learned that the state was effectively shutting down. "Don't go out unless you need to! Plus, the older you are the more at risk you are."

What is a food pantry to do? 90% of our volunteers are over the age of 70. (Oh and did I mention, I just shattered my ankle?) On distribution days, folks line up in cramped spaces for their turn to shop, some waiting two hours. During those two hours we serve a hot breakfast while folks wait; no one should shop on an empty stomach. We also have a kids' store for our youngest clients to pick snacks and other items. We have committed to be a shop-through pantry rather than a pre-box pantry because everyone has the right to choose what food they eat.

Overnight, we became a box pantry, set up registration outside, and had little contact with our clients in our community. Friday morning instead of just packing up produce,





we pre-bagged everything! We packed 15 bags of groceries each for 125 households, and prayed that would be enough. And then I remember crying because I had no idea how we were going to distribute the food with a small number of volunteers, because it was not safe for most of our regular team to be there. At the same time, a few colleagues asked if they could help—Pastors Erin Evans, David Hanssen, Brian Bennett, Melissa Stoller and family all showed up ready to load cars! One of the blessings of being in the SWPA Synod is colleagues who are ready to step in!

When Saturday came, we loaded up cars with groceries. At most we thought we might have to do this again in April, which we did,



and Feeding America informed us that we should expect to see a 60% increase in need. Now it is well known that this girl always plans for at least 20% more people when it comes to food, and for the first time in my life this was a good thing. **Because in April, our Zion Food Pantry saw an 80% increase in need in our community. That 80% increase was also going to need an 80% increase in funding.**

Those of us who do the work of hunger ministry have learned how to stretch a dollar, but almost doubling them is a different ball game. How would we meet the community needs at a time when so many had little to give? How would we multiply our small basket of loaves and fishes into a feast for the masses? Plus, we have always been able to count on local stores donating their surplus goods. Because of supply chain disruptions and general hoarding, those donations were not available to use in the early months of the pandemic.

**But thankfully, our synod office applied for a Lutheran Disaster Response grant for our synod; Zion's Food Pantry Ministry was a recipient of those funds, ensuring that we could continue to do the work of feeding God's sheep.** This last year has been hectic, and the need just keeps growing, but because of generous donors, supportive faith communities, and the beauty of being part of the larger church, our pantry has been able to continue to meet and feed the Greater Penn Hills Community. 💧



## TEAMWORK ON PERRY HIGHWAY



**Pastor Peter D. Asplin**

*Assistant to the Bishop*

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**M**y family has moved three times in the last 20 years and the thought gives me heart palpitations. The planning, the organizing, the sorting, the throwing out, the decisions. Moving is a never-ending process of decision making. When we move at our house, it's Kristen and me working together that makes moving bearable—with kids and family members pitching in, of course!

When the synod office moves, after nearly 80 years at 9625 Perry Highway and 40 years in “the synod office” building, it's a daunting, even terrifying project. But happily, it wasn't up to Kristen and me to make it happen! Bishop Kusserow took the lead. Work began with Bob Cairns, Sandy DeLorenze, Carol Ruckert, and Deacon Beth Caywood starting to strategize about the coming change in the summer of 2019, thinking about files, about what to send to the archives, about what to store and what to keep on-site. Quickly Bishop Kusserow and the administrative staff figured out that they needed help. Faithful help, knowledgeable help.

Former Assistant to the Bishop, Pastor Ed Sheehan, and our faithful chair of the synod Constitution Committee, Pastor Bill Hauser, were enlisted to lead the charge, the organizing and the administration of the move. (They ended up doing a ton of literal heavy lifting as well.) Pastors Sheehan and Hauser met individually with every

member of the office staff, including Patty Davidson of Lutheran Seniorlife and part-time secretary Marty Burkett. They talked to the Communications Services Committee, the Archives Committee, and the Executive Committee. They talked to movers and haulers, and dumpster renters. And they rounded up volunteers to help at every step.

As time went on, every member of the synod staff started thinking—does this stay or does this go? And all over the building, little stickers with numbers on them appeared on furniture and file cabinets. (Pastors Hauser and Sheehan had a plan!) Finally, things started getting packed: by Sandy and Roy; by Bishop, Pastor Stoller, and myself; by Bob and Sharon; by Carol and Patty; by Deacon Caywood and Lauren.

Deacon Caywood had the biggest challenge, as downsizing the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Resource Center was a huge—and painful undertaking. Members

of the Resource Center board were key supporters as they made hard decisions about what to keep and what to give away. (I tried very hard not to dip into the “give away” resources, but...)

One major concern as we left for a new location was the wonderful organ in our synod's chapel. Thiel College determined that they could make wonderful use of the organ there, and hired Pastor John Cawkins of Trinity, North Side (an experienced organ tuner, maintainer, and repairer), to dismantle, move, and rebuild the organ. He also had a great team of volunteers to help with the move.

In the last days of October, the staff and Pastors Sheehan and Hauser worked with Larry Nugent and volunteers from Bethlehem, Glenshaw's “New Start” mission to re-home some excellent furniture and

appliances. Then they held a “garage sale” at the office, giving away tables and chairs, old paraments and hymnals, and the Resource Center materials. The final move was made to the new location at 1014 Perry Highway on November 6.

Of course, you know that wasn't the end. At the end was cleanup, with a team of volunteers recycling metal, throwing away papers and sweeping up mess, moving the server and wifi network, and all of the various and sundry actions that moving requires.

**Collaboration and teamwork made this move possible. Hard work, planning, and a confidence in everyone involved made it successful. And all of it was done in order to better be able to “serve, connect, and equip congregations of the SWPA Synod to tell the story of Jesus” on into the future. 💧**

## 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:

#### January – April

5 Years: Pastor Sarah Rossing

20 Years: Pastor Beverly Banyay

Deacon Linda Brigaman

### Candidates for Ministry:

#### Approved for Ordination

Chris Combs

#### Approved for Internship

1st Lt. W. Roger Randolph

Elizabeth Rheinfrank

Stephen Slepecki

Jamie Ulrich

### Marriage:

Vicar Halle Siebert married Josh Kluever on January 9, 2021

### Retirement:

Pastor John Smaligo  
November 1, 2020

### In Memoriam:

Thelma Filbert  
Mother of Pastor Dorothy Worth  
September 22, 2020

Betty Youkers  
Mother of Synod VP, Barb Nugent  
October 21, 2020

Pastor Richard Flock  
November 13, 2020

Pastor Orville Nyblade  
December 16, 2020

### Prayer Requests:

Susan Merkner, Rachel Faulkner,  
Pastor Tim Dawes

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

# SYNOD STAFF PRESENCE | OCT-DEC 2020

Whether in the joy of celebrating milestones, the uncertainty of pastoral transitions, or the trauma of congregational crisis, the synod supports members during the biggest changes and needs. **Bishop Kusserow and Assistants, Pastors Asplin and Stoller, have been present with the following congregations during Sunday worship, council meetings, or one-on-one visits:**

Around the River Parish:  
House of Prayer,  
Aliquippa; Rehoboth,  
Economy Borough; Faith,  
Aliquippa; Van Kirk,  
Monaca

Camp Agape  
Christ, Millvale  
Community 341  
Emmanuel,  
Castle Shannon  
Faith, Natrona Heights  
First, New Kensington

Good Shepherd,  
McKees Rocks

Good Shepherd,  
Mt Pleasant

Good Shepherd,  
New Castle  
Greensburg Cluster  
Harrold Zion, Greensburg  
Hebron, Blairsville  
Holy Trinity, Irwin

Irwin Area Ministry Group:  
Paintertown, Irwin;  
Penn-Zion's, Harrison  
City; Brush Creek, Irwin

Leechburg Area Ministry  
Group: Hebron,  
Leechburg; St Paul,  
Highfield; First,  
Leechburg; Forks-Zion,  
Leechburg; First, Apollo;  
Spring Church, Apollo;  
Bethesda, Lower Burrell;

First, New Kensington;  
Calvary, Arnold;  
St. John, Ford City;  
Grace, Manorville;  
Emmanuel, Heilman

Lutheran Campus Ministry  
of Greater Pittsburgh

Nativity, Allison Park  
Our Saviors, Ambridge  
Perry Highway, Wexford

St James, Emsworth  
St. Luke, Youngwood  
Trinity, Avalon

Trinity, Freeport  
Trinity, Wexford

Zion, Baldwin Borough

## February



Camp Agapé is an outdoor ministry of the Lutheran Church, providing summer camping programs and retreat facilities. This beautiful rustic site allows you to enjoy the beauty and wonder of God's creation while experiencing an intentional Christian community.

[campagape.org](http://campagape.org)



# Calendar of Causes

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL MINISTRY PARTNERS

*March*



## Lutheran SeniorLife

Lutheran SeniorLife provides the finest senior living communities and care options for seniors, as well as community-based health, wellness, and social services in western Pennsylvania.

[lutheranseniorlife.org](http://lutheranseniorlife.org)

*April*



## Lutheran SeniorLife Lutheran Service Society

Lutheran Service Society has been helping people of all ages, faith backgrounds, and financial circumstances for over 100 years. As part of Lutheran SeniorLife's family of services, Lutheran Service Society empowers neighbors to lead independent, dignified, and secure lives.

[lutheranseniorlife.org](http://lutheranseniorlife.org)



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Issue No. 5

STORIES FROM THE ROAD



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

## *Devotional*: GROUNDHOG DAY



**Pastor Michael Sourwine**

*Pastor of House of Prayer, Aliquippa*  
[msourwine@hoplutheran.org](mailto:msourwine@hoplutheran.org)

For many, the words "Groundhog Day" brings images of Bill Murray sitting up in his bed as Sonny & Cher sing in the background. Then he launches into another repeated day. Many have used that movie reference to euphemistically describe our Covid world now. Every day the same. Not me, friends. When I think of Groundhog Day, I think of the coldest morning of my life: being convinced I had frostbite and would lose toes, and the final thought, "Wait, was that it?"

"Wait, was that it?" has been a sad chorus for me over these months. I was going to read heavy books, write a symphony, and do some awesome fixes around the house. Eleven months later, I read a lot of Facebook, listened to lots of yacht rock, and just changed out my first light fixture in the dining room (important room, 'cause I like to eat). To my grand plans, I wondered, "Wait, was that it?"

I have three little kids. I was psyched that we could do some awesome things together. Read new books. Get better at the instruments we were just learning. Maybe even use some tools to build stuff around the house. Eleven months later, we have read a million emails about school, gotten pretty solid at Wii Guitar Hero, and are absolute masters at pounding... our feet up the stairs when we get mad. Eleven months later, "Wait, was that it?"

Part of me wants to say that I pretty much messed this Covid thing up. This was not what I thought it was going to be. I had all of these grand plans. Covid was going to be a time of doing the same thing every day for everyone else, but not for me.

Alas, I have regrettably thought, "Wait, was that it?" many times over these months. Occasionally, I project God as having that same purview. Thankfully, God isn't like me. God's joy isn't tied to achievement. God has seen the resilience and beauty of the struggle. "Wait, was that it?" Yep. And God was there loving it. 💧