

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

Digital

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Photo by Pastor Julie Holm

Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. **Part 2 of Pastor Julie Holm's travel log is on PAGE 7.** | **Synod Youth take their own journey, PAGE 5.**

Italy, Rome and Assisi

A How-To Guide to Recitals

Organizer Offers Blueprint for Organizing Series at Your Church

By **GEORGE FATTMAN**
First Lutheran, Johnstown

First Lutheran Church in Downtown Johnstown has been scheduling Tuesday noon recitals for more than 30 years.

The programs — 12 a year — are followed by a light lunch. They receive support from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts and from donations by people who attend.

(See **ORGANIZE** Page 4)



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

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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Bishop Paula Schmitt

701 Quail Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602-3010

Phone: 814-942-1042 • Fax: 814-941-9259

www.AlleghenySynod.org •

email: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor Rick Kazmer

Copy Editor Courtney Kazmer

Email: r9remzak@hotmail.com

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Called by God to be one in Christ: we worship, grow in faith and serve all people.

OUR VISION

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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CONTACT US

Newsletter: r9remzak@hotmail.com

Bishop Schmitt: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

Michelle Bossler: Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com

Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock:

kevin.shock@alleghenysynod.com



Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

All Are Welcome

A Message from Bishop Paula Schmitt

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

Last week I was taking a walk with my dog, and on several streets we saw leaves that had already fallen from the trees and I was lamenting a bit the onset of fall — even though it is one of my favorite times of year. As we turned the corner at one of the churches in my neighborhood, their sign read, “Welcome Home Sunday” with a date, and out front there were several yard signs advertising the day, saying “All Are Welcome Here.”

I’ve been thinking about welcome quite a bit the last few weeks. I have been in spaces where the word was used quite often and I could tell it meant something different to the ones who were hearing it than it did to the one who was speaking it. I’ve heard several stories from people who have visited some of our congregations and have not felt welcome. I’ve heard stories of some of our congregations who welcome others with an abundance of grace. The word welcome, I think, has become one of those over-used words that can sometimes lose its meaning over time. We often say the same thing about the word love.

I’ve been thinking about what it means to welcome someone. I know I have been in places where it was clear I was not welcome. I could tell by the way people acted toward me, the things they said and how it felt. Even if someone said I was welcome, the tone of their voice and their body language said something else.

(See BISHOP, Page 16)



Bishop Paula Schmitt

Portage Lutheran Marks 150 Years

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

First Lutheran Church in Portage celebrated a big milestones in August. The church, located at 906 Caldwell Avenue, is 150 years old.

"First Lutheran Church is the first established church in Portage hence the name, First Lutheran Church," Pastor Mark W. Fischer wrote in an email before the celebration.

"We were founded on Aug. 21, 1872, and we will be celebrating our 150th anniversary on Sunday, Aug. 21, 2022, with worship and a meal afterward."

Allegheny Synod Bishop Paula

Schmitt was scheduled to preach during the service.

The synod is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. †

CONGREGATION FAST FACT

First Lutheran Church in Portage was founded on Aug. 21, 1872

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ORGANIZE

(Continued from Page 1)

One day a performer commented, "More churches should do something like this." Indeed, artists like the opportunity to perform.

Many churches sponsor concerts and recitals, but doing them at mid-day on a weekday doesn't seem to be happening elsewhere in the synod.

This paradigm is not for everyone. It works in towns in which people come to work or who live nearby.

So, how does it work? What's special about mid-day?

A good segment of First Lutheran's audience comes from nearby low-income apartments or in vans from nursing homes. They don't have much money to spend on entertainment. They don't have transportation to attend evening programs, often in the suburbs. They like the idea of sharing a meal and interacting with like-minded people.

The rest of the audience comprises people from all over who are attracted to the artists. Some work in the city, but many do not. Attendance ranges from 50 to 95.

The programs are scheduled for April, July and October. They begin in the sanctuary a couple minutes past noon and end by 12:30. Lunch is served afterwards in the social hall.

A basket is there for free-will donations. There is never a charge.

The program depends heavily on volunteers and a tight budget, about \$6,000 a year, about half of which goes to the church for administrative sup-

port, facilities and items like posters, printed programs, tuning, etc.

Marketing includes direct-mail postcards, ads and news releases. Food costs about \$125 a program. Artists receive honoraria ranging from \$85 for one performer to \$325 for a large group. The Tuesday Noon Recital Task Force has 10-12 members. Most are members of the congregation, but others have joined as consultants. The intention is to end this distinction, but to be sure the task force is representative of the community.

The task force sets policy, proposes and schedules artists, applies for funding, greets people as they arrive for the programs, and handles publicity.

Another large group is kitchen volunteers. They plan menus, shop for and prepare food, and set up and clean up. A typical meal is a pasta, salad, a piece of cake and beverages. Leftover food is for sale to the audience.

Of course it is important to have the backing of the church council. Sometimes the series is subsidized by the church's music fund.

The Pennsylvania Council on the Arts sees the recital series as non-denominational, but the church council sees it as a ministry. Arts council funds go only toward the recitals and related expenses.

State funding is based on the quality of the artists, the ability to develop an audience, and effective management.

Questions? Email the task force chair, George Fattman, at efattman@gmail.com. †

Remember in Prayer

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

SEPTEMBER

Week 1:

Providence Lutheran, Bedford

Week 2:

Simpson-Temple United Parish, Altoona

Week 3:

Stonycreek Parish: Grace Lutheran, Stoystown; and Trinity Lutheran, Hooversville

Week 4:

Lilly-Portage Parish: St. Luke Lutheran, Lilly; and First Lutheran, Portage

OCTOBER

Week 1: St. John

Lutheran, Millheim and Salem Lutheran, Aaronsburg

Week 2: New

Centerville Lutheran Parish: St. Paul Lutheran, Barronvale; Samuels Lutheran, Somerset; and Messiah Lutheran, New Centerville

Week 3: Trinity

Lutheran, Altoona

Week 4: Faith

Lutheran, Somerset

Synod Youth Take Summer Trip

Journey Planned Following National Gathering was Canceled

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Youth from the Allegheny Synod went on their own adventure this summer following the cancellation of the National Youth Gathering.

According to Pastor Amanda McCaffery, from St. Luke Lutheran Church in Roaring Spring, 21 kids went on the trip. She helped to organize the journey.

"We had 21 kids attend from around the synod. A couple other churches did their own thing after the National Youth Gathering was canceled, so while the number may seem small, that's partly why," she said in an email describing the trip.

The group left on a Wednesday for Washington, D.C., stopping at the National Cathedral. They visited Helen Keller's burial site and the Martin Luther window.

A trip to the capital wouldn't be complete without seeing the White House.

"(T)he kids continually joked about how much smaller it was compared to what they imagined it would be. We also saw the Washington Monument, World War II Memorial, Reflecting Pool, Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Memorial.

(See TRIP 1, Page 12)

How to Apply for an Arts Grant

(Editor's note: This box accompanies the story that ends on Page 4 about organizing a concert series.)

Guidelines for applying for a grant can be found at https://www.arts.pa.gov/Documents/2022-2023_PCA_PPA_Entry_to_Program_Stream_Guidelines.pdf.

If you are interested in organizing a series, contact Paige Mastrippolito at the Westmoreland Museum of Modern Art, at pmastrippolito@thewestmoreland.org. She can help facilitate the grant process. †

WE *are* LUTHERAN

Brooke Sargen's Faith has Grown at Penn State University

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Nineteen-year-old Brooke Sargen has been a lifelong Christian.

But it was at Penn State, when she found the student Lutheran organization, that she "truly welcomed God" into her life, she said.

Sargen, a member of St. Paul Zeiglers Lutheran Church in Seven Valleys, is part of a family of nine.

Brooke said expanding her faith in college has improved her studies in the medical field.

"Even though time is limited during college, setting aside time to build my relationship with Christ gives me a better headspace for studying. God guides my studies and without him my life would have very little purpose," she said.

While her career path is science related, she said there are opportunities to interject her faith. She has recently been working as a nursing assistant.

"(T)here have been a few patients where we've shared our faith. I love when faith mixes with science because this is something that much of society can struggle with and I struggled with for a while," she said. "I've always been fascinated by science and during my early journey into my faith I struggled to find a balance between



Brooke Sargen

believing the science and relying on my faith."

A challenge for many congregations is attracting younger people to become involved with the church.

(See SARGEN, Page 14)

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412 Allegheny Street, Suite 103

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Sabbatical Report Part 2:

Italy, Rome and Assisi

(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

My journey to Italy started with up-set plans.

I planned to isolate for the Schengen zone at my brother's home outside Hamburg, but changing rules made me miss my flight. Instead, I isolated in an apartment in the outskirts of Rome.

I'd been to Rome before, more focused on the ancient history. This time I was a pilgrim at 15 churches during six days, following Peter and Paul, I visited the Mamartine Prison, Vatican City and the obscure monastery of Tre Fontane, where Paul's final prison cell and martyrdom site are venerated.

I attended Mass at three or four churches. Since I could not understand the language, I put myself in the place of the medieval parishioners, illiterate and unable to understand Latin, and let the art speak to me. Churches in Rome house some of the greatest religious art in Christendom, but most interesting were the frescoes on the wall, telling stories from the Bible and Jesus; connecting these stories,



Photo by Pastor Julie Holm

Porziuncola is a small church with intricate decorations.

emphasizing pieces of them, encapsulating the story of our faith. On feast of the Assumption, I was in a church with both an Assumption altar, replete with votive candles, and a fresco of the Dormition of the Virgin — the pre-assumption depiction of the death of Mary and receipt of her newborn soul by her son in the heavenly realm.

(See JOURNEY 1, Page 8)

JOURNEY 1

(Continued from Page 7)

I visited the catacombs and churches in Trastevere. Most notable were the family connections.

St. Cecelia, originally interred in the Catacomb of Callixtus, belonged to a rich family who donated the ground on which the catacomb was built.

They also owned the house in Trastevere where a community would have congregated when Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire.

Christianity was decriminalized in 313; the family gifted the house to the church, the remains of which are under the current church. It was wonderful to be able to see, and walk through, this early church history: the transition from the small house churches Peter and Paul would have interacted with early neighborhoods, to the great churches built and rebuilt over the centuries since.

Next stop was the home of St. Francis, Assisi. Beloved by both Catholics and Protestants, in the 11th century, Francis was a reformer of the church. Because the old town of Assisi has been preserved, I walked through, and visited the same town and church that Francis Bernardone knew. Staying with a community of nuns at St. Anthony's Guest house, I visited San Damiano, where Francis received his call and Claire's community thrived, the Basilicas associated with both of these saints, and other churches associated with Francis over 3 days. I prayed with Franciscan brothers and other pilgrims at the Basilica, and visited the Santa Maria



Photos by Pastor Julie Holm

Basilica of St. Paul outside the Walls. Below, the Dancing St. Francis statue.



degli Angeli, where Francis' community lived, and the tiny Porziuncola church at the center of that community.

(See JOURNEY 2, Page 9)



Photo by Pastor Julie Holm

Basilica of St. Francis.

JOURNEY 2

(Continued from Page 8)

My next stop was Geneva, but during a 6-hour layover in Milan, I visited the mag-

nificent Duomo in that city. It would be a fitting contrast to the Reformed churches I'd encounter in Switzerland. †

A New Semester for Campus Ministry

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 for the new semester.)

BY DEACON ALICIA ANDERSON

Penn State University Campus Minister

The start of fall semester brings a sudden change to our campus.

Throughout the summer, there are students taking summer classes, participating in research and working on campus, but in much smaller numbers than during the academic year. By the last week of August, returning students and new students are here, getting ready to take on all that a school year holds. First year students will begin to find their way around campus, make new friends and discover just how hard classes at college really are. Returning students will reconnect with roommates and classmates, delve more deeply into their major and settle back into now-familiar places.

Lutheran Campus Ministry's staff and leadership have been spending the summer getting ready for the start of the fall semester. We'll welcome both new students and returning students

at worship on campus Thursday nights and on Sundays at Grace Lutheran. We're planning a discussion series "Our Neighbor's Faith" and a Bible discussion "Greatest Hits of the Bible." There is also interest in regular conversation focused on the news and our faith. We will offer interfaith events, service opportunities, weekly meals and community gatherings. Students will find opportunities to grow in faith, make connections with other students and learn about God and the world (as well as themselves) in the college context and beyond.

Lutheran Student Community and Lutheran Campus Ministry help students remember that God loves them unconditionally, even when they are struggling with classes, friendships or some sort of crisis. We help students notice God's presence in their lives, and learn that God works through us all. We gather students into a community of faith, helping to lay the groundwork for a lifetime of following Jesus as they use their gifts and abilities to serve God and the world around them. Lutheran Campus Ministry works to empower, support, teach, inspire, comfort and mentor students, helping them discover ways to live God's call to love and serve their neighbor in their professional work, relationships, and other activities.

(See SEMESTER, Page 16)

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

This summer my family enjoyed a vacation at the beach with the children and many grand- and great-grandchildren of my grandparents.

It was the first time that many of us had been together since their 70th anniversary celebration in late 2019. Both of my grandparents died during the pandemic of non-COVID-related issues, and this time was a reunion of sorts and celebration of them and our family.

It was good spending time with children who continue to grow both in size and in personality and being able to see how they become more like their parents with each passing year. One of my cousins has a now 8-year-old daughter who acts pretty much



Pastor Kevin Shock

like he did at that age, much to his consternation.

One night he and his wife were telling some humorous stories of things they have to deal with as her parents. They mentioned how she writes them letters when she gets in trouble or has some kind of disagreement with them. Then they remembered that they had one of these letters with them from something that happened right before vacation. People were chuckling, but also pretty impressed at her thoughtfulness in writing. After I read the letter I remarked to her parents that it reminded me of our confession at the beginning of the liturgy.

(See DEM, Page 17)



Assistant to the Bishop & Director of Evangelical Mission Pastor Kevin Shock was installed at Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg on July 24. The photo at left shows Shock with Bishop Paula Schmitt during the installation.



Submitted photos

Synod youth at the Washington Monument.

TRIP 1

(Continued from Page 5)

The trip included a somber visit to the Holocaust Memorial Museum on Thursday, where the group spent a few hours.

"Some of the kids ended up going up to Luther Place for a tour, while some stayed at the Holocaust Museum," McCaffery said.

That evening the group went to The Lutheran Church of the Reformation behind Capitol Hill.

After that, the kids had a break before they went to the evening location, The Lutheran Church of the Reformation behind Capitol Hill.

While dodging some rain, the travelers had time to visit some art museums, taking in Picasso, Jackson Pollock and Magritte.

At the church, they heard a guest speaker from the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Dr. Kristin Witte, who spoke about their ministries, the complications surrounding the immigration process and the challenges people seeking asylum face throughout the world.

Thursday concluded with a metro ride, a first for many of the kids, back to the hotel.

On Friday, the Grace, State College, folks enjoyed a tour of the White House, while the rest of the travelers received a private tour of the National Archives.

"We were shown the outside of the rooms where documents are declassified (no pictures allowed), and we were the second people to receive a copy of a document that had been declassified that day — the first person being the one who requested the item be declassified," McCaffery said.

(See TRIP 2, Page 13)

TRIP 2

(Continued from Page 12)

"We were able to tour the Rotunda where the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights are, before the public arrived, and one of our youth even purchased a copy of the Declaration of Independence for himself. No 'National Treasure' situations on our hands."

After those visits, the travelers went to more museums, including the Smithsonian. The group enjoyed lunch from the city's selection of food trucks, and some of the kids traveled on the metro to the zoo.

After dinner on Friday the group left the capital and went to Caroline Furnace Lutheran Camp & Retreat Center in Fort Valley, Virginia.

The trip changed from city to outdoors activities, including canoes, swimming, hiking and Bible study.

The trip ended on a Sunday morning with worship outdoors.

"The trip was hopefully a memorable one for our kids. The goal was to provide them an experience outside of a setting that they know and to broaden their horizons to a world bigger than the Allegheny Synod," McCaffery said.

"They heard and saw countless stories of persecution and struggle in modern history/curent times — Holocaust, African American hisory, immigration. And at camp we reflected on what we can do to make a difference in a world that is filled with such trauma. We reflected on positive attributes in ourselves and how we could use our own



Submitted photo

The group at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation.

gifts to change the world for the better, even just a little bit at a time." †

" *The goal was to provide them an experience outside of a setting that they know and to broaden their horizons to a world bigger than the Allegheny Synod."*

— Pastor Amanda McCaffery

SARGEN

(Continued from Page 6)

Sargen said technology can help, as well as unique ideas to navigate the "busyness of everyday life."

"A better way to attract young people is making it very accessible, such as the use of technology. Something that works well with the Penn State University organization is providing dinner at the meetings."

Sargen enjoys running, as it provides a time to connect with God.

"When I'm running, I feel alive because I can allow my thoughts to be free and a lot of the time this leads me closer to God and helps to strengthen my faith. It can be difficult in the busy day-to-day life to set aside time to deepen your relationship with God. I've found that running gives me this extra amount of time strengthening my faith," she said. †

FAITH MATTERS

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


BROOKE SARGEN: The majority of what I have been praying for lately has been for a healthy summer and healthy transition back to college. I always pray that God helps me to stay strong in my faith and guides me to follow His bigger plan.

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

BS: My first memory of the Lutheran faith was through participation in the Christmas ceremony on Christmas Eve. All the youth in our church would put on a Christmas play with singing, hand motions and speaking roles.

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

BS: Don't be afraid to question your faith. The best way to grow is to be curious. Churches are the most welcoming place I've attended because as Christians we want to spread the Christian faith and help you to create a relationship with our God.

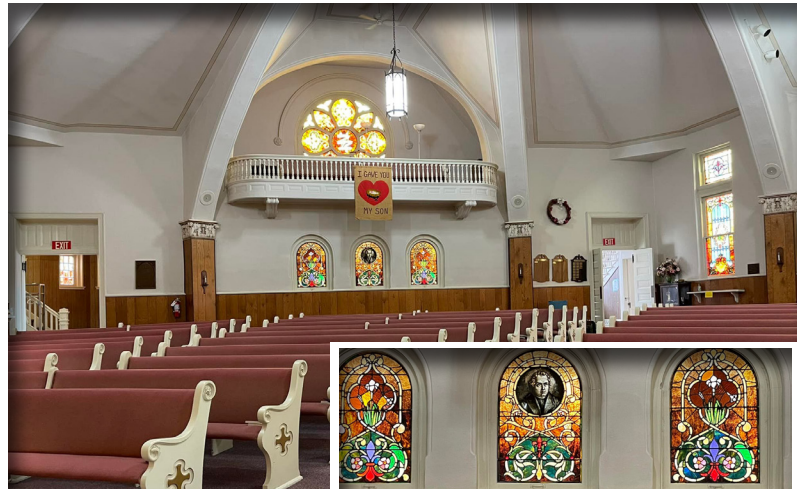


ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

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.



Bishop Paula was honored to preside over the final service at Grace Lutheran Church in Stoystown on July 10. "We give thanks to God for the long, faithful ministry of this congregation that will continue as the members settle into and become part of other congregations using their gifts and skill to build up new ministry," was the message on the synod Facebook page.



Zion Lutheran in Meyersdale



Cassville and Mt. Zion in Huntingdon County



Pastor Dena Gable has completed her term on the ELCA Church Council. She is pictured with Interim Vice President Carlos Peña. Gable serves the Lavansville-Bakersville Parish in the Laurel Highlands Conference and is serving as Conference Dean. The photo was taken during the Churchwide Assembly, held Aug. 8-12 in Columbus, Ohio.

BISHOP

(Continued from Page 2)

I'm sure you've been in places like that, too. It doesn't feel good. All those unspoken cues send a message.

What do we really mean when we say, "All Are Welcome Here"? Do we mean what I believe Jesus intended — that no matter who you are, what you do or don't do, the color of your skin, your gender identity or ability, you will be met with love, grace and mercy instead of judgment? Of course, I hope that's the case, but I also know we're humans. We put conditions on the acceptance of others all the time — and sometimes we don't even know we are doing it! And, sometimes, we do know we're doing it.

As we continue the process of rebuilding in our Synod and continue coming back together, take some time to consider what it means to you to welcome others and how your congregation is practicing welcome. There are small things, like making sure it's clear where the restrooms are located, to larger things, like being intentional about saying hello to someone you don't know that can be

part of how you extend welcome. We live in a world that is hurting and in need of spaces and places where people feel welcome, accepted and as though they belong. Building that sense of community is hard work. It often means we have to put aside our own feelings of being uncomfortable for the sake of the other.

I often remember what my grandparents would tell me, "Just because it's hard doesn't mean you shouldn't do it." Friends, you can do it. You have the love of God in Christ Jesus in you. You were called and claimed through the waters of Baptism and the power and promise of the Holy Spirit lives in you. Reflect the love, grace and mercy you have been shown through Jesus Christ and help others feel like they belong in this one body of Christ we are connected to. Your small effort will make a big difference.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." — (Romans 15:13) †

+Bishop Paula

SEMESTER

(Continued from Page 10)

Please pray for students at college campuses across the country. They will need courage, strength and persistence as they take on academic and personal challenges. Some of them will be far from home and their support network and will need to build new connections for support at school. Pray that they find friends and community that will care for them and guide them well. Pray for all who work with and support students, that they will help students grow and learn and become all that they can become. Pray for student leaders as they work to build a kind and welcoming community that will truly support and care for students, new and returning.

Visit our website or social media to see more about what is happening with Lutheran Campus Ministry this fall! Lutheranpennstate.org.†

DEM

(Continued from Page 11)

She acknowledged what she did wrong, noted — in very St. Paul inspired language — how she sometimes has trouble doing the right thing even when she knows what it is, asked for forgiveness and asserted that she knows God will help her to do the right thing in the future. This letter spoke honestly about her human nature, her need for God and her desire for forgiveness and righteousness in terms that could be understood by anyone reading it. It got me wondering how many people — children or adults — I know who could write or speak something in the same honest and God-seeking way.

We Lutherans do a lot of churchy things well, for sure. One rut that we seem to have gotten into, however, is letting the professionals do faith for us. Think of the people who we expect to pray at church functions or visit people who are ill or lonely or read the Bible and give us some kind of interpretation or teach our children how about God. It's usually the pastor or the deacon or the trusted confirmation teachers. We want to make sure our young people learn the Small Catechism in classes at the church building, when Martin Luther intended that publication to be a resource in the home, so that parents and children could spend time learning about and talking about the faith together. For generations we Lutherans utilized the "drag and drop" model: drag the kids with you to church on Sunday morning and drop them off at church during the week for Confirmation classes. The "drag and drop" model unfortunately resulted in lots of people deciding not to drag themselves out of bed on Sunday morning and dropping out of congregational life altogether. More congregations I see

now are seeking to engage whole families in faith formation, and not just young families either. First Communion, Baptism, Confirmation instruction is all becoming a family affair. It's an acknowledgment that the gift of faith blooms in us brighter and roots itself deeper when we explore it together. It's not just true for children either. It's true for childless families who pray together, for people who talk about the Bible with one another, for those who listen to the hopes and fears of someone else and for anyone who dares to speak some good news about God.

Although my little cousin is smart, that's not the primary reason she was able to articulate her faith in that letter to her parents. She was able to do that because her parents aren't afraid to live out their faith in front of her, to pray with her or read Bible stories to her, to engage her in Christian community, or even to listen to her questions and be honest about whether they can answer them. Sometimes we Lutherans think we have to have all our ideas right before we dare to pray or invite someone to church or visit a neighbor or read the Bible and offer our thoughts on what it says. We don't have to know it all, or even any of it, because the Holy Spirit and our siblings in the faith are there to love us and support us and teach us and even learn from us, as we explore faith together. What do you need to help you live out your faith every day? How can your congregation help you in learning more about God and the faith? These are questions I'm sure your pastor — or your Bishop or her assistant — would be happy to explore with you. Together we make a bolder witness for good news in this world.†

2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Summary of Actions

(Editor's note: This information was taken from the ELCA website.)

The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly met Aug. 8-12 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. Gathering under the theme "Embody the Word," the assembly worshiped together in services of eucharist and lament, experienced a liturgy rooted in Indigenous traditions and heard a public apology in a nonlegislative session to Iglesia Luterana Santa María Peregrina for harm experienced from actions taken by the Sierra Pacific Synod and this church.

The following key actions were taken by the assembly:

- Elected Imran Siddiqui of the Southeastern Synod as vice president of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

- Directed the ELCA Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to reconsider the statements of purpose for each expression of this church, the principles of organizational structure and our shared commitment to dismantle racism, with findings to be reported to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention. Directed an external audit of the governing documents of the ELCA to consider diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility, with find-

ings resulting in recommended changes to the governing documents.

- Authorized revisions to the social statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust; approved exploration of reconsideration of the four stated positions of "bound conscience."

- Encouraged members, congregations and synods of this church to educate themselves about Indigenous peoples, calling on the churchwide organization to work with synods and Indigenous partners to identify sources of funding for ministries for Indigenous peoples, and encouraging restorative justice that could include the return of land to the appropriate Native nations.

- Referred a proposed study of pay gaps for rostered ministers to the Church Council.

- Mandated a review process of the roster manual and policies related to specialized ministries, on leave from call status, and protocols for removal from the rosters; encouraged bishops and synod councils to use sparingly the process of removal from the roster for nondisciplinary reasons.

- Approved the budget proposal for the triennium, including a spending authorization of \$68,814,000 for 2023 for the current fund, along with a spending authorization of \$22,869,000 for ELCA World Hunger.

(See ACTIONS, Page 19)

ACTIONS

(Continued from Page 18)

- Affirmed limits on the use of nondisclosure agreements by the churchwide organization; urged synods, congregations and other ministries to apply the same limits.
- Reaffirmed the commitment of this church to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, directing the churchwide organization to set a goal of a 50% reduction of net greenhouse gas pollution by 2030, with a long-range goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050.
- Called for a review of the nomination and elections processes used by synods and the churchwide organization.
- Responded to memorials on diversity; nuclear weapons; voting rights and Washington, D.C., statehood; strategies for fortifying urban ministries; a Black migrant strategy; the right to boycott; gun violence; LGBTQIA+ welcome; substance abuse; Roe v. Wade; remembrance of Armenian, Assyrian and Greek genocide; parental and medical family leave; a process for pre-identification of nominees for the Office of the Presiding Bishop; revisions to the mission development process; consideration of communion practices related to remote worship; affirmation of the task force created by the Church Council to review the discipline process; and a social message on child abuse and protection.
- Approved or ratified amendments to the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA, most of which were related to general clarifications and updates; inclusive language; synod-authorized ministry; designation of advisory members by the Church Council; boards of the separately incorporated ministries; and election procedures for officers and the Churchwide Assembly.
- Elected members of the Church Council, Committee on Appeals, Committee on Discipline, Nominating Committee and boards of the separately incorporated ministries. †

ENDORSED!

Congratulations to Vicar Allen Stump, who was granted a positive endorsement decision in early August from the Allegheny Synod Candidacy Committee. Endorsement is the second step in the process toward ordination. Allen is serving Christ Casebeer and Laurel Trinity in the Laurel Highlands Conference in the TEEM Program.



Submitted photo

BEFORE *you* GO

Understanding the multiverse

Anyone who follows the Marvel Comics movie franchise has likely been entertained by its recent infatuation with the "multiverse."

Part of the basis for this topic is a theory among physicists that there is an infinite number of universes, filled with different versions of all of us, some very different, some with only slight variations.

It's perfect subject matter for make-believe characters like Dr. Strange.

For us Christians, it looks like a lot of confusion among mostly nonbelievers in an attempt to explain what we already know about God.

We ask God each day to help guide our decisions to avoid bad outcomes. We don't want to end up in one of those many, possible versions of the future where we made a bad investment, wrecked our car or said the wrong thing to a friend or colleague.

Sometimes it's hard to understand where God leads us.

We may pray for a very long time for a new job or opportunity, and when the perfect one comes around — it doesn't work out.

Why would God allow for a "perfect" opportunity to pass us by?

I am not a subscriber to the "multiverse" theory, and I think the Marvel movies are confusing.

But it's true that we face decisions each day that could produce a — perhaps infinite — number of results. Those hot peppers for supper last night likely produced a different result in the morning than if they were not digested.

There are far more severe decisions to be made. Thankfully, we have God providing oversight of our lives. If we listen, and have faith, we know he will lead us to where we need to be at just the right time.

There are an infinite number of reasons why that seemingly perfect job didn't make sense. Perhaps a stretch of road on the new journey to work is very treacherous during the winter. God has insight beyond our understanding. What may seem like a delayed reward may be a gift in disguise.

This isn't an easy part of being faithful, because it requires patience, which is not a part of society very much anymore.

God is at work each moment with knowledge far beyond our vision of things. We need to trust his work in our lives. — *Rick Kazmer, editor*

In addition to paying interest, MIF Term Investments also pay it forward.



Lutheran Church of Christ the Redeemer in Minneapolis, Minnesota

Used an MIF loan to remodel the low-income apartments the church rents to Togolese refugees, thus making their new homes a whole lot homier.

The Mission Investment Fund offers a wide range of investments for individuals and congregations, including fixed- and adjustable-rate Term Investments with a choice of terms. What's more, when you invest with MIF, your investment finances loans to ELCA congregations like Christ the Redeemer. To learn more about our investments and loans, contact us at mif.elca.org or 877.886.3522.



Mission Investment Fund
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