

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

Volume 17, Issue 6 • www.AlleghenySynod.org • Holiday 2022



Spreading
holiday
cheer,
Page 3

This season,
**DELIGHT IN
THE LORD**

'A Mentor and a Teacher'

*First Lutheran
Remembers Pastor
Startzel, Who Died
Suddenly in August*

By **GEORGE FATTMAN**

First Lutheran, Johnstown

Pastor Walter Startzel, who died unexpectedly Aug. 27, was a perfectionist.

The pastor of First Lutheran Church along Vine Street in Johnstown was so particular that he typed 10 pages, single-spaced, of instructions for his funeral.

(See **STARTZEL** Page 4)



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

is published bi-monthly by the
ALLEGHENY SYNOD OF THE ELCA

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Because Christ is here... We are actively engaging in God's work and sharing the Gospel as the Holy Spirit increases the followers of Jesus Christ.

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Images should be as high resolution as possible, ideally 300 ppi at 3x5 inches (900x1500 pixels.)

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Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Our Home

A Message from Bishop Paula Schmitt

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Part of the work I am doing as your bishop is serving on a small "table" of bishops who serve in rural contexts. We gather almost monthly to discuss the challenges and opportunities of our contexts and we are seeking to find ways to support our congregations. You won't be surprised to learn that while each of us serves in a different kind of rural context, we all are experiencing many of the same things when it comes to attendance, finances and volunteers.

We have been meeting with a marketing director who has been asking us questions about our contexts in order to help us find ways to talk about our synods that will help others know the joys of serving in these areas.

This past month, she asked the question, "What makes your place home?" It was an intriguing question; one not many of us had thought about. She explained that her 5-year-old asked her why where they live is home. So, she wanted us to explain to her as though we were explaining to a 5-year-old why we call our synod home. The answers we shared were ones that included relationships, ancestors, the desire for a place to worship, the need to belong to a community and land.



Bishop Paula Schmitt

(See HOME, Page 19)

Christmas Cheer Packages Combat Loneliness

BY PASTOR TIFFANY MARVICH
Zion Lutheran, Williamsburg

In 2020 we knew people were feeling isolated and lonely.

In response, a few of us from the Williamsburg Ministerium decided to assemble Christmas Cheer Packages to reach out to people in the community. We wanted to do something to let people know God was present with them, they were being thought of and to provide a bit of cheer to them.

In December 2020 we purchased different items for these packages and a representative from Zion Lutheran Church, the Cross Roads ministry and St. Joseph's Catholic Church assembled them since we were not yet able to gather with one another. We then were able to safely drop off 48 packages at the doors of the four senior living communities and to the shut-ins at Zion. This was a small gesture of care that people really appreciated.

(See CHEER Page 16)

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STARTZEL

(Continued from Page 1)

He would go home after a Saturday night service and rewrite his sermon for Sunday morning.

He took his Subaru Outback to the car wash, even when it was clean.

Pastor Walter had been the covenant pastor of First Lutheran for 3 1/2 years. He told everybody how much he loved being the pastor. He commented often on how well members got along and their willingness to minister to others.

First Lutherans grew to love him as well, especially as he emphatically assured them of God's patience and love.

To a young man who was feeling conflict in his life, Pastor Walter advised, "Remember (singing) 'Jesus loves me.' That's what my mother always told me."

One day when a man from a different tradition asked him whether he had been saved, he replied: "Yes, that happened 2,000 years ago on a hill outside Jerusalem."

His scholarship, however, was not so simple. He had a deep understanding of Scripture and the ability to explain passages to ordinary people. His preaching — and his conversations — always had context. Even well-read Christians gained greater insight.

"Pastor Startzel was a mentor and teacher to me," Vicki Price, chair of worship and music, said. "He spent time helping me understand the lessons and using that to choose the hymns for the day."

At first, Pastor Startzel was leery about broadcasting on cable TV. Although he would fuss about the details of editing



Submitted photo

Pastor Startzel at the pulpit.

the taped service, he would not watch it on TV.

Eventually, he got over that, then analyzed how to suit his preaching for a TV audience. In particular, he became more dramatic when the camera was on.

Pastor Walter had served Mount Calvary and Mount Zion in Somerset County, St. Paul's/Stovertown, St. Paul's/Gowen City, the Selinsgrove Center, Geisinger Medical Center and Grace/Stoystown.

First Lutheran in Johnstown turned out to be a different experience for him, but it did not change his devotion to careful (perfectionist?) interpretation of Scripture.

Even though he was 75, he was still growing as a pastor.

His parishioners grew, too. †

**Remember
in Prayer**

Join the Allegheny Synod in prayer for these congregations this issue.

NOVEMBER

Week 1: Zion Lutheran, Meyersdale

Week 2: Evangelical Lutheran, Duncansville

Week 3: Christ Lutheran, Dubois

Week 4: St. Mark Lutheran, Snyderstown

DECEMBER

Week 1: First Lutheran, Johnstown

Week 2: St. Matthew Lutheran, Martinsburg

Week 3: St. Paul Lutheran, Pine Grove Mills

Week 4: Moxham Lutheran, Johnstown

Growing in Faith in Moxham

BY DIANE RUGH

Moxham Lutheran Church

Since 2016, Moxham Lutheran Church has been operating its Growing in Faith Garden.

Though things have changed during the years, its mission to serve those in need remains as the driving force.

The garden includes a 6-foot by 50-foot area in front of the church, and about 80 square feet of raised beds in the back, near the alley.

Congregation members oversee this ministry, preparing and caring for the beds and produce throughout the year.

This year’s garden included beets, broccoli, green and yellow beans, green peppers, Brussels sprouts, zucchini, summer squash and tomatoes.

Produce is delivered weekly to Goodwill’s Moxham Food Pantry for its Tuesday and Thursday openings.

Before the project started, congregation members worked with the Moxham community twice monthly in processing vouchers for the former Park Avenue Food Pantry.

The church recognized a God’s Work, Our Hands opportunity and the Growing in Faith Garden began.

The Park Avenue Pantry could not handle fresh produce, but the church was able to distribute it with the vouchers.

Furthermore, through a partnership with Sandyvale Memorial Gardens and Conservancy, on these days, Moxham Lutheran distributed additional vegetables, including hydroponic lettuce. Written produce storage and preparation details were also available if requested.

Each year, there are costs involved, including those for weed cover material, soil nutrition and drip irrigation, yet the garden has been supported in so many ways.

Early on, a congregation member applied for and received a Thrivent grant.

Later, the church received a bequest designated specifically for the garden. Also, the church has always been involved with the Johnstown area’s community garden organization.

(See GARDEN, Page 13)

WE *are* LUTHERAN

Professor Moving on Project Helping People with Disabilities

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

A Penn State professor is part of a project helping the physically disabled enjoy more physical activity.

The effort not only can help with physical and mental health, but also to extend lives, according to Dr. Jonna Belanger, who works in the university's department of kinesiology.

The program is called Happy Valley Fitlink.

"Happy Valley was the vision of one of my students in the Kinesiology program at PSU. After taking my course on disability sports that teaches program development as well as equity and access to physical activity for persons with disabilities, he noticed that there was a lack of access in State College for adults with intellectual disabilities and he asked if I would help him start a program," Belanger, a member of Grace Lutheran Church in State College, said.

The project started in January of 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have adjusted every semester as our world changed along with the pandemic," she said.

The primary population served now is adults with intellectual disabilities and/or people on the autism spectrum.



Dr. Jonna Belanger

Kinesiology is the study of human movement, something that many people with disabilities lack.

Belanger said a lack of activity, access to quality health care and access to quality foods causes shorter life expectancy.

"Our program provides an opportunity for individuals with disabilities an opportunity to learn healthy behaviors while building a community of love and support. A side impact is that our volunteers are mostly college students who will go on to be the next generations of physicians, fitness professionals, allied health professionals, teachers and other health care providers," she said.

(See BELANGER, Page 14)

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Sabbatical Report Part 3:

Exploring the Reformed Church in Switzerland

(Editor's note: This is the second part in an ongoing series by Pastor Julie Holm about her three-month journey around the world investigating unique locations and faith.)

BY PASTOR JULIE HOLM

Brush Valley Fusion of Faith

I serve both UCC and Lutheran churches, so my sabbatical through church history had to include both the Lutheran Reformation in Germany and the Reformers in Switzerland. Traveling north from Italy by train and bus, I first visited Geneva and Zurich.

The homes of the reformers were far more understated. Even though I spent limited time here, about two days in each city, it felt much more relaxing and low key. In Geneva, in particular, faced with the closing of Calvin's Auditorium and the Museum of the Reformation, my exploration centered primarily on churches.

I was particularly struck with the contrast between the churches I'd recently been in, in particular the elaborate murals in Rome and Assisi, and the amazing detail of the Duomo in Milan, to the plain walls of St. Pierre's in Geneva. Of course, context mattered! While the Roman Church laity, mostly illiterate and listening to the service and scripture in an



Photo by Pastor Julie Holm

The plain white interior at St. Pierre, Geneva.

archaic language, Latin, benefited from the stories of scripture lining the walls, the situation of the 16th Century reformers was very different. They were influenced by the amazing invention of the printing press in the middle of the prior century. That meant a huge boom in the availability of printed matter. No longer did a monk have to lovingly copy a book by hand, letter by letter, in order to have a copy of something; hundreds, even thousands, of copies could be printed in a short period of time.

(See JOURNEY, Page 18)



Submitted photos

Members of the Moxham Lutheran congregation in Johnstown used Gods Work. Our Hands. Sunday to help the local food pantry.

Doing God's Work in Moxham

By PASTOR REBECCA WEST

Moxham Lutheran Church

ELCA God's Work. Our Hands. Sunday is a tradition of service to our neighbor, and we remember the words of Martin Luther: "Our faith is a living, busy, active, mighty thing."

With our hands, we do God's work of restoring and reconciling communities in the name of Jesus Christ.

Once we learned that toiletry items are a great need for the 150 families who are served each month through the Moxham Food Pantry, we requested and received member contributions, which allowed us to purchase toiletry items to fill 75 small canvas bags with body wash, toothpaste, toothbrushes and deodorant. On Oct. 18, we gathered following worship to assemble the bags and then enjoyed a light lunch together.

The bags will be delivered to the Moxham Food Pantry for distribution. This project was spearheaded by Jeanne Fleegle and our Social Ministry Team. †

(See JOURNEY 2, Page 9)

Mission Team Back in 'Business'

BY PASTOR ED DEVORE

Retired from Friedens Lutheran Church

After a more than two-year hiatus due to COVID, the Mission Outreach and Support Team (MOST) at Friedens Lutheran Church is back at work doing God's work with their hands!

MOST is a group of folks at FLC that do helping hands ministry in the community, around the mid-Atlantic region and around the globe. During the past decade they have been involved in:

- Trips to Guatemala loaded with supplies for orphans and muscle for doing much needed maintenance on orphanages.
- Spring and fall yard work for area senior citizens.
- Post-disaster work trips to New Jersey and Rockaway, New York after Superstorm Sandy, and to southern West Virginia.
- Offerings to help Ukrainian refugees, the Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services, Lutheran Seafarers' Ministries, etc.
- Seasonal gift bags to area nursing homes and senior care boarding homes.

Funds for MOST's ministries come from offerings from FLC, MOST funds raised serving food at local auctions, and Thrivent member gift cards.

In September the group made their first post-COVID trip back to the southwestern tip of West Virginia to the town of Kermit. Eleven MOST members par-

ticipated in this mission trip. They were: Pastor John Barichivich, Larry Barron, Rick and Tina Barron, Barb and Dan Halverson, Marcia Maust, Amy and Grace Polakoski, Sue Schimpf, and Beth Schrock.

The contact agency for MOST was Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), which lifts up the needs in Appalachian areas where flooding and other natural and economic disasters have impacted families and communities. While in Kermit, the group also worked with ABLE families — a regional outreach ministry — that provides after school and summer programming for children along with a food pantry and clothing "store" for those in need.

While there for two full work days the group did the following projects:

Painting and clean up in the community park.

Replaced a family's roof that was beyond repair.

Removed moldy drywall and insulation in a home.

FLC provided school supplies and hygiene items for the group to take along to give to the after school program in Kermit.

The Laurel Highlands Conference provided more than 20 Flood Buckets of cleaning supplies, which were given for VOAD's use in the region. MOST purchased additional items once on site when they saw some of the needs in the community.

(See MOST, Page 12)

Returning to 'normal'

A Report from Lion Country

(Editor's note: Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America presence on campus in the territory of the Allegheny Synod. We asked Deacon Alicia Anderson, who serves as campus minister, for some updates each semester.)

BY DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON

Penn State University Campus Minister

Though things are not entirely back to “normal” on campus, when I talk with students about how things are going for them this semester, they mention all the typical student activities and concerns.

They are busy with classes, assignments and exams. They make time for student organizations and campus-wide activities like football games and performances.

They are involved in pre-professional organizations and service organizations. They are working on applications for study abroad programs, scholarships and graduate school. Those who are graduating are in the midst of their job search while those who will be back next year are looking for fall housing.

On our campus and university campuses across the country, student life this fall looks very much

like it did before the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions.

With Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State, our on-campus worship has resumed nearly all of the elements that were deemed too risky for the pandemic.

Each week, we sing and pray together, share a time for reflection on the Gospel reading for the week, then gather for a meal and lively conversation together.

Off campus, we see more students returning to worship with the congregation at Grace Lutheran in State College and we have resumed gathering them for meals after worship each Sunday. More service-learning options are returning, including indoor projects that we avoided for the past two years.

Interfaith and ecumenical events have re-emerged and students are even more interested than ever to learn about our neighbors of other faith traditions after so much time apart.

When I look around at the students gathered for worship with Lutheran Campus Ministry on Thursday evenings this fall, it is surprising to realize those long months of COVID-19 are fading into memory.

(See SEMESTER, Page 20)

The Director's Take

News of Note from the Director of Evangelical Mission

By PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK

Assistant to the Bishop & Director of Evangelical Mission

"Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. So they departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere."
— Luke 9:1-2, 6 (NRSVUE)

I recently participated in a gathering for DEMs at The Lutheran Center in Chicago. The Rev. Phil Hirsch, executive director for Christian Community and Leadership for the ELCA, said something during one of our first sessions that has stuck with me and led me down many rabbit holes of reflection.

He said that this statement described the Lutheran way of evangelism for many generations: "If they want us, they know where to find us."

Ugh. It's a kind of evangelism, but not a very effective or Christ-like kind of evangelism, to be sure.

My reflections on that state-



Pastor Kevin Shock

ment were aided by the view from the 11th floor of The Lutheran Center.

One wall of windows looks out on a mostly undeveloped and green section of the metro Chicago area. One sign of civilization that you can see as you look out over those trees are a few steeples pointing up above the tree canopy throughout the landscape.

Those few points reminded me of the original purpose of steeples; they were built so that people could find us.

Often the highest structure in towns, people could easily locate the churches, even if they were not locals.

In the churches they knew they could find the presence of the Holy One, at least in Word and Sacrament, if not in various other ways. Lingering evidence of the original purpose of steeples exists in horse racing and track and field events: the Steeplechase.

(See DEM 1, Page 21)



Submitted photos
**Scenes from the Friedens MOST team
in action on mission trips.**



MOST

(Continued from Page 9)

It was once more a blessing for MOST to be able to be out and about doing God's work with their hands! Thanks be to God! †



Submitted photo
Produce from the Moxham garden.



During the past few years, a few seedlings have even been left anonymously at the church, an indication of community support.

GARDEN

(Continued from Page 4)

Through this liaison, seeds and miscellaneous gardening items have been shared, and seedlings from Sandyvale are available each spring. During the past few years, a few seedlings have even been left anonymously at the church, an indication of community support.

Throughout the pandemic and during the recent interim of no food pantry in Moxham, the garden continued and the church found ways to get the vegetables to those in need.

Produce distribution is now the easiest and most efficient ever with the opening of our regional Goodwill's Moxham Food Pantry on Central Avenue! †

BELANGER

(Continued from Page 6)

"Through our program they learn what truly is possible with inclusion, and how to remove social barriers and expectations to see a person's true ability," Belanger said.

She said the population she is working with is significantly under-served in nearly all aspects of life.

"Even with laws in place like ADA, access and opportunity in many areas of life are lacking. As a society, we lack an understanding and appreciation for different abilities. ADA has been a law for only 30 years, only 30 years ago did we in the U.S. decide it was time to extend full civil rights to those with different abilities," she said.

Belanger said the biggest misconception about the population she works with is that they can't be fit and healthy.

"Each person has their own type of ability, it might not fit what is considered 'able' in society, but most often they are far more capable than most assume. Never assume, they will just take that opportunity to prove you wrong," she said.

FAITH MATTERS

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What have you been praying for the most lately?

DR. JONNA BELANGER: The ability, mental strength and patience with myself to continue juggling being a mom, spouse, professor and FitLink director. At times it gets a bit overwhelming wearing lots of hats.

TLL: What's your first memory of experiencing the Lutheran faith?

DJB: I actually did not grow up in the Lutheran faith. My husband and his family have always attended Lutheran-based churches, so my first memory was attending church with my husband and his family while we were dating.

TLL: What's one message you have for anyone considering attending a Lutheran church?

DJB: A church should remind you frequently that God loves you, the whole you and all of you. †

Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries & Liberty Lutheran Services Share Good News

(Editor's note: this article was submitted by Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries.)

Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries and Liberty Lutheran Services are pleased to announce that Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries (ALSM) is joining Liberty's family of services. As a faith-based, nonprofit organization, ALSM has served individuals and families in Central PA communities for 70 years. Touching the lives of 3,000 people annually, their 300-plus team members offer senior living communities and services that span generations in an eight-county region in Central Pennsylvania.

During the last six years, the leadership of Liberty and ALSM have explored several options for joining together in order to serve more people and expand services. The boards of each organization voted to affiliate in mid-September and the process is expected to be completed by Jan. 1, 2023.

"Liberty is both humbled and honored to bring ALSM into the family," Luanne Fisher, CEO of Liberty, said.

"ALSM's compassion, knowledge and commitment to the communities it serves will strengthen Liberty's Mission to faithfully accompany individuals and families who are facing life-changing situations through an empowering approach that honors their choices and well-being."

With this union, there will be no fore-



seeable changes to any communities or services. ALSM's two retirement communities: The Lutheran Home at Holidaysburg and The Oaks at Pleasant Gap, will join Liberty's five communities: Paul's Run in northeast Philadelphia, Artman in Ambler, The Hearth at Drexel in Bala Cynwyd, The Manor at Yorktown in Jamison, and The Village at Penn State in State College. The community-based programs of both organizations will also remain the same, with opportunities to expand services. Both organizations are financially sustainable.

Fisher will remain president and CEO of Liberty.

Patricia W. Savage, who has led Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries for the past 26 years as president and CEO, will be retiring in the coming months.

(See NEWS, Page 16)

A WAY TO REACH OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY WITH THE LOVE OF GOD... TO SPREAD THE CHRISTMAS MESSAGE.

CHEER

(Continued from Page 3)

The social ministry team at Zion Lutheran Church decided to continue this as a way to reach out to others in 2021. We purchased some items and others were donated by people within the congregation. Some of the items included in the nativity gift bag packages were mugs with hot chocolate inside, word searches a devotional and a craft with a message of faith made by the children in the congregation.

As a congregation, we assembled 105 packages the Sunday before Christmas. We delivered them again to our shut-in members and the se-

nior living communities. The rest were taken by congregational members who delivered them to people they believed could use a gesture of Christmas cheer. It was wonderful to see how many people participated by delivering the remaining packages to others. Not only did people receive the packages, but also a visit from someone.

Everything worked out so well we are planning to continue to gather items, assemble and deliver them again this December. This has been a way to reach out to others in the community with the love of God and to spread the Christmas message of joy and hope. †

NEWS

(Continued from Page 15)

ALSM will become a subsidiary of LLS. Two ALSM board members will join the LLS board and two LLS board members will join the ALSM board.

During her time at ALSM, Savage led the organization through a variety of challenges and periods of tremendous growth. Liberty is extremely grateful for her leadership and vision to build

a strong, faithful organization.

There will be a Godspeed worship service honoring Savage at 3 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 18 at Zion Lutheran Church, 500 Allegheny Street, Hollidaysburg.

If you have any questions about the affiliation, or to RSVP for the Godspeed service and reception, contact Andrea Schurr at andrea.schurr@alsm.org or at 814-696-4516. †

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

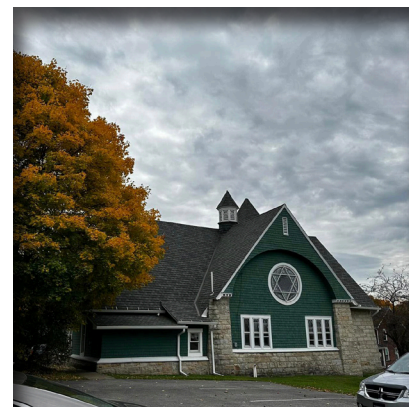
Bishop Paula Schmitt and Pastor Kevin Shock, assistant to the bishop, visited these congregations in recent weeks. Photos are from the Allegheny Synod Facebook page.



First Lutheran in Johnstown. Below, Trinity Lutheran in Somerset.



Laurel Mountain Lutheran. Below, St. Luke's Lutheran, Roaring Spring; Olanta Lutheran; and Grace Lutheran, Curwensville.





At left, The Reformation Wall in Geneva is a long wall with several additional monuments. Above, plain walls and a focus on font and Bible characterize the Preacher's Church (Predigerkirche) in Zurich, Switzerland. The point of attention is the Bible in the Grossmünster, Zurich.

Photos by Pastor Julie Holm

JOURNEY

(Continued from Page 7)

With the availability of printed matter came an emphasis on literacy, and the Reformation in both Germany and Switzerland had included a strong moral imperative toward education and literacy.

Churches in Geneva and Zurich were gutted of their art as iconoclasts followed the concerns that Zwingli and Calvin had about graven images. In many of these churches, even a simple cross is absent, or is not central to the worship space. Instead, I found that the altar, or communion table, was topped simply with an open Bible. Reformed Christianity took us back to the Bible, a Bible in the vernacular (in Zurich this was usually the Zwingli translation into German), which was available, thanks to the education that was becoming more widespread. It was no longer necessary to venerate pictures and sculptures, people had God's own word!

Of course, this had a dark side; the iconoclasts also destroyed a great deal of medieval art in their fervor.

In St. Pierre's in Geneva, this was highlighted with a highly decorative side chapel, the Chapel of the Maccabees. Used as a storage area during the period of iconoclasm, the chapel was not gutted, and an ongoing renovation is revealing amazing pre-reformation art that contrasts with the plain white walls of the sanctuary.

Also in Geneva, I visited the Reformation Wall, an international monument to the Reformation. While it is focused on four of the greats of the Reformed Church (only two of which I would explore on this trip) there were also additional memorials as part of it, including Jan Hus, Luther and Zwingli.

Part of the monumental wall remembers the Pilgrims, with a quote in English from the Mayflower Compact.

Having missed my opportunity to visit the English and Dutch homes of the English Separatists, it was rewarding to connect with the Congregational Forebears of the United Church of Christ at this monument. †

HOME

(Continued from Page 2)

In this season, as we approach some major holidays, we begin to think more about home, don't we?

We invite our friends and relatives to gather around tables full of delicious food and warm hospitality. We decorate to celebrate the seasons and to make it more inviting for those who will visit.

We might even complete a bigger project like painting or remodeling in time for visitors and guests. What makes your home a home? Do you think about your church in that same way?

What would have to happen at your church in order for it to feel like home for you or those who might visit? What is one small change you might make this holiday season to help others feel "at home" when they visit? It might be as simple as putting up a sign or two directing visitors to rest rooms or the sanctuary.

Or, you might consider something more elaborate like a free community meal.

One of the bishops in our meeting said something I've been thinking about quite a bit since our time together.

He noted after several of us talked about our ancestors coming from Germany, Norway and Sweden to settle in this area that the boats from those countries

What would have to happen at your church in order for it to feel like home for you or those who might visit?

are no longer coming with people to fill our pews and we need to find ways to make people who are already in our communities feel as though they are welcome and invited to our "home."

As you prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth during the seasons of Advent and Christmas, I hope you will be reminded of the home you have in Jesus and take the risk to open your church home in a new way so others will be able to experience the same sense of love and belonging you have through Jesus.

That's the best gift you could give to someone — a true welcome home.

Friends, keep the faith; love your neighbors; be kind to each other and share the gift of home with your community.

May you have a blessed Advent and Christmas season and a safe and peaceful New Year.

†

+Bishop Paula



Deacon Alicia Anderson with students during Thursday Evening Worship at Pasquerilla Spiritual Center on the Penn State Campus.

Submitted photo

SEMESTER

(Continued from Page 10)

Fears about the speed at which a new respiratory virus could spread in crowded college housing conditions were very real back then. Sometimes there are masks, but standing far apart from each other is no more. Many activities now seem manageable because of abundant vaccines, available testing, effective treatments and much more knowledge about the illness. We still pray regularly for friends and family members who are sick with COVID-19 and when students have congestion or a cough, they typically reassure the gathered community that they tested negative or are on antibiotics for a sinus infection. COVID-19 is still with us, yet students have developed skills and strategies for managing its effects and dangers.

Through the ups and downs of college life and major events in our world, students are drawn to our community of faith. With Lutheran Campus Ministry, they encounter God and the love and support of Christian community. Together, they explore the teachings of Jesus and find they are relevant to the issues in their daily lives. They are encouraged and challenged, learning and growing together, and discovering how they can live their faith each day. †

DEM 1

(Continued from Page 11)

The first events were literally run from steeple to steeple across the countryside, because the steeples were easy-to-find points in the distance.

The scene in suburban Chicago is a rare one. In most cities, steeples are overshadowed by much taller buildings. That reality may be a testimony to the gods that our society hold most dear, but that is a column for a different time. Even on our territory, in State College, steeples that were visible just a few years ago can no longer be seen among all the high-rises. Even in our smaller towns and rural areas, where they remain the tallest structures, steeples go unnoticed.

It's hard to see a steeple if you're looking at a phone, or if you're focused on the road in front of you, or if you're unable to leave your house, or if the stress of work or family or illness pushes your gaze downward. I believe that there are people who pass by our steeples every day, who are nevertheless seeking a God whom they do not know, or at least the gifts of hope and peace and strength that we know come from God alone. They might pass by because they have never been in a church and don't know what to expect, or because they have

been hurt by the church, or because they are driving to work on Sunday mornings. There are all kinds of reasons — not excuses, but good reasons — why people don't chase steeples anymore or engage with church the way that people used to. Friends, it is far past time for us to stop primarily pointing up and to focus on pointing out.

Being sent out with good news is such an important part of following Jesus that he does it twice in the gospel, according to Luke. In chapter 9, he sends out the 12 to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Just one chapter later he appoints 70 more people to do the same. Jesus may not be able to visit every village in the world, but through his disciples and apostles, his message and his way will get to every village. Jesus knows that every village holds people who long for healing and good news.

I imagine that the cities, towns and villages that we inhabit are not much different than the villages that the 12 and the 70 visited. I also believe that, much like Jesus sent his disciples throughout the regions of Galilee and Samaria, he has planted us throughout the Allegheny Synod to proclaim good news and heal the sicknesses in our communities.

(See DEM 2, Page 22)

“Go to Dubois, to Snyderstown, to Mt. Union and Mundy’s Corner, to Grantsville, to Everett to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Go beyond the walls of your church building to find the ones who need me.”

DEM 2

(Continued from Page 21)

Jesus never said, “If they want me, they know where to find me.” He instead went out, and sent his followers out, to find the people who need good news and healing. Having received his word and teaching, his body and blood, Jesus is saying to us, as he did to his earliest disciples, “Go to Dubois, to Snyderstown, to Mt. Union and Mundy’s Corner, to Grantsville, to Everett to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Go beyond the walls of your church building to find the ones who need me.”

Friends, this isn’t just a plan for the future or a way to keep our congregation going. This is what Jesus called his earliest disciples to do, and it is the ministry he has given us. Something else that Phil Hirsch said in that first session stuck with me.

He is asked all the time about the priorities of the church, and he told us boldly and clearly that the church has only one priority: Jesus Christ. To seek Jesus, to follow him, to proclaim his life and find the ones who long for him is the whole of our life and ministry. “Go,” Jesus said, “to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.” That is his Way, and that is our way as his people.†

BEFORE *you* GO

Preparing for the next chapter

For about a decade of marriage, we didn't think we wanted to have kids.

Then, my brother-in-law decided to excellerate his life by getting married, having a kid (our first nephew) and building a house.

The arrival of the new little guy, Ethan, got us thinking that we didn't want to miss out on being parents, either.

So, Courtney is pregnant — due on May 22.

To make room in our soon-to-be nursery, I had to make some concessions. I just gave away my bumper pool table.

It's the first of some other things that will have to go, to accommodate strollers, play pens and stacks of diapers.

We are about to enter perhaps the most important part of our lives, because we will be responsible for someone else.

That's a lot of pressure, to be sure.

But I feel like it's a good thing that we waited until our mid- to late-thirties to take this on.

I am a lot more level-headed than I was a decade ago. Sure, we are worried as heck: will the baby be healthy? Will there be formula? How will we know how to do this, or that?

Fortunately, the new arrival will have great grandparents for support. We also have been praying — a lot — dating to before Courtney became pregnant.

So, we know God is on our side, too.

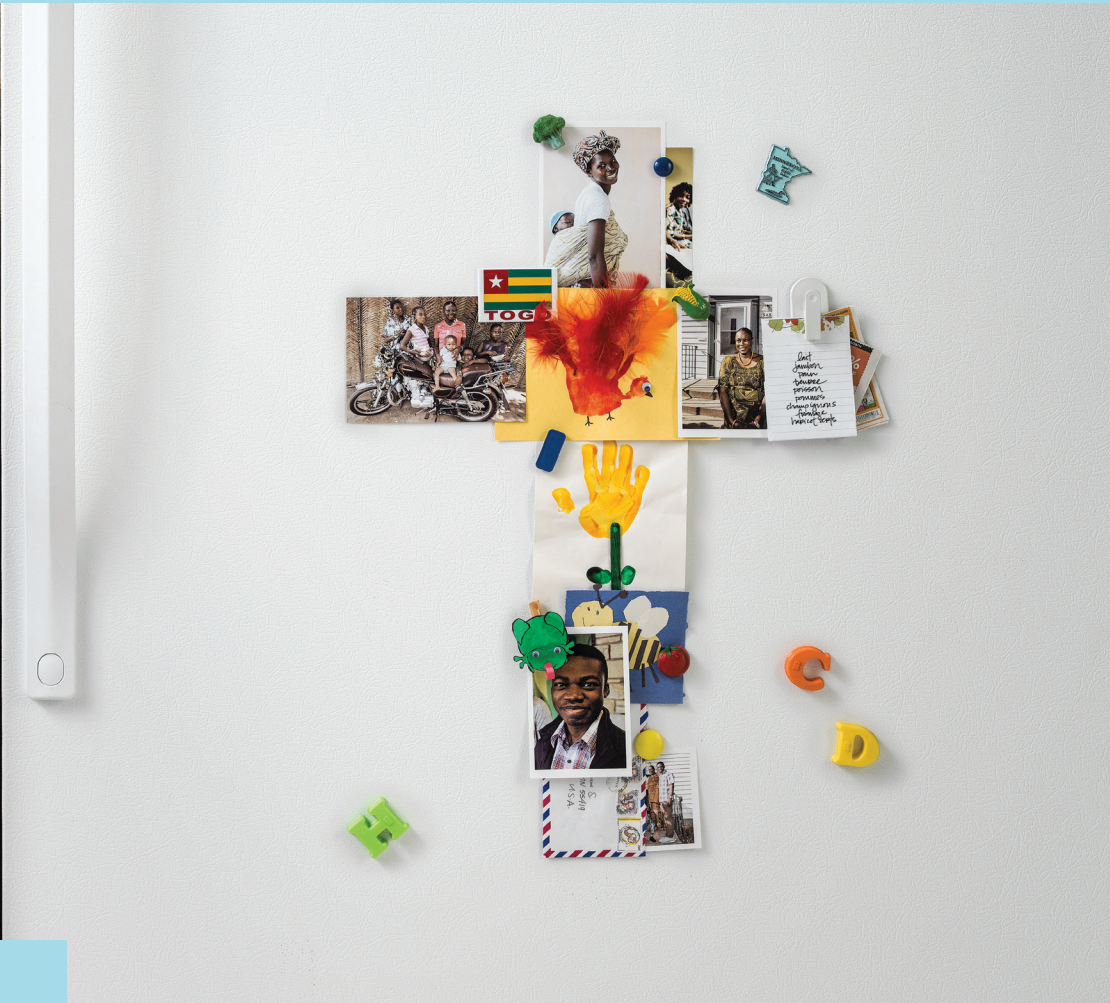
There's a couple more issues of The Lutheran Letter that will come out before the big day.

In the meantime, I have a nursery to build.

See you in the next edition.

— Rick Kazmer

What makes MIF Term Investments notable? Even non-investors see a return.



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