

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Blair-Huntingdon Conference

2023-2024

This year was a time of transition and loss in our Conference. Retired pastor Rev. Denise Arpino, most recently having served Simpson-Temple in Altoona, died in July. Retired pastor Rev. Ed Harshbarger, most recently of St. Matthew Martinsburg, died in December. Rev. Jaime Olson concluded his call in Duncansville following twenty years of service.

Current and retired clergy met for text study most weeks at local coffee shops and restaurants as well as for Conference meetings at hosting congregations or at one of our area parks.

In July, Rev. Drew McCaffery led a group of youth and adult leaders from around the Synod to Florida to participate in relief efforts to areas of the Gulf Coast damaged by Hurricane Ian. Our Conference youth hosted a spaghetti dinner to raise funds toward travel expenses.

In August, thanks to the organizational work of Rev. Amanda McCaffery, we welcomed folks from across the Synod to Lutheran Day at the Curve in conjunction with “Faith Night” at PNG Field in Altoona.

In September, Rev. Amanda McCaffery, Rev. MartyJo Stellabotte, and I worked with several of the congregations at the southern end of the Conference on the ELCA’s Civic Life and Faith study and sent our feedback to the task force that is writing that social statement.

In October, our Conference youth hosted a Halloween costume party for residents of the Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg. Activities included music, bingo, and party

games with refreshments.

In November, our Conference and ‘Chef’ Drew McCaffery welcomed rostered ministers and their guests to Pre-Thanksgiving Dinner Church, hosted at Bethany in Altoona; Rev. Kevin Shock presided.

In December, our Conference was honored to host The Weekend, the Synod’s first junior-senior high retreat since 2019. Over seventy youth, adult leaders, and volunteers were warmly welcomed by Rev. Brandon Cian and the congregation of St. James in Huntingdon, who graciously allowed us to “take over” their regular Sunday worship service. We look forward to returning this year to continue this important ministry.

In February, three of our Conference pastors braved the 40 degree lake, and two of our pastors utilized the common sense God gave them to lend support from the shore, at the annual Polar Plunge at Canoe Creek State Park to benefit Pennsylvania Special Olympics.

In April, the Conference planned a “Wacky” bowling party for all ages at Morrison’s Cove Park Lanes in Martinsburg as a fundraiser to benefit Lutheran Campus Ministries at Penn State.

We look forward to another year of doing ministry together in the heart of the Allegheny Synod.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Traci A. Marriott, Dean
Pastor, St. Matthew Martinsburg
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Clearfield Conference

The Clearfield Conference includes nine congregations, four of which are in formal partnerships and five in informal partnerships. Rostered leaders are: The Rev. Christine Roe (First Faith Lutheran Cooperative), The Rev. Vicki Beilfuss (Holy Shepherd Parish), and The Rev. Robert Way (retired).

For First Faith Lutheran Cooperative and Holy Shepherd Parish, each co-op/parish continues to enjoy various ministries, faith growth opportunities and events both separately and as a parish. These two formal partnerships find much value in being in ministry together.

Ministry Highlights:

First Lutheran's "All God's Animals Pet Pantry" helps senior pet owners struggle to care for their beloved companions. "Lunch Bunch," a ministry of Shepherd of the Hills, is a monthly potluck for seniors that brings much joy to the participants.

With Pr. Way retiring in January, St. John, Clearfield is in transition discerning their future. Five other congregations in Luthersburg, Rockton, Olanta, and Curwensville are also without a called pastor. With help from lay leaders and pastors, both within the synod and ecumenically, these congregations are still able to worship and receive Holy Communion.

We are taking extra time as a conference to gather together to better know each other and envision new possibilities. At our Fall caucus in November, 76+ folks gathered for intentional conversation about who God is

calling us to be. In January, 80+ shared a potluck meal and then shared God's sacred meal in worship around the (very, very long) table. At the time of this writing, we are planning a gathering in April for intentional sharing our stories about life in ministry within each congregation and our hopes for the future.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Vicki Beilfuss
Clearfield Conference Dean

Johnstown Conference

2023/2024 was a year of transition for a number of congregations. Three pastors left their calls to take calls in other synods and one pastor retired from his call.

- Pastor Mark Fischer resigned his call at First Lutheran, Portage and is currently serving as the interim pastor at St. David's Lutheran Church, Davidsville
- Pastors Faron Johnson, Julia Sprenkle, and Scott Klimke took calls in other synods.
- The Johnstown Conference welcomes Pastor Jim West as the interim pastor at Christ Lutheran, Westmont.
- Vicar Christy Harford has moved from Trinity, Sidman to serving First Lutheran, Johnstown and Benscreek Lutheran as she finishes her seminary classes and prepares to start her internship year at these two congregations.
- The conference welcomes Vicar Claudia Plows as vicar at Trinity, Sidman
- With the retirement of Pastor Kevin McNamara from St. Paul's Mundy Corner, seminary student Jennifer Bobolsky is serving at St. Paul Lutheran, Mundy's Corner and St. John's, Summerhill.

Currently, there are three congregations in the conference working on Mission Site Profiles: Good Shepherd in Windber, Mt. Calvary in Johnstown, and St. David's in Davidsville. As has been the case for the past several years, the number of churches looking to call a pastor are significantly more than the number of pastors seeking to change calls throughout the ELCA.

This spring Moxham Lutheran Church and Christ Lutheran, Westmont began exploring the possibility of becoming a parish. The two congregations have entered into a period of discernment and engagement to see if being in a parish arrangement is the best way forward for both congregations.

Since November, 2023, Pastor Mark Fischer has been leading worship monthly for the men at Federal Correctional Institution (FCI)-Loretto. In 2021, one of

the men at FCI-Loretto communicated with the Maryland Lutheran Prison Ministry program and requested to see if it would be possible to have Lutheran worship services at FCI-Loretto. They in turn contacted the Allegheny Synod. After waiting out the pandemic, the Allegheny Synod and FCI-Loretto began a partnership with the prison with Pastor Fischer volunteering his time to lead worship at the correctional institution. Approximately 65 or so men out of a population of 700 men come to the services which include the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In March, 2024, Pastor Fischer was asked if he would be willing to also lead worship at the camp at FCI-Loretto; this will begin in April, 2024. Chaplain Statler made Pastor Fischer aware of the need for new(er) hymnals as the ones at the prison were falling apart. Thanks to a donation from the Laurel Highlands Conference, 75 LBW hymnals were given to the prison ministry at FCI-Loretto.

At the Spring Caucus Meeting held April 16, 2024 Pastor Nancy Hoover was elected to serve as the conference dean through June, 2026.

Submitted,

Pastor Mark W. Fischer
Johnstown Conference Dean

Laurel Highlands Conference

Comprised of 26 churches, the Laurel Highlands Conference serves as a part of the Allegheny Synod within Somerset County, Pennsylvania and Grantsville, Maryland. Presently, 12 churches function as single-point parishes and 14 churches function through partnerships including (1) three-point parish and (2) four-point parishes.

Ordained clergy and vicars gather for monthly meetings hosted at various churches within the Conference. These meetings provide opportunity for worship, sharing of information and needs related to the Conference and Synod, and the mutual support and upbuilding of one another. Experiencing several vacancies within the Conference, ordained clergy often serve within their respective call and as vacancy pastors for sister churches. The Conference is also served through the sharing of talents and leadership by vicars and authorized lay worship leaders.

During the past year, the Conference has experienced the disaffiliation from the ELCA of St Paul Lutheran (Buckstown, PA) and the closure of St Luke Lutheran (Rockwood, PA), whose final Mass was held on November 5th, 2023. We mourn, with confidence in the promise of resurrection, the death of Rev Linda McElroy Thomas who entered the Church Triumphant on November 3rd, 2023. Vicar Christy Harford began serving at Benscreek Lutheran (Hollsopple, PA); Rev Regina Holliday was

ordained to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament and installed as pastor at Horner Lutheran (Stoystown, PA) on March 7th, 2024; and Vicar Allen Stump received a positive approval through candidacy and is currently in the call process while serving the churches of Christ Casebeer Lutheran (Somerset, PA) and Laurel Trinity Lutheran (Jennerstown, PA).

The churches of the Laurel Highlands Conference serve our neighbors through various ministries and partnerships. During the 2024 Lenten season, the churches joined together to share in an appeal to support the ministry of Opportunity Palestine. Through this appeal, God's people of the Laurel Highlands Conference contributed \$9,200 + to support our brothers and sisters in Christ, and neighbors, in Palestine and the Holy Land!

With thanksgiving to God for the invitation and faithfulness in the partnership of the Gospel, we rejoice in our Lord's promises while witnessing to the faith, grace, mercy, love, and hope that God's people and the leaders of the Church share throughout our communities and the world.

Respectfully submitted in the Peace of Christ +

The Rev Tyler J Graham, STS
Dean, Laurel Highlands Conference
Pastor, Salisbury Lutheran Parish

Nittany Conference

This year, the rostered leaders of the Nittany Conference have met monthly, either using Zoom or in person. These gatherings have offered the opportunity for worship and prayer together, idea and resource sharing, and collegial support. These gatherings have been well received by our colleagues and provide helpful opportunities to walk with each other and support our congregations and ministries navigate the challenges of ministry.

This year the Nittany Conference has welcomed Pastor Laura Waltermire who was called to serve St. Mark Evangelical Lutheran Church in Pleasant Gap. Pastor Waltermire is a graduate of Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa and is originally from Messiah Lutheran Church in Rockwood, PA.

We have bid farewell to Pastor Susan Williamson who served Pine Hall Lutheran Church in State College and

Gatesburg Lutheran Church in Warrior's Mark and has accepted a call to serve a congregation in the New England Synod. At this writing, Pine Hall and Gatesburg are in the call process. At the end of April, we Pastor Brent Book will retire from ministry after more than 25 years. He has been serving Zion Lutheran Church in Boalsburg. Zion Lutheran is beginning the call process in seeking their next pastor.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve within the Nittany Conference and thank God for the people and leaders here.

In Christ,

Deacon Alicia Anderson
Nittany Conference Dean
Campus Minister with Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State