

Issue No. 9 | February 2022

Wayfarer

STORIES FROM THE ROAD.



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

Published by Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod

MISSION:

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

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”

—1 John 4:7

Cover Photo: Lauren Wolcott

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WHO IS A CHILD OF GOD?



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**All God's critters got a place in the choir
Some sing low, some sing higher
Some sing out loud on the telephone wire
And some just clap their hands, or paws or anything they got now**
William Russell Staines (1947-2021)

Does this familiar camp song bring a smile to your face? Do you hear the music in your head as you read these words? Do you actually break out in song? Camp songs can use silliness to draw us into seeing the world with delight and appreciation; this one also teaches us to treat other "critters" with respect, since they are all part of God's choir.

Of course "choir," here, is a metaphor. It's a way of making a personal connection to critters who are quite different from us and from each other. And whether or not Bill Staines meant for "critters" also to be a metaphor, camp counselors do lead their campers to conclude that all people should be treated with respect.

Holy Scripture and our Church's liturgy do the same thing. While our practice of the faith in congregations of people we know can lead us to think of the story of Jesus being only for us, or for people like us, the songs and texts of our faith say otherwise.

The first pages of the Bible (Genesis 1:26-27) describe the creation of all people in God's image. The punch line of the story of Jonah is God's expression of concern for the people of Nineveh (Jonah 4:11). At Jesus' birth, the magi from lands to the east saw a heavenly portent and began their months-long journey to bring their gifts and worship (Matthew 2:1-2). Jesus said that in his death he would draw all people to himself (John 12:32), and the last pages of the Bible describe a

multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language gathered around the throne of God (Revelation 7:9).

As our liturgy reaches its high point in the celebration of the eucharist, we remember Jesus' words, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin" (LBW, p. 69; ELW, p. 108). During the 50 days of Easter, the preface to the eucharistic prayer adds our song of praise to that of "earth and sea and all their creatures," pretty much bringing us full circle to the camp song with which I sought to get your attention!

The delightful metaphors of camp songs and the sacramental praise of our liturgy join the Holy Scriptures in teaching us that all our neighbors are God's children. Jesus did not come to offer us a secret invitation to be part of an elite club of God's favorites. Rather he lives as the incarnate testimony to God's creative and redeeming work that is being done in all the world, and among all the human family. It is joyful participation in this work that our faith in Jesus calls us to engage. 💧

**SAVE
THE
DATE**

SYNOD ASSEMBLY: JUNE 16-18, 2022



PARTNERS IN WELCOME



Susan M. Smith, Ph.D.

President of P.L.U.M. Board & Member of East Liberty Lutheran Church

We all feel tired and, sometimes, isolated. Those around us have seemingly infinite needs. Then we hear of new tragedies and refugees leaving Afghanistan, and we wonder what can we do? It helps to remember that we can do more when we work with partners to increase our impact and lighten our individual load.

Are you aware that southwestern Pennsylvania is receiving Afghan refugees? Do you know that two additional agencies will resettle about 200 of these and other vulnerable refugees? Can you imagine how much they need to start a new life in our area? Everything!

In November, the Immigrant Working Group of our synod presented a webinar, "Southwestern PA Welcomes Afghan Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants," to provide a space for people in our region to get information and share ideas of ways to help. Together we can share the work and support each other, as well as our new neighbors.

This webinar explained basic immigration terms that are often misunderstood, showed biblical connections, and humanized those who come as immigrants. Some immigrants spoke of their experience.

- Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS) and Casa San Jose explained some of their work, past and upcoming.

- Hello Neighbor has been connecting Pittsburghers and immigrants who have been here six months to five years and has now been approved to resettle refugees, too.
- Bethany Christian Services is a nationwide organization that has recently opened a branch in Pittsburgh.
- Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services (LIRS), has worked with refugees for more than 80 years, and will partner with Bethany as they resettle people in our area.

Christ challenges us as Christians to love our neighbors. Many Bible passages indicate that we should reach out to the strangers in our midst. Need is high at this time for lots of reasons, including for those who seek refuge in our area. Yet when you lend a hand, you are not taking on the weight of the world on your own; you are shouldering it with many others working together. 💧



JEREMIAH VILLAGE



Sheila Talarico

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As the nation's oldest and most tenured Lutheran social ministry organization, Glade Run Lutheran Services is no stranger to reinvention, nor the need to find the inspiration and energy to make these evolutions possible. Founded in 1854 as The Orphans' Home and Farm School in Zelienople by the Reverend Dr. William Passavant, today Glade Run is a leading regional provider of educational, mental health, autism, and unique therapeutic offerings.

Serving children, adults, and families in homes, schools, and community-based settings, this historic agency needed to look no further than the students and young adults we serve to discover the next emerging need in our communities—safe, welcoming, inclusive, and affordable housing for individuals with autism and other challenges.

As we guide children and young adults through our continuum of services and assist with the transition into adulthood, the lack of appropriate living environments inspired us to create an alternative to group homes. Jeremiah Village is named for Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Constructed in partnership with Trek Development Group, the newly completed phase one of Jeremiah Village includes eight cottages and 36 apartments on Glade

Run's historic Zelienople campus in Western Pennsylvania. With a combination of market-rate and affordable housing options, Jeremiah Village provides housing for all income levels. Its unique location within walking distance to charming downtown Zelienople provides accessibility to restaurants, shopping, drug stores, post office, a theater, and more. While a number of units are designed to meet the physical and sensory needs of individuals with autism, the community is uniquely inclusive and welcoming to everyone with and without disabilities. A bonus for residents is that Glade Run's campus—which includes a sensory playground and a therapeutic equine, animal, and horticulture program—is also accessible to residents.

What this means for families of an individual with autism is that there is a place where their child—young or old—can live successfully and safely as an accepted and welcomed part of the community. 💧



LUTHERAN ART FOR EASTER



Pastor Scott Bryte

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The Christian imagination has been hijacked. From white-skinned, blue-eyed Jesus with a Bee Gees disco haircut, through a flag-waving, pro-American Christ, down to a harmless baby-eyed cartoon savior, the image of Jesus has been watered down, politicized, and otherwise co-opted. This is not to say that Christian imagery has to be literal, or realist, or limited to slavish illustrations of Bible stories. But the Christian imagination (how Jesus is described and depicted) is every bit as much a proclamation of the Gospel as writing and preaching, and bears the same responsibility to faithfully present Jesus to the world.

The Christian imagination is one that centers around Jesus as the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; who descended to the dead and who rose again; who ascended and has promised to return. That's the core. Other things can be expressed, too, (Jesus as judge, Jesus as friend, etc.) but without that core, images of Jesus cease to be products of the Christian imagination.

There is a strong history of Lutheran art. April 6 is the annual day of commemoration for Lutheran artists Matthias Grunewald (1470-1528), Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553) (he and his wife Barbara were close friends of Martin and Katerina Luther); and Albrecht Durer (1471-1528).

Over the course of my ministry, I have come to interpret, rather literally, the charge to show Jesus to the world. In the past decade or so, I've developed great interest in the idea of putting an especially Lutheran twist onto traditional forms of Christian art. Here are two examples of this project, centering on the very crux of Gospel proclamation: the death and resurrection of Jesus.



A crucifix is among the oldest products of Christian imagination and reminds us that God would rather die himself than lose us. This crucifix is designed to be carried into worship in procession. I call it *Crucifix Passionis* (Cross of Suffering) and it differs from a traditional crucifix in several ways:

Most significantly, Jesus is not depicted as dead, but as dying. Jesus holds his head erect, and fixes his gaze on the viewer. This is done to shift the emphasis away from the sacrificial aspect of the death of our Lord onto the present reality of Christ's presence with us in our suffering. In this carving, Jesus is not slumped over in death, but strains away from the cross. There is no spear wound in his side, as that happened after Jesus was already dead.

Traditional crucifixes frequently show Jesus as frail and emaciated. Here, he is strong and well-muscled. This is done in part to more accurately represent the physique of a carpenter, but primarily to communicate that the



death of Jesus is not an indication of God's impotence, but rather of divine strength. His hair is pulled back into a pony tail, a practice sometimes employed by long-haired carpenters to this day. The nails do not pierce his hands, but penetrate his wrists at a point between radius and ulna, where they could more realistically support the weight of his body.

In Eastern Orthodox art, the cross is shown with two additional lines. The small horizontal line at the top represents the sign above Jesus' head. The lower diagonal line represents a board to which Jesus' feet would have been nailed. The slant of the board hints at Jesus twisting his body in agony. The board slants upward to Jesus's right (the viewer's left) to show favor for the righteous; those at Jesus' right hand.



The position of Jesus' feet in this crucifix uses this idea from the Eastern Orthodox cross, but reverses it. Jesus's left foot is higher, as "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us". (Romans 5:8 NRSV)

Christ, the Firstborn of the Dead (below) is a visual representation of the comparison and contrast of Adam and Jesus. "In fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being. For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)



Jesus is shown bare since he is newly born from the dead and is the new Adam. He stands out starkly from the predawn gloom of the scene as he is the light which darkness cannot overcome (John 1:5). Finally, Jesus steps on a sword, a Roman "gladius," to show that he overcomes the power of the Roman Empire, the grip of every earthly authority, and even the power of death itself. 💧



DEVELOPING YOUNG LEADERS



Christopher Atwood

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Every November, two youth from each synod are invited to attend the ELCA Youth Leadership Summit. There they are given keys to leadership, not from adult leaders but by the ELCA Youth Core Leadership Team, a team of 12 youth from around the ELCA that plans and executes the summit. It also advises churchwide staff, churchwide council, and even the Council of Bishops when requested.

The summit provides an opportunity for youth who are leaders in their home congregations, communities, and synods to meet and create relationships with other youth, exchange ideas, and grow their own leadership gifts. At the summit, they hear speakers from around the church who are leading in traditional and nontraditional ways, meet in small and large groups, work on spiritual growth, and worship together.

The youth return home with these gifts, making them stronger leaders for their synods and congregations. These youth have been given the keys to leadership by the churchwide body and are ready to take on leadership roles. How can we do the

same for more youth of southwestern Pennsylvania, in our congregations, and in our communities? Leadership development starts from childhood. Passing on the keys of leadership is a long and never-ending process, and it is so much more than just handing them over.

“The ELCA National Youth Summit is a really unique experience, and I can’t recommend it enough! It’s an opportunity to meet tons of new people your age and learn how to worship with them in a whole new way. Additionally, you get the chance to travel somewhere new, which really is an invaluable experience.”

- Sophie T, 17
 Member of Berkeley Hills Lutheran Church

Just like teaching a youth to drive, you need to set them up for success before setting them out on the road. First, we practice leadership with them, slowly giving them more and more responsibility before sending them out on their own. If you are interested in learning more about how to create a culture of sustainably passing on leadership in the church, please read *Growing Young* by the Fuller Youth Institute. 💧



SELAH: PAUSE & BREATHE



Pastor Bob Schaefer

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By any measure, the 2020s so far have been an overwhelming decade. On the news: Climate catastrophe. Racial reckonings. Polarized partisanship. And an ever-morphing pandemic threat, for good measure. But also in the pews: The tension even among the faithful, up and down the slate of political issues. The constant state of creative adaptation to emergent circumstances. The familiar difficulties of money and numbers now exacerbated by the new challenges.

On top of it all, many of us have become content creators in order to maintain or advance our ministries during the “Year(s) of Covid.” Since March 15, 2020, I’ve single-handedly produced nearly 700 installments of Daily Prayer for YouTube and as a podcast. I’ve assembled almost 90 virtual choirs, bell choirs, small ensembles, duets, and solos. And I’ve become the director, tech guy, and camera operator for our new Sunday livestream—alongside the usual responsibilities for leading worship. There was a time in my life when all the data I’d generated fit on a single floppy disk (the one with the green label.) These days I’m filling up the equivalent of a couple thousand floppies each week. And there’s no end in sight.

The specifics of your 2020s experience are unique; the enormities and the trivialities you’ve faced are likely different from mine. But across the board, church leaders are tired and overwhelmed.

That’s why the synod’s *Selah* retreat at Camp Lutherlyn was such a breath of fresh air. During an isolated time, the synod found a way to safely bring us together. When our worlds have shrunk to fit in the space of a home office, our synod asked if we could come out to play.

As technology and content threaten to take over every aspect of ministry, the bishop and his staff understood the value—the necessity—of breaking in hiking boots and making s’mores and dialing back our digital entanglement enough to let the goodness of God’s world start to shine through again.

And even as the demands of modern life and ministry threaten to pull us in too many directions at once, the synod team gave us each permission to do whatever gives us life.

I left *Selah* more refreshed than I’d felt in over a year—and grateful for the gift of renewal my synod has given me. 💧



VBS TAKES DIFFERENT SHAPES



Deacon Elizabeth Caywood

Synod Resource Ministry Director

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For anyone connected with Christian education in the congregation, this time of year brings one thing to mind—time to begin planning Vacation Bible School!

If you want to get a bit inventive and create your own program, yet don't quite know where to begin, let's go behind the scenes to a few congregations in our synod and see what's helped them serve their members and communities. We'll be looking specifically at three congregations: Oak Grove Lutheran Church, Zelienople; Trinity Lutheran Church, Butler; and First Lutheran Church, Downtown Pittsburgh. While these churches vary in location and size, they also share commonality in their planning and faith emphasis.

VBS design begins at **Oak Grove Lutheran Church** when Director Tracy Shaffer creates the curriculum from scratch, with assistance from the Christian Education Committee and Youth Group. Pastor Nathaneil Christman notes that the exceptional group of volunteers is flexible, adaptable, and inventive. Knowing the gifts of those serving, they are able to make changes when needed, and find roles for volunteers where they will be successful.

Families register online, including options for age groups (3yo to fourth grade or fifth grade to 17yo). Older youth are helpers during VBS then participate in Youth Group activities that follow the VBS program. Adult volunteers have all necessary clearances. In 2021, approximately 35 families were served. Typically, their program runs Monday through

Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon, during June. A unique feature in their structure is to offer the older youth activities from noon to 3 p.m. each day, and all day Friday. Last year's event included a trip to Kennywood for 15 youth.

Oak Grove reaches out to their neighbors through social media and provides flyers for distribution by members to the community. Pastor Christman shares that they "constantly remind one another that VBS is not about the crafts, games, songs, science, and skits—VBS is about instilling faith in the hearts and minds of children and youth. Crafts, games, songs, science, and skits are tools to help us teach the WORD. At the end of the day the participants should be able to tell us about God's story!"

Kimberly Wilson agrees this is the time of year the committee members at **First Lutheran Church** begin to share theme ideas via email. Once a theme is selected, the week is planned based on an outline that consists of a daily story and lesson with the entire group, and then smaller groups rotate to different stations with the help of their teen volunteers. The stations are Imagination—further exploration of the story; Creation—a week-long craft is created, adding something to the theme/story of the day each day; Sal(i)vation—using the theme to create snacks, with the campers' help, while talking about why and how the snack ties to the story (former tasty creations included pickles, shakes, and even communion bread); and Celebration—making a joyful noise with song and instruments. Following lunch, excursions are planned to match the theme as closely as possible. Past trips around town have included the sports stadiums, the cultural district, tours of city hall, and the fountains to cool off!

While Camp Downtown is initially planned by First Lutheran, it is considered a ministry of the downtown ministerium. Each church hosts the approximately 40 campers for lunch on a different day, but the educational piece takes place at First Lutheran. Ages of participants range from Kindergarten through sixth grade. Seventh grade and up function as counselors. Their program is held daily in June from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. To stay connected with their participants, campers are invited back for a one-day Winter Ice-Fest during the colder months to get them excited about the coming year.

Are you looking for something completely different for your VBS program, while also supporting another ministry of the synod? That's what **Trinity Lutheran Church** decided to try, and it has worked very well for their congregation's VBS programming. Trinity contracts with Camp Lutherlyn to offer their participants a full-day program and, while utilizing Lutherlyn's staff, have tailored the program to accommodate a wide range of

ages by also having a group that is geared to preschool children for a half-day experience. In addition to the VBS offering hosted onsite at Trinity, participants also experience what Camp Lutherlyn has to offer for one of the days of VBS by visiting the camp to enjoy swimming, nature hikes, etc. Trinity provides lunch for the kids the day they visit Lutherlyn and a special pizza party on the last day with parents/guardians in attendance for a closing program.

Pastor Joel Benson notes this option of VBS has benefited the volunteers, the children, and the camp. The children enjoy the unique variety of camp songs, skits, and scripture lessons taught by Lutherlyn's staff; the teens and adults can volunteer alongside the staff, and Lutherlyn has the opportunity to introduce the children to what camp is like. Trinity bears the cost for the families except for a small registration fee. (Contact director Deacon Deb Roberts and see lutherlyn.com/summercamp/daycamp.html for specific details on how this program might work for your congregation.)

For those of you who prefer "boxed" VBS kits, there are plenty to choose from again this year. Two great places to begin looking for an overview of 2022 kits and other helpful resources: buildfaith.org and childrens-ministry-deals.com.

Other options that are popular in our synod include VBS programs from Illustrated Ministry (illustratedministry.com); ELCA Lutheran World Hunger, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (elca.org), and growcurriculum.org.

There are many published resources out there; connect with the Resource Ministry at the synod office for more assistance. And please do contact these churches for any additional information that might be helpful. Hopefully these ideas will inspire your team to create a memorable VBS in your setting! 💧



GRANT SPOTLIGHT: MARIANNA MISSION



Pastor Peter D. Asplin

Assistant to the Bishop

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The sight of a church building standing loved and cared for but unused is far from common in the United States. The people of Marianna, Pennsylvania, mourned the 2019 closing of the Roman Catholic church building there: Saints Mary and Ann Church, part of St. Oliver Plunkett Parish. The building sat, well cared for but unused, after that.

Members of Bethlehem Lutheran Church had been operating the Marianna Christian Outreach for over a decade in a storefront on Main Street in West Bethlehem Township. The space was small, and the landlord was unresponsive. After some work with the Diocese of Pittsburgh, a vote by the congregation, and donations from all over the county and the country, the property was purchased.

And then the work began: painting and cleaning, planning and organizing, carpentry, plumbing and electrical work. The congregation decided that they wanted to create a place the community could depend on for support. Certainly the free clothing and household goods would continue to be given away, that's the outreach's core mission. But the congregation had a broader vision. It included providing a space for the Washington County Food bank to do truck-



to-trunk distributions building a brand new little free pantry for emergency needs; and re-forming the original sanctuary as a space for worship. Even more endeavors are in the planning stages! In order to serve the community in this way, many changes were needed. The back of the church had been a wooded area with a small driveway. The ministry needed an area big enough to take drop offs from people sharing their gifts—and a way for folks with limited mobility to easily access the operation.

Bethlehem Lutheran Church applied for an Ethel Verney Grant. The grant monies were partially used to excavate and clean the side and the back of the church —providing a smooth, wide, and easy access to the ministries within. Ethel Verney's vision of supporting those in need in southwestern Pennsylvania continues to make great things happen! 💧



THANKFUL FOR CHURCH STAFF



Pastor Amy Michelson

Associate Pastor of Hope Lutheran Church, Cranberry Township
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Imagine I do not have to tell you, dear readers, that church work can be difficult. It is rewarding as well, but difficult to: Work with people. Belong to a community with diverse perspectives. Share what we are passionate about, the things we care about the most. I imagine many of us know that the most important and meaningful things in life are also the most rewarding, and the most difficult.

March is employee appreciation month. It is also the beginning of Lent, arguably the busiest season of the church year. Often, the busier we get, the heavier the difficulties of ministry become.

Mistakes are inevitable, and we can start to focus on the negative. But what about all the things going well? Do we pay mind to those alongside us who are working hard so things run smoothly, and people are invited, nourished, and equipped?

Sometimes all it takes for each of us to be re-energized is to hear an affirming word or receive recognition of the positive impact we have on others. No matter the season, it can be nourishing to acknowledge someone's efforts, especially those who often toil in the background.

After all, lives are enriched and even changed through all facets of ministry, such as the loving welcome of the children's choir, the mindful planning of the funeral bulletins, the

Christ-centered handling of finances, and the caring conversations with the director of youth. Ministry is done in these ways and so many others, and that is a true gift.

So, let us take some time to say "thank you" to all the dedicated folks who do God's work alongside us in our churches. Send them a card, write them an email, blast it on social media, get them a gift, or give them an extra day off.

It is not always easy working in a church. It is especially difficult working during a pandemic, with frayed emotions and constant change. What is often rewarding is knowing that what we do is meaningful as we help others come to know God's presence in their daily lives.

Thank you for the work you do, dear reader. And a special shoutout to administrators, treasurers, musicians, youth directors, and custodians. What you do matters. Thank you.



ADVOCACY

RAISE YOUR VOICE IN LOVE



Pastor Sarah Rossing

Pastor of St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church, Youngstown
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There are two things on my office door. The first is a drawing of me in alb and stole made by a little girl in my congregation. I'll call her Katie, here. The second is a poster from a LAMPa (Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania) event. It features a quote from Martin Luther. **"God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does."**

I think of those two images when doing ministry in the community or participating in advocacy. My favorite picture of Katie is her bringing a big box of macaroni and cheese to a food pantry collection. It's a favorite food she wanted to share with someone else, someone who was hungry. I think of that picture whenever I see her drawing on my door.

Together these images are reminders of my faith community and our call to love God and neighbor.

Katie has a safe home where her needs are met by loving parents. But she has Sunday school classmates who are not so fortunate. Our congregation has neighbors whose prayers for daily bread often go unanswered. Our local ministerium meets some needs, but there are many others we can only help meet on occasion, like housing and healthcare. Then there are deeper pains and injustices that will not be healed by a food or clothing drive.

My congregation's hands only reach so far in addressing those needs. But our hearts and voices can reach much further.

When we, as people of faith, put our voices together to tell the story of our love for our neighbors and their ongoing needs, others pay attention. When we collect food, pay a utility bill, or attend a prayer vigil, immediate needs are met. This is a good and necessary kind of love.

When we raise our voices to advocate for change, underlying causes are addressed, and our love grows. Katie and I collect food for friends and neighbors. We also raise our voices to tell our stories, so one day we won't have to collect food in the first place. We raise our voices to love our neighbors even more. 💧

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:

February-April

10 Years: Deacon Amy Santoriello*

15 Years: Deacon Debra Roberts

35 Years: Pastor David Littke

*Deacon Santoriello was mistakenly listed in the previous edition.

New Calls:

Pastor Frank Podolinski, Pastor of St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Trauger, December 13, 2021

Pastor Kerri Clark, Associate Pastor of Our Redeemer, McMurray, February 1, 2022

Installations:

Pastor Christopher Combs, First, Greensburg, October 24, 2021

Deacon Michelle Kunkle, St. Luke's, Youngwood, January 9, 2022

Pastor Frank Podolinski, St. Paul's United Church of Christ, January 23, 2022

Welcome:

Pastor Scott Dennis (PCUSA), Interim Pastor of Peace, Greenock

Pastor David Gieschen (retired), transferred from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Retirement:

Pastor Michael Robinson

Pastor Keith Josephson

Pastor Rebecca Dittenhafer

In Memoriam:

Corliss Auckerman, Treasurer of St. James, Youngstown, November 10, 2021

Pastor John Harman, November 18, 2021

Pastor Donald Worth, November 29, 2021

John Becker, husband of Pastor Ruth Becker, December 23, 2021

Carol Spaninger, mother of Kelly Spaninger, January 12, 2022

Evanna Stoves, mother-in-law of Pastor Bob Zimmerman, January 15, 2022

Prayer Requests:

Pastor Jerry Nuernberger

Denny Barkley (husband of Pastor Peggy Suhr-Barkley)

The most up-to-date list at: swpasynod.org/prayer



Wayfarer

New Council Members?

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swpasynod.org/wayfarer

SYNOD STAFF PRESENCE | NOV 21-JAN 22

Whether in the joy of celebrating milestones, the uncertainty of pastoral transitions, or the trauma of congregational crises, 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 in-person and online visits to ministers, lay leaders, and councils:**

Bethel, Latrobe
(Stahlstown)

Bethesda, Lower Burrell

Bethlehem, Scenery Hill

English, Zelienople

Faith, Natrona Heights

First, Greensburg

Glade Run

Good Shepherd,
Bower Hill

Good Shepherd,
Greensburg

Harrold-Zion, Greensburg

Hebron, Blairsville

Holy Trinity, Beaver

Hope, Beaver
(Brighton Township)

Lutheran SeniorLife

Lutherlyn

Messiah, Morningside

Messiah, Munhall

Nativity, Allison Park

Our Redeemer, McMurray

Our Saviour, North
Huntingdon

Perry Highway Lutheran,
Wexford

Seaman Memorial,
Zelienople

Spring Church, Apollo

St. John Mark, Homestead

St. John of Highland,
McCandless

St. John, Mars

St. John's, North Versailles

St. John's, Perrysville

St. Matthew's, Crafton

St. Paul, Zelienople

St. Peter, Uniontown

Trinity, Connellsville

Trinity, Freeport

United Lutheran Seminary

Zion, Harmony

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

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

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



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Issue No. 9 STORIES FROM THE ROAD



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Devotional: STEWARDING OUR HEARTS



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“So, do you exercise regularly?” I was on the medical center’s treadmill, hooked up to machines and IVs, trying desperately to keep the poorly fitting hospital gown in order as the nurse turned up the speed when my cardiologist asked the question. My red-faced response, “not as much as I should,” is likely a common refrain for medical staff to hear. Fortunately, I passed my stress test! But the question, embarrassing as it was, combined with a deep dive into family heart health history, launched me toward a more thoughtful approach to my wellbeing.

Much of my call in the church involves inviting others into whole-life stewardship. Thus it was not without some irony that I realized I had not been stewarding my heart as well as I should—and I couldn’t just blame pandemic lethargy. Good stewardship for me was to meet with my doctors, set up a series of tests, eat a few more vegetables, and begin, step by step, (literally) to care for my heart.

Our hearts matter, our bodies are important. They are a gift from God, who in the person of Jesus, entered into the miracle of human life to delight in a human heart. This is the essence of God with us, Emmanuel—God living and loving among us. And while these human hearts are not meant to beat forever, we are invited to steward them, as we steward other gifts from God in loving and intentional ways. How are you stewarding your heart—physically and emotionally? 💧