

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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Jolene Grubb Kopriva made waves when she won a surprise election early in her career to become a Blair County judge.

She talks about her career and her faith — **PAGE 10**



Dave Finney

*Finney
Finishing up
Stint as Synod
Secretary*

By RICK KAZMER
Editor

Allegheny Synod Secretary Dave Finney is retiring from the post.
(See **FINNEY**, Page 5)



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) Lebo
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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Inviting people to love one another.

OUR VISION

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Articles for the Letter should be about 300 words or less and include applicable website or contact information.

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CONTACT US

Newsletter: r9remzak@hotmail.com

Bishop Paula Schmitt: Office@AlleghenySynod.com

Michelle Bossler: Michelle.Bossler@AlleghenySynod.com

Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock:

kevin.shock@alleghenysynod.com

Director for Evangelical Mission Sue Ellen Spotts:

SueEllen.Spotts@elca.org



Allegheny Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

New Name, New Office, How to Get Involved

Grace to you and peace!

By now you've probably heard that I have reclaimed my birth name. I am now known as Bishop Paula Lebo. This was a long time coming. When I was finalizing my divorce more than 10 years ago, there was an opportunity to change my name, but for one reason or another, I didn't.



Bishop Paula

I told myself it was fine, but in reality, it wasn't. I was carrying around a weight that I needed to let go. The process to make the change was simple — but it is ongoing. There are so many places that I need to make the change and forms to complete. For a few more weeks I will probably have a dual identity until I catch all the places to make the change.

During the past few weeks, I have been approached by people who have heard about this change and listened to their stories of reclaiming a name or their stories of hesitating for one reason or another like I did. I am grateful for these connections and honored that others would share their stories with me.

In one instance, I listened as someone told me about their pain and how they felt they were carrying around a name that no longer seemed to fit. I was able to remind this person that first and foremost, they are God's beloved child — which is at the heart of their (and our) identity. No matter what name we take or reclaim, we will always be known as God's beloved first — and that's what really matters.

Another change will be coming your way after our Synod Assembly. The Allegheny Synod Office will be moving from our current location along Quail Avenue in Altoona to The Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg.

(See BISHOP 1, Page 16)



Submitted photo

Scene of the Edition

Pastors Rebecca West and Kevin Shock went outside the Synod Office after a meeting on April 8 to “view” the eclipse. These two amateurs didn’t get a crisp picture, but at least Pastor Kevin could find the sun! The eclipse was visible in parts of the country from Texas to the Northeast. Locally, Erie was the best place to view it.

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Remember in Prayer

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

MAY

Week 1: Zion Lutheran, Boalsburg

Week 2: Graef's Lutheran, Cairnbrook

Week 3: Salisbury Parish: Christ Lutheran, Grantsville, Maryland; Evangelical Lutheran, Greenville; St. John, Salisbury

Week 4: Shiloh Lutheran, State College

JUNE

Week 1:

Williamsburg Parish: St. John Lutheran and Zion Lutheran, Williamsburg

Week 2: Grace Lutheran, State College

Week 3: Gloria De Dios, State College

Week 4: Mt. Olivet, Altoona

Assembly Planner Retiring

Jeanne Fleegle Talks About What's Next

By **RICK KAZMER**
Editor

Long-time Allegheny Synod Assembly Committee member Jeanne Fleegle is retiring and leaving the area.

The start of her next chapter marks an end to a long service for God's work in the region, helping to plan lodging, meals, and registration for the important annual Synod gathering. Assembly is a time when faithful and church leaders gather to conduct business and worship.

"Meeting other people who share the same faith as you is also important. Reach out and engage in conversation with someone you don't know," Fleegle said.

Her faith journey started at a young age. Fleegle's family attended a church in Johnstown, but she said she never became involved.

"I felt like an outsider," she said.

When a friend invited her to Moxham Lutheran Church, however, things changed. She became a member at age 14. And she remains a member 64 years later, serving on committees and in other roles.

"As I will be moving out of Pennsylvania, one of my worst days will be attending my last service at Moxham Lutheran," she said. In retirement, Fleegle is moving to Winter Garden, Florida, near family.

She has three children with her husband, Gary, who died in 2018 after 51 years of marriage. Her oldest daughter, LeAnn Stuever, lives in Philadelphia with her husband, Paul. Son, Bob (Gary) Fleegle lives in Winter Garden with his wife, Carissa, and their kids. Daughter Tricia Cooper lives with her husband, Mike, in Maryland with their children.

After years of planning the details for assembly, Fleegle said that some of the seemingly mundane tasks have become her favorites.

"As I have matured (not gotten older) I have found planning events is fun. From making sure the site is booked to making sure the tables are set correctly is something I enjoy. No matter what the event, something is always learned as to what works and what needs to improve. This is what the Assembly Committee does after every assembly when reviewing the evaluations," she said.

Among the biggest challenges is maintaining an affordable cost for the event, so all congregations can participate.

(See FLEEGLE, Page 6)

FINNEY

(Continued from Page 1)

The St. David's Lutheran Church, Davidsville, member has served as secretary since 2012, taking over for Bob Thomas.

He and his wife, Michelle, will celebrate 30 years of marriage this fall. They have a son, Elliott, a recent computer science grad from the University of Pittsburgh, and a pet dog, Bailey, who "guards our house from the mailman," according to Finney.

He provided some details about his time in the role, and what he plans to do next in life.

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What have you enjoyed most about the job?

DAVE FINNEY: I enjoy working with the constitutions and governing documents of the church. After working for 25 years as a rules official with the West Virginia Golf Association and the West Penn Golf Association, I developed an affinity for working with governing documents, rules, and their application to the game. The rules of golf were good training for the provisions bylaws and continuing resolutions of the constitutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

TLL: What has been the biggest challenge (and) what do you see as the biggest challenge to come?

DF: The biggest challenge for the Allegheny Synod is that we are getting smaller and we'll have to adjust. My grandparents used to drive Chevy station wagons and now I drive a small, much-more-fun-to-drive Mazda CX-5. Computers in their early days would fill up an entire room, now they fit in the palm of your hand. There's "getting smaller" and then there's getting smaller, lighter, faster, and more efficient.

TLL: What's the biggest piece of advice you have for the next secretary?

DF: Enjoy the ride while it lasts. Get involved, strive to help communities and congregations in the Synod.

TLL: What has happened in the Synod that you are most proud of during your term?

DF: I tell people that I am proud to have earned "tenure" in the Allegheny Synod. In the past 12 years, I've worked with four vice presidents, five treasurers, three bishops, and one secretary. In some ways, I think I have added some measure of stability and continuity to the Synod, with the comings and goings of so many people.

TLL: What are you planning to do next?

DF: We moved to Johnstown in 2006 to help in the lives of my parents — Pastor Dave and Betty Lou Finney. Dad was the pastor of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran in the Hornerstown section of Johnstown for 32 years and mom was a French teacher in the Westmont Hilltop School District. Our next move is back to West Virginia, where we lived for 20 years prior to moving to Johnstown. We'll be moving to Fairmont, West Virginia, and I'm pretty sure I'll be working at the Pete Dye Golf Club during the summer months and continuing with adjunct teaching during the academic year. I'd also like to get involved with the life of the West Virginia/Western Maryland Synod.

TLL: What's your day job, and are you retiring from that, too?

DF: I was a golf course superintendent for most of my career and spent the past 10 years working at Pitt-Johnstown as the supervisor of campus grounds. I'll be retiring from Pitt on Sept. 3, 2024.

TLL: Anything you'd like to add?

DF: Keep the faith. Keep up the good work of the Synod. Call me if you get stuck. †

“I am looking forward to this new adventure in my life and what the good Lord has in store for me.”

FLEEGLE

(Continued from Page 4)

The committee regularly evaluates location options. The Blair County Convention Center has consistently checked the most boxes.

"Free parking, handicap accessible, and plenty of restrooms are offered. Now that we are using electronic voting, it is important that internet services are available. The convention center can handle over 300 people. Also we have a good rapport with people who work here and that is a big plus," Fleegle said.

To cut costs, morning snacks have been discontinued. Outside food is not allowed to be brought into the convention center. Fleegle said that last year money was donated in memory of someone to buy morning snacks.

"If your congregation would be willing to memorialize or honor someone from your congregation, please let me know," she said.

Among the biggest rewards is working with a great group of people, according

to Fleegle. It's something the next person who steps up to serve will enjoy. Fleegle gave a shout out to Synod Secretary Michelle Bossler, in particular.

Next up for Fleegle is warm weather in Winter Garden. She is moving into a 55-plus community. She plans to go south in August.

Bingo, bus trips, holiday parties, and "Wine on Wednesdays" are on the docket.

"What more could I want?" Fleegle said. "I am looking forward to this new adventure in my life and what the good Lord has in store for me." †

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Pastor Ron Miller and
Dr. John Waters

Summer means **BBQ**

And Other Meal Adventures

By **PASTOR RON MILLER**

Trinity Lutheran Church, State College

As with most congregations, the members of Trinity love to eat. They enjoy soup dinners, covered-dish suppers, and Easter Breakfasts, but most of all, they love barbeque (BBQ) meals.

Meals, of course, often occur around tables — though sometime BBQ means balancing your plate, drink, flatware, and napkin on your lap, all the while striving not to spill your meal, or worse yet, wear it!

Here at Trinity, State College, we once did chicken BBQ.

I inherited those big racks where one can prepare 40-54 halves of chicken at a time. My father taught me the secrets of Chicken BBQ and I have learned more tricks along the way.

(See BBQ, Page 8)

SINGING THE PSALMS OF LIFE

*A Festival of Hymns
with Organist-Director
Michael Burkhardt*

By **THE LUTHERAN LETTER**

Grace Lutheran Church and the State College Chapter of the American Guild of Organists invite the public to a free organ recital by nationally known organist and composer Michael Burkhardt at 7:30 p.m. Friday, June 21, at Grace Lutheran Church, 205 South Garner Street in State College.

The program will focus on the Psalms of life, a festival of hymns that will include songs of exhortation, lament, new life, praise, hope, and confidence from a variety of traditions.

Early English, Genevan Psalter, chorales, African-American Spirituals, carols, folksongs, and other genres will be featured, as well as organ works. For details, email arts@grace.org. †

BBQ

(Continued from Page 7)

Early on, Dr. John Waters, an instructor of anatomy and physiology, helped me and during the years various TLC disciples have helped. Since the COVID pandemic, however, there has been little interest in holding chicken BBQs. So, I pursued other culinary outlets.

Some years ago, I found myself being asked to cater various meals, both at Trinity and in the State College Area. I began learning how to prepare and deliver meals for large groups, 100-150 or more. To satisfy insurance requirements, I secured my ServeSafe certification and I have maintained that certificate. I continue to cook for Trinity and — along with my volunteer crew — have served congregational breakfasts, lunches, and dinners throughout the year.

For Lent and Advent, I prepare and serve at least three different soups and I have developed a large collection of soup recipes. I have learned to prepare various dishes for dinners, and I have a large collection of recipes. Various themed dinners have been served at Trinity during the years and at one point, beer tasting classes were offered, allowing participants to taste six different brews along with both sweet and savory dishes. Currently, dinners are served followed by a showing of an episode of "The Chosen."

If an army travels on its stomach, then Trinity, as the army of God, is well-suited to travel. †

EAT ANYTHING SOLD IN THE MEAT MARKET without raising questions of conscience, for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. I am referring to the other person's conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. — **1 COR. 10:26-31**

Don't Be Afraid to Dream

By **SUE ELLEN SPOTTS**

Director of Evangelical Mission

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams." — Acts 2:17

Let's talk about dreamers ... like Caitlin Clark. Maybe you've heard about her? The news has been filled with stories of her for a while, but especially this past college basketball season as she broke records, closed out her college career, and was the first pick in the WNBA draft.

Not surprisingly, her journey started as a dream. In an interview with Robin Roberts, Clark revealed that when she was in second grade, she wrote her dream of being a basketball player on a slip of paper (which her mother saved). Between second grade and now there was a lot of intentionality. Clark played several sports before focusing on basketball. She created a path where one was not always readily available; sometimes playing in boys leagues if girls teams were not available. When asked why she thinks people can't get enough of watching her, she credits the smile she has on her face and the fire with which she plays.

Recently, at a conference gathering, I admitted that I'm not crazy about the "Director" part of my title, Director for Evangelical Mission. It's not really my role to direct the mission of the congregations in the Synod. I am more of a facilitator, assisting you in living into your ideas



**Director of
Evangelical Mission,
Sue Ellen Spotts**

for how God is calling you. Perhaps, the "D" should be for Dreamer for Evangelical Mission.

To be more accurate, the dreams of mission opportunities in the Synod do not start with me, either. They are conceived in your congregations and communities as each of you listen to God's Word calling you to live out your faith in the world. We, as God's people, have been anointed with the fire of the Spirit. What idea, what dream do you have that puts a smile on your face? How can you live in the Spirit in such a way that people are drawn to you; can't keep from watching to see what's next.

We will be traveling these next months through the season of Pentecost, the season of the Church. I invite you to use this season to open yourselves to the Spirit that has been poured on us. Have visions; dream dreams. Write them down and chart a path, even if you have to be creative in finding the path. Don't be afraid to take a shot at a new idea for mission or ministry. Clark admitted that sometimes she thinks she is closer to the goal than she actually is when she takes the shot. Don't worry if you are too far from the goal or if your idea seems too far out to be practical. Let the fire in you embolden you to try. †

Lifelong Zion Member Won a Judge Seat as a 'Dark Horse' Candidate in 1987

The Result was a Career that Broke Barriers

By **RICK KAZMER**

Editor

Jolene Grubb Kopriva considered herself to be a dark horse candidate for a Blair County judge seat in 1987.

Attorney Bert Leopold had won primary nominations for both parties before dying in July of that year. So, each party could pick a candidate.

Kopriva, 70, a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg, got the call and started running a grassroots campaign.

It was an eight-week race to November. "It opened the door for someone like myself to run for the office since I had no previous political experience. A very unique set of circumstances," she said.

During the shortened campaign season, Kopriva traveled Blair County, meeting with people in church basements, at chicken dinners, and during other functions. When the votes were tallied, the margin of her victory was tight. There were 35,000 votes in total.

"I only won by 700 votes, so it was a very close race. That new experience in the political realm with all the ups and downs certainly tested my physical strength and my

faith. God and I got very close as I had to trust that He would provide for me regardless of the outcome. I have always felt God placed me where He wanted me to use the skills he gave me," Kopriva said.

During her career, she married her husband, Tom.

They have been married for more than four decades and have three grown children and seven grandchildren.

Her law work started with general practice for 10 years at the Evey Routch Black Law Firm.

"Every day was different. I could write a will, go to a preliminary hearing on a criminal case, and then draft a civil complaint and work on a guardianship case all in one day. The next day I could visit an accident site to prepare for a deposition and then do an adoption. It changed every day, which I loved," she said.

She found a particular enjoyment inside the courtroom for jury trials.

She added that she was the first female attorney her firm.

"I appreciated the opportunity they gave me and recognized the chance they took on me.

(See JUDGE 1, Page 12)



Fellowship on the Lanes

A Fun Time for Silly and Serious Bowlers Alike

By THE LUTHERAN LETTER

On April 7, a lively group of members from congregations in the Blair-Huntingdon Conference of the Allegheny Synod gathered for Wacky Bowling at Morrison's Cove Memorial Park Lanes in Martinsburg as a fundraiser for Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State.

Serious and silly bowlers alike had a wonderful time knocking down pins in wacky and more typical bowling styles.

"We are grateful for this support from the Blair-Huntingdon Conference," Deacon Alicia Anderson, Campus Minister with Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State, said. "It was fun to see both youth and adults try-

ing to bowl in some silly ways, like without fingers in the holes or sitting down. Plus, there was plenty of time for a game of regular bowling. Thank you to everyone who joined the fun and raised money for Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State!"

Participants included members and pastors from Bethany Lutheran Church in Altoona, St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Martinsburg, Geesytown-Newry Evangelical Parish in Hollidaysburg, and Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries in Hollidaysburg. Together, they raised \$580 to help Lutheran Campus Ministry build community among Penn State students, and provide opportunities for students to grow in faith through their college years. †

JUDGE 1

(Continued from Page 10)

"My one partner would send me to cover hearings for him. When I returned to report to him on the outcome, he would always pre-empt my report with the question, 'Did they like you?' It took him a while to trust me and my abilities. Eventually he was the partner to second seat me on my first jury trial and gave me support," Kopriva said.

As a solicitor for schools and municipalities, Kopriva said she was often mistaken for a newspaper reporter or stenographer when she substituted for her partner. Correcting people on her role was a misconception Kopriva had to overcome often early in her career.

"When I first met with clients, sometimes they thought I was the secretary for the attorney," she said.

Female attorneys are much more common now. According to Kopriva, 60% of Pennsylvania attorneys are male; 40% female.

"An amazing change in 50 years," she said.

After winning her impromptu race for judge at age 34, Kopriva served as a Common Pleas Court judge in Blair County for 30 years. She was the first female and the longest serving judge in the history of Blair County,

"All by God's good graces," she said.

The bench continued a diversity of work. From 2006-16, Kopriva served as president judge, giving her the opportunity to address "system issues," she said.

"We established a drug court, credit card court, and mortgage foreclosure court,

truancy court, and peer court for juveniles. My work with children youth and families through the county and state, as well as prevention, felt very rewarding," Kopriva added.

Christian roots helped her navigate some of the troubling cases that passed through her courtroom.

She still serves on the bench, working five days a month as a senior judge. This has given her time to enjoy her family, and to help her 99-year-old mother.

She also chairs the Ruth Circle at Zion, among other activities that give back to the community.

In retirement, her goal is to have purpose, relationships, and relevancy.

"One thing I know, God is everywhere. Whether we say His name or sing His praises out loud, He is there. We must live and love in faith and trust," Kopriva said.

When it comes to society, the judge thinks that we need to accept each other's differences.

She provided a pool metaphor on how to deal with differences and disagreements.

"Stay in the deep end of the pool in faith/love and agree to disagree in the shallow end of the pool with those things the devil likes to use to divide us," she said.

"History teaches us a lot and gives me hope. Remember when a Presbyterian would never marry a Methodist or a Catholic could not run for political office? We can change and we will with God's grace and power," she said.

(See JUDGE 2, Page 13)

JUDGE 2

We Are Lutheran

(Continued from Page 12)

THE LUTHERAN LETTER: What's the earliest memory you have of going to a Lutheran Church?

JOLENE GRUBB KOPRIVA: I cherish my early memories of Zion where I have attended since I was 3. I remember feeling bored with long sermons, as does every child, however, I love the memories of the flannel board to tell us Bible stories and taffy pulls in the kitchen, and Wednesday after-school Bible club. Vibrating organ music at Christmas and Easter, and special music. I loved being part of a choir, especially when the kids sang with the adults! The bigger the sound the better. Lasting memories that continue to help me feel part of a community and the sense of something special about a community of faith!

TLL: What would you tell someone considering attending a Lutheran Church?

JGK: Every church has unique characteristics created by the community within and the geographic community without. I would hope the common themes of any Lutheran church would be a sense of welcome to any who enter the church, a message of love, and a life of service. Basically, love, love, love, and listen. Everyone has their own story and it takes time and trust to learn it. Seek to understand before you judge.

TLL: What are you praying for the most lately?

JGK: I find myself praying for my family members and my church family members. We also pray for leadership in the world to develop to guide and direct us into problem-solving and not name calling. Let us all pray to be pencils in the hand of God. †

Mark Your Calendars

**Friday,
June 14**

**Saturday,
June 15**

Allegheny Synod Assembly 2024 will be held Saturday, June 15, at the Blair County Convention Center. The Worship service will be held Friday, June 14, at Zion Lutheran in Hollidaysburg.

MORE DETAILS, [CLICK HERE](#)

ICYMI: SYNOD NEWS

These are some of the churches Bishop Paula Lebo and Assistant to the Bishop Pastor Kevin Shock visited during the past two months, along with some other news of note from around the Synod.



Vicar Ted Williams has been called to serve a special call at Ferguson Township Lutheran Ministries (Gatesburg and Pine Hall). Bishop Paula visited with these congregations in April to conduct the call vote. It's an exciting new phase of ministry for these congregations and for soon-to-be-pastor Ted.



Pastor Kevin Shock and Bishop Paula were at Faith in Somerset to authorize five new lay worship leaders for our Synod. Front row from left: Rick Focht, Christine Frazier, Sally Shaulis, Marsha Hutzell, and Ben Hoffman. Pictured with these new leaders are their mentor/support pastors. We give thanks for the ways the gifts of these leaders will bless our Synod. If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about becoming a lay worship leader, contact the Allegheny Synod Office.

Bishop Paula worshipped with First Lutheran in Portage on Easter morning where a new chalice and ciborium in honor of a beloved member's 90th birthday were dedicated.



Assisting One Another

Thoughts from the Assistant to the Bishop

By **PASTOR KEVIN SHOCK**

Assistant to the Bishop

Let me take you on a quick tour through the town of my early childhood.

My bicycle was my ticket to freedom as a kid, and I would often ride down the hill to the public library where I perused the children's section or went to story hour with Miss Lohr. From there I could ride through the rear parking lot past the back entrance to my doctor's office and across the municipal lot beside my church to the back of the furniture store where my dad and grandfather worked.

There I liked to see what was happening on the loading dock or wander around electronics (with state-of-the-art VCRs and microwaves!) or visit the employees in the office area or ride the freight elevator. I could easily visit my mom at the bank, look at the produce at Battaglia's Market across the



Pastor Kevin Shock

street, look for the latest Hot Wheels at Troutman's department store, or get my hair cut at Rick's, all on the same block.

Rick knew to call my mom when I was convinced I wanted a mohawk at a young age. They came up with a compromise that was probably closer to a mullet. Mr. Mosso at the pharmacy a few doors down also knew that penicillin made me gag.

People all around knew that I was Dave and Debbie's son or Dick and Mary's grandson or Josephine's great-grandson. I saw people I knew at the playgrounds, around the Rogers-McFeely Pool (yes,

I lived in Mr. Rogers' actual neighborhood), and in the grocery store. I also saw lots of people I knew, and people who knew me, at church. One of the things I loved about church was that Pastor McCoid and Pastor Opalinski seemed like they were so big and important in the eyes of a little kid, but they were always kind and attentive and treated me just like they treated anyone else.

Now that I'm 40 years removed from that town and that experience, I confess that I think of it like the "good old days." Community looked different in that place and time than it does in many of our boroughs and cities of the Allegheny Synod today. People constantly saw each other, because goods and services had to be exchanged in person, and many of those goods and services were managed by small business owners and sold or provided by your neighbors.

(See SHOCK, Page 18)

27 All-Star Students Played Big-Band Jazz in Johnstown

By **THE LUTHERAN LETTER**

Jazz musicians from four high schools played together for the first time on April 16 at First Lutheran Church in Johnstown during one of the congregation's popular noon recitals.

The Cambria County All-Star Jazz Band comprises students from Forest Hills, Greater Johnstown, Richland, and Westmont-Hilltop high schools.

Band directors from the four schools put together the program and took turns conducting. They are Eric Pfeil, Joshua Brumbaugh, Mitch Custer, and Jerrod Cannistraci.

The program ranged from Camila Cabello's "Havana" to an arrangement of "Sesame Street." The undertaking took a special effort among four districts.

"Music education, and specifically music education through performance, can strive and grow through the collaboration of local music programs and their all-star members," Pfeil, who had the idea, said.

George Fattman, chair of the recital series, added: "Imagine how much these young performers grow in capability and confidence as a result of a few hours together."

Lunch follows the half-hour recitals.

The students met with the audience after the show.

There is no charge for the program or lunch. The entire series of 12 programs and lunches each year is underwritten by donations. †

BISHOP 1

(Continued from Page 2)

For almost a year, the staff and Synod Council have been engaged in conversation about how best to utilize the space and the resources we have. We did some research on costs, considered how we work, and what our needs are now. The opportunity to be hosted by our partner, Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries, will help us to be better stewards of the resources we have and afford us some different opportunities for meetings and ministry.

We will maintain our same phone number and e-mail addresses. A date has not yet been set for the move. We only know it will be after the Synod Assembly.

The thought of trying to pack up to move and plan the Assembly was too much for us! A Synod Assembly has many moving parts. As we continue to plan for both our worship on June 14 and our business meeting on June 15, I want to encourage you to consider serving in a Synod position. There are vacancies on Synod Council, Consultation Committee, Discipline Committee, Mission Endowment Committee, and to serve as a voting member to the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly being held in July 2025 in Phoenix, Arizona.

This year we also will elect a new Synod Secretary. Secretary David Finney is retiring from this position. We are thankful for the many years he has served in this role and wish him the best as he and his family relocate to West Virginia.

(See BISHOP 2, Page 17)

Go Tell It **IN** The Mountains

By **GREGORY R. PILE**

Bishop Emeritus of the Allegheny Synod

"Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born!"

Quoting a Christmas hymn in the May/June

Lutheran Letter may cause you to wonder if this "old guy" has lost touch with reality. But let me assure you, he has not! Rather, I am writing to update you regarding the Lilly Grant Initiative, titled "Go Tell It IN The Mountains."

(See **TELL**, Page 19)

BISHOP 2

(Continued from Page 16)

If you were able to attend a Spring Conference Meeting, you were given a small booklet that outlined the terms and responsibilities of some of our Synod committees and teams. I hope you will prayerfully consider how your gifts could support the ministry we do together.

As a reminder: Synod worship will be held at 6 p.m. Friday, June 14, at Zion Lutheran in Hollidaysburg. Our business meeting will convene at 8:30 a.m. Saturday, June 15, at the Blair County Convention Center. We will be utilizing the VPoll voting application again this year and are looking forward to welcoming a member of their team to the Assembly. Our theme is "Go Tell It IN The Mountains" — the same as our Lilly Endowment Grant Initiative. The proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ will become a central theme for our Synod in the coming years as the grant is administered.

There will be a presentation at the Synod Assembly in which you will have an opportunity to offer your gifts to support the initiative. Several of our partners also will make presentations about their ministries and how we work together in mission. Visitors are welcome at the Assembly and must register along with voting members by May 15.

A special event is being held before Synod worship at 5 p.m. June 14. We will host a hearing on the draft social statement on civic life and engagement. You can download a copy of the summary draft [HERE](#). Read the summary before you come to the hearing and be prepared to provide feedback that will be included in feedback received from the whole church. If you can't make the hearing, go to the draft statement website and click the link for the feedback survey. Your voice is important as the church continues its discernment about this statement. Once the feedback period closes in September, all the responses will be taken into consideration and a more complete version of the statement will be forwarded to the ELCA Church Council and then to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

If the Churchwide Assembly approves the statement by a two-thirds majority, it will become part of the library of social statements produced by this church to help guide our policy. I hope you will engage in this process and make your voice heard.

Looking forward to seeing you at the Synod Assembly. †

— *Bishop Paula*

As I have been remembering my early childhood, I have been reflecting on the things about my childhood that made me feel healthy and whole, and I am beginning to realize that we have been given a holy gift in being able to reclaim the care of our neighbors.

— *Write's Pastor Shock*

SHOCK

(Continued from Page 15)

This was long before Amazon or smartphones or even ATMs that have impersonalized our commerce and our communities. Today, I know some of my neighbors, but not nearly all of them, and there are few places in the small town in which I now reside where members of the community see each other day in and day out.

When I was young and the adults around me were looking for someone to serve on a board or help with a community event or sponsor the Little League teams, there were all kinds of people they could ask with whom they were already in relationship. It is much more difficult to build relationships today with the way our society has changed, and so it's no wonder that it's more difficult to find people who will be engaged in community life and in the church when we ask.

My goal in sharing all these reflections is not to simply evoke feelings of nostalgia and a longing for the "good old days." I have been thinking about the difficulties the church faces, and I have been thinking about our role in bringing about repair and reconciliation.

Christ has given us a way of living that is about making neighbors and being neighbors and caring for neighbors. The work of mending social fabric is the work that Jesus does, and that Jesus invites his people into. We have been given the will and the way to rebuild community because we have witnessed how our Savior has done that very thing.

As I have been remembering my early childhood, I have been reflecting on the things about my childhood that made me feel healthy and whole, and I am beginning to realize that we have been given a holy gift in being able to reclaim the care of our neighbors. God has given us the ability to assist one another in rebuilding community, not just for the church's survival, but for the well-being of all the people around us. May the Spirit guide us in making decisions that bring healing and restoration to the towns and cities where we live. †

TELL

(Continued from Page 17)

The early spring months of 2023, yes some 15 months ago, found a group of visionary people from the Allegheny, Northwestern Pennsylvania, and Upper Susquehanna synods writing a grant request for funds to support a Compelling Preaching Initiative. The result, announced in the fall of 2023, was the awarding of a grant of \$1,250,000 during five years to fulfill that vision!

The goals of the initiative are:

1. Ordained and lay preachers will be equipped to utilize traditional and non-traditional techniques, including different modes of delivery to develop skills and practices that will make the gospel message more compelling.

2. Aspiring preachers will be recruited and engaged in a variety of compelling preaching strategies that educate, empower, and support competency in their ministry.

3. Existing members of congregations and new community audiences within our three Lutheran partner synods will respond to compelling preaching opportunities and content by integrating the gospel message into their attitudes, actions and ministries in daily life.

A Steering Committee with three people (Bishop Paula Lebo, Pastor Scott Schul, and myself from our Synod) from each of the three synods has been meeting since February to begin the implementation of that grant. Here in the Allegheny Synod, Bishop Paula and her staff have been introducing us to this initiative and its vision using emails and bulletin inserts and in person presentations. The Steering Committee also has a PowerPoint/video presentation ([CLICK HERE TO SEE IT](#)). If you have not yet seen it, go

there and learn more about this three-synod, compelling preaching initiative.

In addition, the Steering Committee, as I write this article in late April, has begun interviewing people for the position of Initiative Director. The present plan is to launch the initiative at the assemblies of the Upper Susquehanna, Northwestern Pennsylvania, and Allegheny synods the weekend of June 14-15. A brief presentation with an additional video/PowerPoint presentation will assist in the launch of this five-year initiative.

Let me be clear, however, there will be no positive results or growth from this initiative, if you and your congregation are going to wait for someone to come to you with a formula for success. No, in order for this initiative to be impactful, you and your congregation will need to be engaged in the several components of this initiative. So ... become engaged in this initiative. Learn more about it and how it can touch your life and impact your congregation by contacting the Allegheny Synod office at office@alleghenysynod.com, or call 814-942-1042 and inform the staff that you want to place your name and email address on the list to receive ongoing updates and next steps of this exciting initiative.

Personally, I have ventured out of retirement to chair the Steering Committee for the Compelling Preaching Initiative because I believe it can assist present preachers, aspiring preachers, and all of us who are listeners in the pews in our work of telling the powerful story of God's gracious love for us and how it can enrich our lives and ministries in 2024 and beyond. Join me. Together we can make a difference IN these Allegheny hills and valleys! †

BEFORE *you* GO

Hello, World!

For the past few months my wife, Courtney, and I have been watching the April calendar closely.

April Fool's Day, April 8 (the day of the rare solar eclipse), and tax day were circled dates. That's because our daughter, Nora Belle, could have been born on any of those dates. Would she be a tax day baby? An eclipse watcher, or a jokester?

It turned out to be the latter.

For various reasons, we knew Nora was going to be induced. It was just a matter of how early. The doctors decided 37 weeks was the right time to bring Nora into the world. That meant April 1 would most likely be her birthday.

I won't get into the nitty-gritty details, but after a fairly long induction, Nora arrived at 9:52 p.m. April 1 with a full head of hair. She'll likely need to have a good sense of humor, given the day. But we are just happy she is here safe and sound. We lost her big brother, John Henry, at 20 weeks in early 2023, so this has been a long and nerve-wracking process.

Now, we have a summer of stroller rides, camping trips, and other outdoor fun planned. There's a lot to learn, but we are ready for the challenge.

A special thanks to the team at UPMC Altoona for the excellent care during our stay. Nora Belle was brought into the world in good hands. And, we even got a steak dinner after she was born. I am sure there will be more stories to share about her in the coming year. Thanks for reading,



Nora Belle Kazmer

— Rick Kazmer