

The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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WEST FINDS DIRECTION



Submitte photos

Vicar Rebecca West, center, is completing seminary as part of a unique program involving her congregation in Rockwood. Pictured from St. Luke's in Rockwood are Randy Berkey, Melissa Kreger, West, Tim Albright and Linda Romesberg. They, along with Ethel Mae Karfelt (not pictured) and others, are helping with the program.

St. Luke's a Partner in Faith for Vicar

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

A 92-member congregation in rural Somerset County is playing a key role in the future of the Lutheran church.

St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Rockwood is part of a seminary program that is helping Vicar Rebecca West complete her studies to become a pastor. It's especially notable this year, as the Allegheny Synod is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the ordination of Elizabeth Platz, the Lutheran Church in America's first female pastor.

(See PARTNERS, Page 14)



Pastor Elizabeth Platz fields questions during a visit to the Synod.

Platz Visits the Synod

BY THE LUTHERAN
LETTER

Pastor Elizabeth Platz, the first female pastor ordained by the Lutheran Church in America on Nov. 21, 1970, visited the Synod on Nov. 17.

(See PLATZ, Page 12)



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

RAGTIME MUSIC

Unique festival in Central
Pennsylvania **INSIDE**

The LUTHERAN Letter

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Please contact the editorial team (above) with
your comments and story ideas. We look
forward to hearing from you.

OUR MISSION

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.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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

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

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Bishop: Think Stewardship in the New Year

Dear Friends,

May God's grace and peace be with you.

I've been thinking about stewardship for the last several weeks. Stewardship is the way we care for that which God has given us, and by this, we care for each other and for God's people.

Several years ago, Forest Hills Church in Charlotte, N.C., produced a YouTube video titled "Christmas Presents." The video opens with a man who wakes up wrapped in Christmas paper. He pulls the wrapping off his face and says, "I'm alive! I'm alive!" As the video continues, the man sees his wife and children giftwrapped and he rejoices for his family. When he enters the kitchen, the light switch and the faucet are giftwrapped and he celebrates having power and clean water. As he gets ready for work, he celebrates having food to eat, a job and a car to drive. The video is a poignant reminder of just how very blessed we are and how many blessings we overlook and take for granted. If you have access to YouTube, I recommend that you watch it.

It reminded me that all that we have and all that we are comes from God. God has blessed us far more than we realize. God has given us life, people to live with, and skills and abilities for our vocations. God is at work on us and in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. God calls us to those vocations for the benefit of his kingdom here on earth. God loves you more than you can imagine.

Stewardship is God's invitation to share the blessing and abundance of his love. When we share our resources with the church and with those in need, we give witness to God's faithfulness. When those resources are combined with the tithes and offerings given by your sisters and brothers in Christ, you get to be part of God's mission and ministry through your congregation. The mission dollars you give to your congregation are tools, which empower ministry here in our synod and around the world. Your gifts and tithes help support new leaders through the candidacy program; support efforts to develop new ministries and revitalize established ones; and contribute to the effort to end hunger and food insecurity through backpack

programs, food banks and community dinners. In your congregation your mission dollars support the pastor(s) and staff. On your behalf, the pastor visits the sick, cares for those in need, works with other congregations to extend the reach of your ministry and works together with you to support the education, outreach and mission to which your congregation is called. Your gifts provide light and heat for the building so the people who come to worship and attend meetings are comfortable and safe.

While ministry requires a financial commitment, that's not the only way it happens. God calls all of us to be part of sharing his love with all people. God has gifted you with skills, abilities and time, which you can use to further the ministry of the church. You do this in many ways. Some of you work with the Sunday School, some with the Altar Guild, some of you help with congregational dinners, some clean up in and around the church, some volunteer with food drives, some sew quilts and blankets. There are many ways God calls us to use our gifts and skills for the sake of the ministry we are called to do together. Have you thought about how you can use your gifts to serve your congregation? Have you thought about how you can increase your giving to your congregation?

You congregation shares a portion of what you donate for the greater work of the synod. The Allegheny Synod would not exist without the support, which you and your congregation share. In November, I sent a letter to our congregations thanking them for the many ways they support the ongoing work of the synod. In the letter I said, "your support allows Pastor Paula, Michelle Bossler our office manager, and me to carry out our calls for the sake of the Allegheny Synod. This work includes walking with congregations, leaders, and members through times of joy and times of challenge; searching for new pastors and deacons to join our Synod; walking with those discerning a call to ministry; connecting with ecumenical sisters and brothers; and all the many and various ways we partner to carry forth the work of the gospel."

(See **BISHOP**, Page 6)

Congregational News

If your congregation hasn't been in The Lutheran Letter in a while, please share some news and events from your church. Email lutheranletter@allegheynsynod.com, or mail the information to: The Allegheny Synod, 701 Quail Ave., Altoona, PA 16602, with contact information. The editor will be in touch for more details. Keep up the good work!

Allegheny Synod Assembly Update

The Allegheny Synod office reports that the first email with information about June's annual assembly will be sent out in early February. Call the synod office at 814-942-1042 for more information.

Information on the Ecumenical Services:

The Allegheny Synod will partner again this year with the Altoona-Johnstown Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Archdiocese, to host two ecumenical prayer services.

- The first service will be held 3 p.m. on Feb. 9 at Grace Lutheran in State College.
- The second service will be held 3 p.m. on Feb. 16 at St. John Gaulbert Cathedral in Johnstown.

All are welcome to join us for these services as we pray with our sisters and brothers of different Christian traditions.

Pastors are invited and welcome to vest and process. The color for the day is green.

News of note From the BISHOP'S DESK



The Allegheny Synod 40,000 Can Challenge

Advent to Super Bowl Sunday December 1 to February 2

It's time to gather food items for your local food banks, agencies, and organizations which care for people in your community. Let us know in the Synod office by email (office@allegheynsynod.com) or by calling the office (814-942-1042) your weekly totals. This is a great testament to the wonderful work we have done together as the Allegheny Synod.

Please join The Allegheny Synod Staff in welcoming
Interim DEM, Pastor Becca Ehrlich



Pastor Becca will begin her duties on January 2, 2020 and complete her term on August 31, 2020. She will work on the Synod's stewardship, mission, and evangelism.

We are excited to have Pastor Becca and look forward to how she will bless our Synod

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If you would like to support the *Lutheran Letter* as a patron or make a donation, please complete this form and return it to:

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IN HONOR OF: Sequanota Conference Center & Camp by Revs. Bob & Eleanor Abarno • Camp Sequanota Staff by Caryl Swanson

IN MEMORY OF: Gretchen Rummel by Karl, Matt, Karen & Grandchildren • Jeff McCready by Mary Jane McCready • Pastor Chris Ramsey by Cherie & Larry Shannon • Scott Balsley by Jo Balsley • The Rev. Robert G. Whisler • W. Clair & Aletta S. Calvert by James A. Calvert • Charles Yingling by wife Mona Yingling

Mount Union has a Growing Ragtime Tradition

Congregation Regularly Hosts Top-Tier Talent During Musical Festival

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

A small Allegheny Synod congregation is a big deal for lovers of ragtime music.

St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Mount Union celebrated ragtime music for three days in September as part of the Central Pennsylvania Ragtime & American Music Festival, which attracts talented musicians and passionate enthusiasts.

"The service and performances were a wonderful experience," Steve Katcher, who helped to organize the event, said.

"For many fans of ragtime and American music, traveling to little Orbisonia and Mount Union for the festival is a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

Katcher said that similar festivals elsewhere in the country are sometimes held in ballrooms where the musicians are separated from the crowd.

"Here, everyone is accessible to meet and chat," he said.

The musicians are a talented lot.

Orbisonia resident David C. Brightbill has been the organist for St. Luke for about 27 years. He loves ragtime because of the era it came from — the 1880s through World War I.

He said he mostly plays sacred numbers in public, but enjoys the opportunity to perform ragtime in public during the festival, especially with other talented musicians.

"These performers come great distances to be part of this annual event. There are several from California, Texas and Colorado. Local cities are represented as well, such as Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Baltimore," he said. "These performers are all what I would term professional and are among the very best in their field. Several have been on stage in Carnegie Hall."

Brightbill said St. Luke and Orbisonia Pres-



Submitted photo

Performers are, in the front row, festival director David Brightbill, special guest artist Ed Clute and pianist Bryan Wright. In the back row are, pianists Adam Swanson, Daniel Souvigny and Brian Holland, drummer Danny Coots, pianist Richard Dowling, Lutheran lay leader Steven Katcher, singer Joyce Richardson and pianist Frederick Hodges.

byterian Church have welcomed the group of performers and their fans. But not all churches like the music.

"We are not welcome in some of the local churches due to the style of music that is shared. At one time this was referred to as the devil's music oftentimes found in the bar rooms and speakeasies of the era long ago."

But Brightbill said the music can provide a good worship opportunity. He is trying to combine worship music and ragtime on Sunday mornings into a form he is calling "Sacred Ragtime."

"After all what better way to share Christ's story than to join together in worship and song?" he said.

"Performers (during service) are permitted to play whatever they enjoy with a sacred twist usually. Piano, organ and drum are featured on the hymns and the entire service is oriented around music."

It's part of St. Luke's strong musical tradition. The festival is a growing part of it.

"It's an intimate, private series of concerts. Ragtime is a classic but often overlooked musical genre. There is nothing like it!" Katcher said. †

Youth Make it Their Own in State College

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

Allegheny Synod youth gathered for a weekend of fellowship on Nov. 22 at Grace Lutheran Church in State College.

"It was a wonderful evening service for our second day of the Allegheny Synod Youth Gathering," was one message on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page midway through the event.

Youth worshiped, danced and joined in fellowship during the event.

The theme was "Making it Mine" based on Galatians 2:20. †



Submitted photos



Worship and music were part of the weekend for youth in late November in State College.

Synod Youth on Parade



Submitted photos

Congratulations to Trinity Lutheran in Juniata. The float the youth created won second place in the Hollidaysburg Winterfest parade. "Great job everyone!" was the message on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page on Nov. 25.



Thanksgiving Day parade viewers may have spotted some Allegheny Synod youth among the passing floats. Noah Fry, a member of Holy Trinity in Lanser (at left in top photo) was in the lineup. Those watching the Dunkin' Donuts Thanksgiving Day Parade might have spotted Gavin Miller — pictured with his brother Landon — of Moxham Lutheran, Johnstown (bottom left photo). "Way to go, boys!" was posted on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page.



Special Wheelchair Transport Program Growing in Bedford

The Wheels Away wheelchair van ministry provides free transportation for wheelchair-bound individuals from Bedford and surrounding counties. In 1994, it all started with a well-worn van and has since grown to a fleet of three vans.

The ministry's vision since the beginning has been to help individuals in wheelchairs get to medical appointments, family functions, funerals, shopping trips, to go to church and more. Wheels Away continues to see an increase in utilization. Usage more than doubled from 2018.

The vans were used 432 times in 2019. Wheels Away was spearheaded by John Beamer and has grown to include Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries and Love INC.

The vans were utilized last year by a family where a father and son were involved in a motorcycle accident that required each of them to complete months of physical therapy. The father was unable to be transported to his appointments in his vehicle due to being wheelchair bound.

The family reached out to Wheels Away to assist them in getting to therapy.

The father and son are now on their way to recovery and the father can now ride in his own vehicle. He is extremely thankful that he was able to use the vans.

If you have any questions about Wheels Away, contact Andrea Schurr at 814-696-4516, or at andrea.schurr@alasm.org. †



Submitted photo
Pictured are Bev Patten, executive director of Love INC; John Beamer; and Pat Savage, president of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries.

Bishop

(Continued from Page 1)

Not only does your support help to continue the ministry in our synod, the mission support dollars from congregations allow us to support our ministry partners. Through you we support our partner ministries at Camp Sequanota, the Lutheran Campus Ministry at Penn State, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, United Lutheran Seminary and Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries. I am thankful for you for the ways you support your congregation, our Synod and the mission and ministry of the ELCA.

We are happy to announce Pastor Becca Ehrlich will be joining the synod office staff in January. Pastor Becca will be serving as interim director for evangelical mission and as an assistant to the bishop. This call is in partnership with the ELCA, which is funding a majority of this position. Stewardship, outreach and mission will be the main focus of Pastor Becca's call.

She most recently served as associate director of admissions at United Lutheran Seminary. Prior to accepting that call, she served parishes in Frewsburg and Clarence Center, N.Y., which are in the Upstate New York Synod. Prior to ordination, she spent 12 years working in youth, young adults and family ministry in inner city Philadelphia and suburban Pennsylvania.

Pastor Becca has served on the Upstate New York Synod Candidacy Committee, the council, the Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center (an outdoor ministry of the ELCA) board of directors and now serves on the ELCA Spiritual Renewal Team.

She is a graduate of Muhlenberg College. She has a master's degree in theology from La Salle University in Philadelphia, and a master's of divinity from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. She is working on her doctorate of ministry at United Lutheran Seminary.

Pastor Becca has been married to her hus-

band, Will Platnick, for over seven years. Will serves in technology ministry as the principal site reliability engineer for the YouVersion Bible app — the most popular free Bible app for smartphones.

We are very happy to welcome Pastor Becca to ministry among us in the Allegheny Synod. She will begin on Jan. 2, but already has begun setting appointments with congregations to meet with pastors, councils and stewardship teams across the synod. She wants to be a resource to help your congregation with tools, skills and programs that will foster good stewardship in the church. If you would like Pastor Becca to come and meet with your congregation, please contact her at the synod office.

I thank you for the way you bless your congregation with your gifts and skills.

May God bless you and keep you now and always,

+Bp Michael Rhyne †

Remember in Prayer

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

JANUARY

Week 1: Ferguson Township Lutheran Ministry: Pine Hall Lutheran and Gatesburg Lutheran, State College

Week 2: St. John Lutheran Church, Sinking Valley

Week 3: St. James Lutheran Church, Huntingdon

Week 4: Boswell-Benscreek Parish: St. Andrew, Boswell and Benscreek

FEBRUARY

Week 1: Trinity Lutheran, State College

Week 2: Christ Trinity Parish: Christ Casebeer, Somerset, and Laurel Trinity, Jennerstown

Week 3: St. James, Altoona

Week 4: Mt. Calvary Lutheran, Johnstown



Submitted photo
Patricia Savage is president of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries, a nonprofit serving families in eight counties.

Patricia (Pat) Savage-Johnson is the president of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries. She has held the post for 23 years. She agreed to share a little insight into her job and life with readers.

5 QUESTIONS With Patricia Savage

1. What's the biggest impact you have noticed recently?

Developing independent living for citizens with supportive services so they can "age in place."

2. What do you like most about western and central Pennsylvania?

The kindness and compassion for people demonstrated daily.

3. What Bible verse gets you through a rough day?

This is a hard question. I enjoy reading and studying the Bible, but on a rough day what comes to mind is the great old hymns I grew up with and heard my mother sing, for example, "Beautiful Savior" and "It is Well with My Soul." Horatio Spafford composed the beautiful lyrics of the latter under circumstances so awful I can hardly imagine his anguish. I am always inspired.

4. What's the most rewarding part of your job?

My ministry in daily life — meeting the human-service and health-care needs of people in our care.

5. Any hobbies?

Traveling, crocheting, reading. †

AN ABIDING PRESENCE

Passavant Founded Churches, Hospitals and a College

(Editor's note: This is part of an ongoing feature about the people represented on stained-glass windows in the Church of the Abiding Presence at Gettysburg Seminary. The information for this feature was collected from the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic and from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod.)

A Zelienople native who helped form Lutheran congregations and synods has earned a place among great Lutherans of the past at the Church of the Abiding Presence at Gettysburg Seminary.

William Alfred Passavant, born in 1821, was a zealous missionary and a pioneer in social services, according to information collected by the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic.

He even founded a college — Thiel College in Greenville.

He worked mostly in Western Pennsylvania, where the society reports that he cared greatly for the poor and suffering.

His work stretched into neighboring states to the west and east.

His passion for helping the poor was boosted by a visit to deaconess institutions in Germany in 1846.

He was able to establish hos-



William Alfred Passavant, at the top of the photo, founded Thiel College in Greenville.

pitals and orphanages with scant resources.

The society reports that the work started in Zelienople and extended to Chicago and Milwaukee to the west and to Mount Vernon, New York, to the east.

He had publications, *The Mis-*

sionary and *The Workman*, which were influential.

Passavant was a pastor of First English Lutheran Church in Pittsburgh, according to the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod's records.

He also served Christ Lutheran Church in Baden for 21 years. The synod emphasizes that he was a "one-man mission director, founder of congregations and institution builder who devoted his life extensively to the founding and administration of social service and health agencies."

His work is the inspiration for the missionary zeal of the "Pittsburgh Synod," the report states.

He founded 18 congregations in addition to Thiel College and introduced the deaconess movement to America.

His institutions and services are still active.

The society, perhaps describes his impact best.

"To sum it up, by his zeal, by his ability to inspire people, by his vision of Christian service to the needy ones, by his confidence in the Lord's guidance and support, Passavant became the pioneer leader and builder in the continuing-to-this-day strong tradition of Lutheran Social Services."

He died in 1894. †

Staff photo by Courtney Kazmer

Betz Following Call He Heard in the Laurel Mountains

Name: Brent Betz

Age: 50

Hometown/congregation: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Windber

Family: Wife, Phyllis, and daughter, Danielle

Seminary program: Master of Divinity Program at United Lutheran Seminary the Gettysburg Campus

Expected graduation: 2023



HEEDING THE CALL

This is part of a series of features highlighting seminarians and their journey.

I think my background will help me as a pastor in that I have much experience dealing with people, and especially children.

TLL: What are you most looking forward to as a seminarian? What are you a little nervous about?

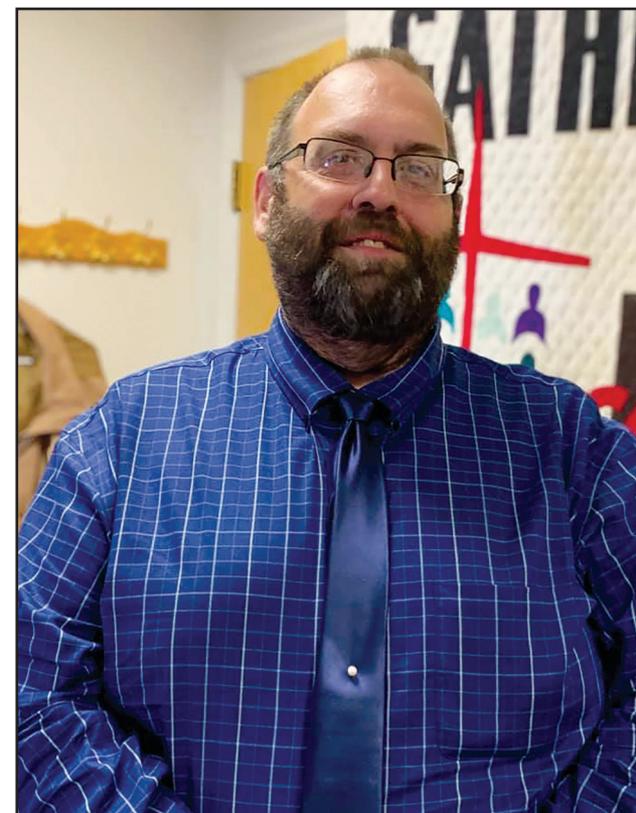
BB: I'm looking forward to the new and interesting things that I will be experiencing and learning as a seminarian. I'm a little nervous about going back to school since it has been over 25 years since I was last a student.

TLL: Do you eventually want to be called in the Allegheny Synod, or are you open to any assignment?

BB: I would like to be called to the Allegheny Synod, but I am truly open to go wherever God's call takes me to.

TLL: What's your favorite hobby and why?

BB: My favorite hobby is fishing. I enjoy it because it gives me a chance to spend time with my wife and enjoy the beautiful outdoors



Brent Betz

of God's creation in Pennsylvania.

TLL: What's your favorite Bible verse and why?

BB: This has always been one of my favorite Bible verses I think because it shows just how thankful we are to have God in our lives.

Psalm 100:1-5 - A Psalm of thanksgiving.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever. †

TLL: Is this a second career for you?

BB: Yes, this is a second career for me. I have my undergrad degree in elementary education and have spent time working as a teacher (substituting) and for the last 18 years have worked as a therapeutic staff support. In doing this I worked with children ages 4 -21 with emotional or behavioral health problems and also worked with children on the autism spectrum.

Update on Bishop Election Task Force

(Editor's note: The following was edited from a letter from Casey Colledge, chairperson of the Bishop Transition Task Force, to Allegheny Synod congregational councils. The task force is helping to facilitate the election process of the new bishop in 2020.)

The Allegheny Synod Council has called for a Bishop Transition Task Force to be appointed to oversee the election of a new bishop and the transition period from the election in June to Sept. 1, 2020, when the newly called bishop assumes his/her duties.

Bishop Michael Rhyne has decided not to run for re-election after more than five years of service.

The synod constitution is very clear about the election process, which calls for the election to be conducted by "Ecclesiastical Bal-

lot."

The task force will be making recommendations to the council at the January council meeting for the procedures for electing a bishop in June.

You will hear about this balloting process in more detail in the coming months.

We will continue to be led by Bishop Rhyne's faithful service during the transition. The task force is fortunate to have an outstanding group of people who have agreed to serve on this team to help us prepare for the process ahead. The task force has created a survey that was sent to church councils to obtain more feedback on the process.

Ask your council members, pastors and other leaders for more information on that survey, or call the synod office at 814-942-1042 for more information on it.

The feedback will help keep the task force focused on the important topics that the synod sees as priorities to focus on for the next six years. The survey deadline is Jan. 31.

The task force will develop rules of procedure for election at the annual Allegheny Synod Assembly in June.

Information will be available and disseminated at the Spring Caucus Meetings, which will include rostered leaders and congregational voting members.

These meetings will have time for prayer, discussion of how the Ecclesiastical Ballot is conducted, sharing of the existing synod and bishop profiles, and encouragement for further conversation and discussion.

The election will take place at assembly on June 5-6 at the Blair County Convention Center in Altoona. †

Around the Synod with Bishop Rhyne



Submitted photos

Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church in Johnstown is celebrating 75 years. Bishop Michael Rhyne was on hand for a special celebration in December. "Thank you to all who made this wonderful celebration both Saturday evening and Sunday morning possible. Thank you Mt. Calvary for sharing some of these pictures," he wrote on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page on Dec. 8.



"It was a little snowy coming up the mountain, but a beautiful worship service at Mt. Zion in Glasgow, PA for the third Sunday of Advent. Thank you Pastor Chuck Swenson and all our friends at Mt. Zion for the warm welcome and wonderful morning," that was the message on Facebook Dec. 15 from Bishop Rhyne (far left) after a visit to the congregation in Glasgow.

First Lutheran Rededicates Historic Chimes

BY THE LUTHERAN LETTER

First Lutheran Church in Johnstown in November rededicated their approximate 100-year-old bells, which have been refurbished. The 11 bells were installed in the early 1920s.

The congregation celebrated with a reception following the rededication. A men's quartet performed during the rededication ceremony. Handbells were also part of the event. The Community Foundation for the Alleghenies provided a \$1,000 grant that supported the project.

First Lutheran Church was organized in 1832. The first building was dedicated on Ascension Day in 1834, according to the church website.

The present edifice was erected in 1922 after a disastrous fire destroyed the previous building.

The present structure sustained damage in the floods of 1936 and 1977.

The majestic Skinner 3,000-pipe organ was rededicated in 2013 after extensive renovation. First Lutheran played major roles in the creation of Camp Sequanota in 1947 and the Allegheny Lutheran Home in 1949, according to the historic report.

As part of the rededication celebration, Fawn Slonka made a cake showing some of the bells and the original mechanism used to ring them. Rob Abele conceived and oversaw the chime restoration. Anne Fattman was the lector during the rededication service.

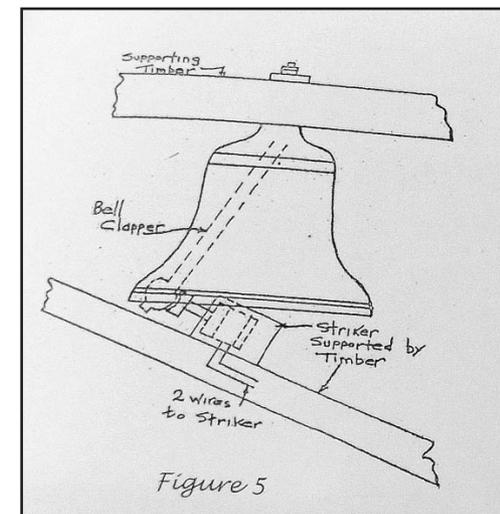
The bell rededication was covered by WATM-TV. †

At immediate right, Vicki Price, chairwoman of the rededication, holds a brochure about the tower chime, which she produced. Fawn Slonka (not pictured) also made a cake showing some of the bells and the original mechanism used to ring them. At far right is part of a brochure that was produced for the occasion, which shows a drawing of the bell-striking mechanism.



At left, at a reception following the rededication: Dorothy Anderson, William Hargreaves, Anne Fattman and Katrina Perkosky, development and services officer of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies. Bottom left, Vic Kohler looks at a tower chime display case. The massive bell and support beam are shown. At bottom right, Some of the electrical switches that relay notes played on a keyboard to the huge chime (11 bells) in the church tower.

Submitted photos



Celebrating 175 in Bellefonte



St. John Lutheran Church in Bellefonte recently celebrated the church's 175th anniversary. St. John was founded Oct. 25, 1844. "Thanking God for these years of faithful ministry," was the message on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page. The sanctuary is pictured at left.

Submitted photo

Platz

(Continued from Page 1)

The Lutheran Letter is joining the Allegheny Synod to celebrate Platz's accomplishment, and what it has meant for all the women who followed her in pastorhood, in the coming year.

During her visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Duncansville, Platz helped with service and fielded questions from the crowd.

Platz's career largely included work in campus ministry at the University of Maryland Campus, College Park. She is still at work at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Silver Spring, Maryland. When interviewed by phone before her visit, she had a clear message for women pastors.

"Act like you belong," she said. †

Girl Scouts Make Crismons



Girl Scout Troop 40060 was busy leading up to the holidays. They made new crismons for the Christmas tree at Salem Lutheran in Aaronsburg. "Thanks for all that you do for us here at the church as well as all the great things you are doing in the community!" the information was posted on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page on Nov. 19.

Submitted photo

Home & Garden

Journals Provide an Inspiration, and also a

LINK TO THE PAST

BY COURTNEY KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Home & Garden Editor

My grandma is an extraordinary woman.

Not only is she 102 years old, she is also smart, talented, beautiful and a devout follower of Christ.

I am blessed because I have a set of journals that she wrote from the early 1960s through the 1980s. They pick up again in the early 2000s.

They are written on any notepads that she could find. They are brittle and yellowed from their age.

They are a link to the past.

On the pages she logged a daily entry describing both the mundane and the serious events.

The weather, cleaning the big old farmhouse, canning — and dealing with frozen pipes — are part of life in Allegheny Township, Somerset County, decades ago.

She also highlights her love of embroidery

and sewing. Many of her creations are still around, some of them in my house.

She was also involved in a club called The Homemakers. Her and a few other ladies would meet at one of their homes and work on special projects.

I like to page through each journal and imagine my grandma at the end of the day making her entry on the pages of the notepads.

I know that on Jan. 4, 1965, my grandma took her Christmas tree down and that the weather was mild.

On Christmas Day in 1983 she wrote that the water pipes froze. On the very next day they thawed, before disaster struck.

I can also see who came to visit and imagine some of the faces in my mind.

Many of them have since passed away.

The words have inspired me to start my own set of journals. On Jan. 1 I started documenting the same things my grandma noticed when she was at home.

Staff photo by Courtney Kazmer
These are some of the journals, aged and yellow now, that contain my grandma's notes from the past.

The weather and other seemingly ordinary daily occurrences will hopefully be pieced together by someone in the future to tell the story of life in Somerset Borough when I was a young woman.

Perhaps someday they will bring someone as much joy as my grandma's journals have done for me.

When I feel sad, a quick trip back to Oct. 18, 1976, on the farm usually helps. I can go back to the kitchen where she is churning butter, or out in the garden where endless weeding needs to be done.

Maybe she will be baking bread or pies during a cold spell. It is like traveling back in time. It always cheers me up.

These journals are priceless to me, a precious heirloom that I will always cherish. †

Partners

(Continued from Page 1)

West and St. Luke's are part of the chain, carrying Platz's legacy into the new decade.

"It's been a joy to build relationships and share in ministry at St. Luke's," West said of the congregation, which has a weekly worship attendance of 35.

Here's how the program works.

It's a three-way partnership between the synod, congregation and United Lutheran Seminary in Gettysburg. It allows students to complete their master's of divinity program in three years. The congregation provides financial help — \$24,000 a year to cover tuition and some housing and living expenses. The student works 20 hours per week at the congregation, creating an integrated learning experience.

"They become partners in ministry with raising up pastors in the church," West said.

The Rev. Allison deForest is the director of the program at the seminary. She said that it allows students to complete seminary one year early, completing ministerial fieldwork and an internship in the process.

"The strengths of this program are that it reduces the number of academic years that the students need for theological education and it can reduce the number of times the student has to relocate since they do not move to campus and then away again for a traditional internship," deForest said in a written statement.

"I believe that our co-op students are very well prepared

for parish work as soon as they graduate."

In Rockwood, the congregation is glad to be raising up one of their own. Rebecca West and her husband, Jim West, both serve at St. Luke's.

Church council secretary Marsha Hutzell said that women have a unique perspective to bring to the table.

"I personally think that women have a unique experience in the world that is a great benefit to the church and ministry. ... I just find Vicar West a joy so it is maybe who she is as a person, more so than her gender, that I am thankful for."

As a teacher by trade, Hutzell said she finds it rewarding to help people achieve their goals. Watching Rebecca West fulfill a dream is such a case.

"Vicar is so excited about her learning that it breathes new life into the congregation and those around her as she shares what she learns with us," Hutzell said.

Rebecca West is set to graduate in May and to be ordained in June. Perhaps no one can attest to the rewards and challenges of the journey better than her husband. The couple has been working as a team at St. Luke's.

Pastor Jim West noted the significance of the 50th anniversary of Platz's ordination on Nov. 21, 1970. Rebecca West's ordination in the summer will be another link in the chain created that day.

"There are many St. Luke's members who will share my joy on the night of her ordination," he said.

Pastor Susan Winger has also been an asset along the way. She has served as Rebecca West's off-site supervisor, meeting monthly to review progress and to provide advice.

"Guided by the Holy Spirit, Rebecca has grown in confidence and developed a sure sense of her call to public leadership," Winger said. "Each sermon preached, each class taught, each worship led, each visit made have helped her discern God's call."

Winger takes particular enjoyment in helping another woman answer the call from God. She noted the women of the past.

"My sisters of the past who paved the way to this year are remarkable witnesses," she said. "We are a better church because they dared to be first. To name her (Rebecca West) as my colleague, and to have Rebecca added to that cloud of faithful witnesses is a gift to me and to the church as a whole."

Assistant to the bishop, Pastor Paula Schmitt, said the program also serves as a proving ground, allowing students to try new things and assess the receptivity of the congregation as well as to change, hone and improve upon ideas.

"Our office consistently looks for congregations that might be open to this program as well as benefit from having a student learner in their midst," she said.

In a way it's fitting that Rockwood, a railroad town, is helping to move the faith forward.

It's also proof that small-town congregations can make a big

difference.

"They have nurtured and challenged me through this time of spiritual, theological and personal growth, and my time with them has strengthened my call to Word and Sacrament ministry," Rebecca West said. †

The Accelerated Pathway

The Accelerated Master's of Divinity Cooperative Pathway for outstanding Evangelical Lutheran Church in America students is an innovative partnership between the seminary, congregations and synods that enables the student to complete both the master's program and candidacy in three years.

Co-op students complete their ministerial fieldwork and ministerial immersions by working about 20 hours per week at a single congregation identified by their bishop and candidacy committee.

At the same time they are full-time students, creating a highly integrated learning experience. Coursework may be completed on a residential or distributed learning basis, depending on the student's location and learning style.

Congratulations Around the Allegheny Synod

Go in PEACE

Each year I try to ring a bell at a Salvation Army Red Kettle.

The campaign raises money for the charity to provide heating assistance, warm clothing and food to those in need. Recently I joined the board of the local service center, so I have learned more about the importance of the project. The fact is that the Salvation Army, and many other charities in your communities, continue to need help, either through donations or of your time, all year long.

People are in need throughout the year, not just during the holiday season. But that's when the spirit of giving is at its greatest.

If you don't have a charity or board you regularly help out, take some time this winter to read up on a few local ones. Chances are that many of them are doing work that relates to a project going on at your church. Maybe some collaboration would be mutually beneficial in 2020.

The real winners are all the people the work helps out. If you come up with a project, be sure to let us know, so we can pass news of the good work along. See you in the next edition.

— Rick Kazmer

Stay Connected

Synod news is also online. The Synod's Facebook page is updated with events and video messages from Bishop Rhyne. Find the Synod at Allegheny Synod 8C. For Twitter users, follow the Synod using "AlleghenySynod." Find videos from around the Synod on YouTube at Allegheny Synod, ELCA channel (www.tinyurl.com/synodyoutube).



Submitted photos

Above, congratulations to St. Stephen Lutheran Church in McAlevy's Fort on unanimously calling Evelyn Wald to serve as their pastor. She is pictured (center) with congregation members. At right, congratulations to Friedens Lutheran Church on the call of their new pastor, John Barichivich. He will begin service in early 2020. The new pastor is pictured with his wife, Julie, and daughters, Britney and Jessica. Their oldest daughter, Jordan, was not able to make the trip. "We give thanks to God for this new chapter in ministry at Friedens and welcome this new pastor and his family to the Allegheny Synod," was the message on the Allegheny Synod Facebook page.



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You could invest in an ordinary IRA. Or you could invest in an IRA that lends a helping hand.



Faith Lutheran Church in Lavallette, New Jersey

Financed a major renovation with a loan from the Mission Investment Fund. When Superstorm Sandy severely damaged the new addition, MIF deferred Faith's loan payments until the congregation got back on its feet.

The Mission Investment Fund offers competitive interest rates and flexible terms on a wide range of investments for individuals, congregations and synods. When you save for retirement with MIF, your investment finances loans to ELCA congregations like Faith Lutheran. To learn more about our investments and ministry loans, contact us at mif.elca.org or **877.886.3522**.



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