

# The LUTHERAN Letter

TO INFORM, INSPIRE AND ILLUMINATE

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## PUBLICATION NOTICE

Dear readers,  
The Lutheran Letter is going digital this fall.

The September/October issue will be published online only.

Printing and postage costs combined with the COVID-19 crisis made it necessary for some difficult changes. Digital editions will provide the same content at far less expense. There are also some advantages to this format.

Stories and photos from around the synod will be available on your phones, tablets and computers anytime, anywhere.

(See **DIGITAL**, Page 5)

## A VOLUNTEER EFFORT



Submitted photo

**Volunteers at Trinity Lutheran in Juniata work on the ceiling of the youth room they are building in an old theater the church has owned for decades.**

## Trinity Lutheran Building Youth Room

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

For decades Trinity Lutheran Church in Juniata has owned an old theater building near the sanctuary.

It has been used for storage mostly, but the congregation had bigger plans

for the property that are now being realized.

With the help of a \$500 mission grant from the Allegheny Synod, part of the building is being turned into a youth activity room with games, including air hockey and basketball.

(See **ROOM**, Page 13)

## Lutheran Policy Advocates Target Hunger, Other Concerns

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Mostly every industry, career and even hobby has an organization lobbying on its behalf.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is no different.

While most Allegheny Synod Lutherans may not be aware of their work, staff members at the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania are trying to secure change in public policy based on the experience of Lutheran ministries, programs and projects around the world and in communities across the United States.

Among top priorities for the organization is ending hunger, according to Tracey DePasquale, the state director of Lutheran advocacy ministry.

(See **ADVOCATES**, Page 14)



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in variety of ways, **INSIDE**

# The LUTHERAN Letter

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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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# Remember The Sabbath

For this edition of the Lutheran Letter the message is from the Allegheny Synod Staff.

During the COVID-19 crisis the staff has been talking about about what happens once things start to return to “normal.”

Our leaders have been going above and beyond to care for our people, to create new avenues for worship and to learn how to be the church when what was usual has been taken away. We have been forced to neglect our Sabbath, and time away, because there is always so much to be done. In this message we want to encourage everyone to care for themselves, and to encourage congregations to support and encourage their pastors and deacons to take that much needed Sabbath time.

“Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” — Exodus 20:8

If you're a confirmed Lutheran you know that verse, perhaps by heart. It is one of the Ten Commandments you learned in Sunday School or Confirmation class. You may even know the answer to, “What does this mean?”

“We are to fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching or God's Word, but instead keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it.”

Typically, we think of Sunday as the Sabbath day, but in Luther's day there were many holy days and days of rest. There was a balance between work

and rest. Luther's focus on the third commandment emphasizes the sharing of the Word and the gathering of community. There is not a single right way of keeping the Sabbath, nor is there a single day. For many, Sunday is a natural day for rest, worship, prayer and play. But for those who work on Sunday, for those in shift work, nursing, retail or ministry, it is not a day that inclines itself to hold space for those things. Many of us need to be intentional about scheduling Sabbath time.

Sabbath is God's gift to us. It is an opportunity to lay burdens down, an opportunity to turn to and worship our Lord and a reminder that the meaning of our lives is not seeing how fast we can run the rat race. Sabbath reminds us that God is with us and God's presence, nor our worthiness, doesn't rely on how busy we are.

In today's culture we are constantly invited to fill every single moment with sound, movement or production. We are so driven that we have little time for rest and little time to cultivate our relationship with God. When we do stop, we may hear another voice — one that calls us to a life of work and leisure, work and prayer, of time alone and time in community. It is a pattern that calls us to trust that God will provide for our needs — even if we stop and rest. God calls us to remember the Sabbath; to remember to rest, to pray, to study

the Word and to listen to God speaking in the silence.

Sometimes the Ten Commandments have been called “gifts and guidelines.” But we want you to remember these are not suggestions, they are commands. God commands us to keep Sabbath. God understands the need for rest and renewal and commands us to respect that need by creating intentional spaces of rest that help to quiet our minds and spirits.

Maybe some of us hear that as God acting like our parents saying, “Eat your vegetables.”

We may not have wanted to do it as children, but it was good for us. Our parents made sure we got the nutrients we needed, even if we didn't want to do it. Our parents did this because they loved us. Our Heavenly Father gave us this gift of Sabbath because we need rest. We need time to recover. We need time with our Lord and our God. God built that into the creation of the universe. Remember, the fact that God took a day of rest on the seventh day, should show us that Sabbath is necessary and a good thing.

Jenn Giles Kemper, of Sacred Ordinary Days, says, “A regular practice of Sabbath honors our limits and allows space for a deepening experience of trust in God. When we willingly release control, our inclination toward self-sufficiency is gently removed.

(See **SABBATH**, Page 3)

# Sabbath

(Continued from Page 2)

With unclenched fists, our own striving and tending fades. As we open our hands, we entrust our lives and our world to God again each week.”

It’s not easy to willingly release control, is it?

We are very conditioned to be in control, to have it together, to know what the next move is. It takes practice to allow ourselves to let go. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin in his book, “The Gift of Peace”, says this about letting go, “By letting go, I mean the ability to release from our grasp those things that inhibit us from developing an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. Letting go is never easy. Indeed, it is a lifelong process. But letting go is possible if we understand the importance of opening our hearts and, above all else, developing a healthy prayer life.”

Keeping Sabbath is different than taking a day off or going on vacation. Keeping Sabbath requires more from us. If you’re like us, when you have a day off, it’s filled with all the things you couldn’t get done on another day. Vacation time is usually time spent with family and friends. Keeping Sabbath is very different. Instead of filling the time, we are invited to empty it, to let go, to be still.

Over the last several months as we have been in quarantine because of the pandemic, we have been

blessed by many online opportunities for prayer, reflection and worship offered by our pastors and deacons. We have visited with many of our congregations in a short amount of time through their online services and offerings. We have been blessed by our leaders and their efforts to provide meaningful connections to worship. While we felt a blessing from all of the opportunities, our leaders have been working overtime to provide those connections and remind us we are not alone. In a very short amount of time our leaders had to figure out how to become videographers, video editors and sound and lighting technicians. They had to master new technology, much of which they had no experience with, or training. They had to deal with a weekly array of glitches. Not gathering in the church building did not equal less work. Not one of our leaders is afraid of hard work, but the onslaught of constantly new things to learn as well as managing the pastoral care needs of the congregation has been exhausting and it has been hard to find time to feed their own souls while feeding ours. Add to that the uncertainty of the future, and the concern about whether the congregation will bounce back when they return to in-person worship. The stress of these concerns, while not taking time off, can lead to depression, exhaustion and a diminished sense of call.

When your congregation returns to in-person worship, your pastor may begin a conversation about taking vacation or finding some time for Sabbath rest. A first reaction might be, “We were off for four months, why do you need a vacation?” The reality is, your pastor was not off. In order for them to continue to serve you well, they need rest. We are urging all congregation councils to enter into a mutual conversation that builds awareness of the need for Sabbath for their pastor. A day off is one thing, but Sabbath rest is quite another.

We are aware that taking Sabbath time is counter-cultural. The only commandment of the Ten Commandments that if a ministry leader breaks, they will typically be congratulated for his/her hard work is, “remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy!”

We are asking congregations and leaders to lean into being counter-cultural by recognizing that Sabbath rest was given to us by God for a reason.

In an effort to support our congregations and leaders, the Allegheny Synod staff is developing resources to support congregations giving time of Sabbath to our leaders. We are developing a recorded worship service for use by the congregation when the Pastor is taking their Sabbath rest.

(See **SABBATH**, Page 5)

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# Christ Lutheran Improvises for Communion During COVID

BY TOM SCHOTT

Christ Lutheran Church, DuBois

COVID-19 brought changes to worship services everywhere, including Christ Lutheran Church in DuBois.

With the lockdown coming during Holy Week and Easter, it made the regulations even harder to accept.

Christ's pastors, John and Amy-Godshall Miller, found a way to reach their congregation by streaming a Sunday service.

Most of the service — sermon, children's sermon, readings, music, announcements — could be checked off quickly and conducted with proper social distancing. But one other important item, beyond that of personal interaction, was missing — communion.

"Our people were telling us they missed the Sacrament and we chose not to excommunicate them for months and especially not during Holy Week," Pastor John Miller said.

A solution was found from Pastor John Miller's sister, Pastor Lynn Miller, whose congregation in Virginia was providing take-home communion kits. With the backing of Christ's church council, the idea was given the go-ahead.

Volunteers prepared the communion kits, containing wine and communion bread in varying quantities for individuals, couples and families. The volunteers use sanitizer, gloves, N95 masks and other precautions to be hygienic and safe.

Pickup times were announced and congregation members, wearing gloves and masks, distributed the communion kits in a drive-by fashion outside of the church entrance. Home deliveries were made for those who were unable to come to the church themselves to pick up a kit.

The plan turned into an extra benefit for those picking up the kits. In addition, they received a church bulletin (also available online to use with the streaming service) and prior to



Submitted photos  
Christ Lutheran Church Council President Chuck Allen passes a communion kit and a bulletin through a car window this spring as part of the effort to practice faith during the pandemic. Below is a communion kit.

Palm Sunday, an Eco-Palm.

Pastors John and Amy summed up the effort:

"In this blessed Sacrament we not only hear the words of the Gospel we see, touch, smell and taste them," they said in a shared statement.

"This is important because we are not just hearers, we experience life and faith through all our senses. Real bread and wine allow each of us to receive God's forgiveness into our hands and mouths, experiencing through every sense that God is with us, that Jesus' sacrifice is 'for you.'"

Two hundred and forty communion kits were distributed for Palm Sunday, an additional 250 for Easter, and 190 more on May 3. While not planning to provide the kits each week, Christ Lutheran will distribute them regularly until services in the church can resume.



*(Editor's note: As of the time of publication, Pennsylvania's economic lockdown was in Gov. Tom Wolf's "green" phase in most counties. That is the least-restrictive phase of the state's three-stage reopening plan. The Allegheny Synod still recommends that congregations use practical precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 during worship.) †*



# The YOUTH<sup>er</sup>an Letter



Every three years, 30,000 high school youth and their adult leaders from across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gather for a week of faith formation known as the ELCA Youth Gathering. Through days spent in interactive learning, worship, Bible study, service and fellowship, young people grow in faith and are challenged and inspired to live their faith in their daily lives. The next event is scheduled for June 29-July 3, 2021, in Minneapolis, though planning has started. Organizers shared some key details for the next event:

## Q: What's the theme and how/why did you pick the theme?

**A:** In April 2019, a group of creative youth, young adults and adults gathered in Minneapolis to discern the theme for the 2021 Gathering. After reading through 2018 Gathering evaluations, listening to locals share about their city and much discussion about the spiritual lives of young people, the theme "boundless: God beyond measure" was chosen. Our theme makes the almost incomprehensible hugeness of God personal. In our scripture verse, Paul writes "I want you to know all about Christ's love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is." Christ's love for us is so abundant it can't be calculated, quantified or even estimated. A love that couldn't be contained in heaven so God came down and became human. A love so huge it was willing to suffer a gruesome death amongst taunts and jeers. A love so magnificent and glorious that death could not contain it, and so love was resurrected and changed everything humans knew about life, love and forgiveness. †

## Sabbath

(Continued from Page 3)

You could utilize the full service or share the sermon from the Bishop or staff. Our hope is this will mean your congregation won't have to pay a supply person and your pastor has the opportunity to rest, recover and renew. We are also suggesting that at least through September congregations offer their leaders an additional Sabbath day at least once a month. We would invite you to make that a day when you will share with the congregation that the pastor will be out of the office, that they will only be responding to true emergencies that cannot wait and they are spending the day in prayer. We hope that this would be an opportunity for our pastors and deacons to get a little extra time to recharge. And, we hope that you will join your pastor in this effort of Sabbath-keeping. We hope that you, too, will be renewed, refreshed and can strengthen your relationship with Jesus. We know that this time of global pandemic was something none of us expected. This has been

hard. It is important that we recognize that fact. We have made it through so far because so many have worked and given of themselves to keep ministry going and to make sure we are finding ways to connect with God's people. What we don't want to happen is for those who have given so much, to crash and burn once that immediacy of the emergency begins to subside. We thank you for the support you give to our leaders and the encouragement you share with them to make sure they are caring for themselves. When they have that Sabbath time, they are better able to care for the rest of us.

May God be with you and keep you.

In Christ,

Your Allegheny Synod Staff:

Bishop Michael Rhyne

Ms. Michelle Bossler

Pastor Paula Schmitt

Pastor Becca Ehrlich †

## Digital

(Continued from Page 1)

The fall edition will be posted on the synod's website, Facebook page and emailed to those who request it. To have your email address added to the list, send it to [michelle.bossler@allegheny-synod.com](mailto:michelle.bossler@allegheny-synod.com). We know this will be a big change for loyal print readers, but it's one that will help The Lutheran Letter continue to publish the great stories from the synod into the future. The November/December issue is scheduled to be a standard print edition. Synod council is considering how to handle the 2021 publishing schedule. Thanks for reading, and God bless you.

— Editor Rick Kazmer

## A STEWARDSHIP STORY

## ‘There’s John — He Built Our House’

*(Editor’s note: For five consecutive weeks the Allegheny Synod Stewardship Table members will be sharing a personal stewardship story. Be sure to check out the Allegheny Synod Facebook page regularly read more stories, which may be accompanied by a video.)*

**BY PASTOR VICKI BEILFUSS**  
Holy Shepherd Parish in Lanse  
and Karthaus

This stewardship story actually belongs to my late husband, John.

One spring he was asked by a member of his church to join their Habitat for Humanity retreat to West Virginia. It was not long after John and his first wife divorced and his self-esteem and self-worth had sunk. It would cost him between \$100-\$200 and a weekend of his time. So he thought, “Why not?”



**Pastor Vicki Beilfuss**

Everyone was assigned a task toward the completion of this house for a family with two little girls. His job was covering the outside of the foundation with a cement mixture.

One daughter of the family decided she wanted to help John. I visualize him rolling his eyes, but

he let her help stir the cement. As little girls will do, she peppered him with all kinds of questions. He patiently answered them — if you knew John you’d be laughing at that mental image.

The retreat ended with the crew and family taking time to worship. As they were getting ready to leave, John saw the little girl tug on her father’s pant leg. John overheard her say, “Look there’s John — he built our house!”

John’s eyes would fill up every

time he told this part of the story. What seemed like such a little thing to him, meant so much to this little girl.

This experience started John on his stewardship journey of discovery. It helped him to realize he had gifts to give and gave him the courage to say, “Yes, I will help.” I keep a picture John took of this little girl and her sister to remind me of John’s generous heart and how generosity can powerfully touch both receiver and giver. †



**ALLEGHENY LUTHERAN  
SOCIAL MINISTRIES**

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**Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth  
around your waist, and put on the  
breastplate of righteousness.  
As shoes for your feet  
put on whatever will make you ready  
to proclaim the gospel of peace.**

**Ephesians 6:14-15**



## Remember in Prayer

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

### JULY

**Week 1:** First Faith Cooperative Ministry: First Lutheran, Philipsburg; and Faith United Lutheran, Houtzdale

**Week 2:** St. Luke Lutheran, Centre Hall

**Week 3:** St. John Lutheran, Clearfield

**Week 4:** Christ Lutheran, Johnstown

### AUGUST

**Week 1:** Friedens Lutheran, Friedens

**Week 2:** Zion Lutheran, Everett

**Week 3:** Holy Shepherd Parish: Holy Trinity Lutheran, Lanse; and Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran, Karthaus

**Week 4:** First English Lutheran, Tyrone

## In God's Name



## 5ive QUESTIONS with Carol Barnick

**Carol Barnick was baptized in Christ Lutheran Church, one of three churches that formed Laurel Trinity Lutheran Church in Jennerstown in the early 1970s. She is the secretary of the church, and a key member of the congregation's annual spring play, which is a fundraiser for the church youth. It had to be canceled this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Barnick took some time to talk about herself and Laurel Trinity.**

**Q1:** Each spring your church holds a play as a fundraiser for the congregation's youth. It had to be canceled this year because of the pandemic. What did you miss most about the performance?

**A1:** I missed the gathering for rehearsals, the adrenaline rush on opening night and the laughter from the audience.

**Q2:** Looking back on the last few months, what's the biggest source of inspiration you noticed in your community?

**A2:** Even though we can't meet physically as a church we're still able to hear God's word virtually and I love hearing how people are enjoying their meals together, at the family table, as a family, rather than on the run to another activity.

**Q3:** What's your favorite hobby and what do you like about it?

**A3:** I love camping and cooking over the fire. Nothing better



Submitted photo

**Carol Barnick is looking forward to her church family again gathering together in person.**

than breakfast over the fire. I like being disconnected for a little.

**Q4:** What are you most looking forward to at your church in the rest of 2020 and in 2021?

**A4:** I am looking forward to being back together physically, as the body of Christ worshipping, singing and sharing communion. I miss that!

**Q5:** What's your favorite Bible verse and why?

**A5:** John 3:16 right now (because it was just Easter). We know that God loved us so much to sacrifice His Son to die for our sins so when our earthly lives are over we'll live in eternity with Him. So powerful that verse is! †

**“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

— John 3:16

# AN ABIDING PRESENCE

## *Chrysostom Might Today Encourage That We Practice What We Preach*

(Editor's note: This article was published in *Living Lutheran* in 2018. It is being reprinted here with permission. This feature is part of a series of stories about people depicted on the stained-glass windows at the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg.)

BY THE REV. DR. SHAUNA K. HANNAN  
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary professor

John Chrysostom (347 - 407 AD) was a priest who became bishop of Constantinople.

Chrysostom, "golden mouth" in Greek, was so named because of his exceptional oratory skills. He was trained both in rhetoric and scriptural interpretation, a combination often labeled "sacred rhetoric."

While we take for granted the marriage of these two disciplines in preaching, it wasn't prevalent in his day.

The bishop is honored for his eloquent, scripturally grounded and contextual preaching. Chrysostom is esteemed by the Eastern Orthodox Church and by the Roman Catholic Church. (In 1908, Pope Pius X designated him the patron saint of Christian preachers). He was so skilled in oratory that congregations were moved to applause. But Chrysostom distrusted such applause given its undue attention paid to the preacher instead of Christ, so he encouraged preachers to be indifferent to praise, noting that the "example of one's life is a better lesson" (Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Preaching of Chrysostom"). He was so eloquent that, even when he preached against applause, such an announcement, ironically, "brought the house down with applause" (Pelikan).

The content of his preaching was just as notable and eloquent as the form — it was grounded in a distinctive way of interpreting Scripture. Chrysostom, a citizen of Antioch (a city presently bordering Turkey and Syria), was part of the Antiochan tradition of biblical interpretation.



Staff photo by Courtney Kazmer  
**Saint John Chrysostom shares a window with Saint Augustine of Hippo at the Church of the Abiding Presence in Gettysburg.**

As a reaction against the prevailing Alexandrian school of biblical interpretation (popularized by Origen in the third century), the school of Antioch rejected the primacy of allegorical interpretation in favor of the "literal" (not literalistic) sense of Scripture.

For example, when the Bible mentions bread, Chrysostom interprets it as that material substance one eats to sustain life, not as a symbolic reference to some theoretical nourishment. (Generally speaking, Martin Luther and Lutherans today are more in the Antiochan tradition than the Alexandrian, allegorical tradition.)

The next logical step of such a mode of interpretation was to pay attention to the everyday concerns of people in the congregation and community. Chrysostom's vast collection of sermons show that he did just that. For example, some 90 sermons focused on social themes of poverty and wealth and exhorted hearers to care for the poor and hungry.

Even more, he practiced what he preached by leading his community to care not just for one another, but for the whole community.

Chrysostom railed against abuses of ecclesiastical and political authority, even as he himself served as bishop of Constantinople. In his sermon series "On the Statues" (377 AD), he "illustrates his compassion as well as his social responsibility in a time of political crisis" (George Kennedy, "Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition").

It was this kind of preaching that caused an uproar among those in power and eventually led to Chrysostom's exile. But exile didn't silence him as he continued to find ways to communicate, to proclaim. Such diligence unfortunately led to a second exile, a long journey through difficult terrain that weakened Chrysostom's undernourished body to the point of death. "Ironically, the one whose oratory moved congregations to wild applause was persecuted for his criticism of the megalomania of public officials and preachers" (Richard Lischer, "Theories of Preaching").

Chrysostom preached more than 200 sermons based on the Pauline epistles. Perhaps it was the Antioch connection that led to his fondness for Paul (recall that Paul began his first missionary journey from Antioch).

Or perhaps it was the similar way the two downplayed their eloquence by . . . well, by being eloquent. "When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom" (1 Corinthians 2:1).

(See **ABIDE**, Page 9)



# *‘The Blessings Continue’: How Zion Paid it Forward*

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

When Kelly and Kevin Miller’s daughter struggled with brain aneurysms a few years ago they spent a lot of time at a hospital in Pittsburgh — so much so that they needed a place to stay.

They found Family House Pittsburgh, billed as “a home away from home” for patients and their families who are stuck in the city for medical treatments.

“It was just amazing what they did,” Kelly Miller said, noting that for about \$65 a night comfortable accommodations and food was provided.

So when Pastor David Bowman distributed about \$30,000 at the beginning of the year to the Zion Lutheran Church in Hollidaysburg with instructions to find a way to do the most good with the money, it didn’t take long for the Millers to decide to give it to the Family House.

“I didn’t hear the rest of the sermon that day,” Miller said. As soon as she and her husband were given the cash, she said she was thinking “who can we help?”

They quickly realized that the \$500 they were given would benefit a lot of families in Pittsburgh.

“It benefits so many people,” Miller said about the Family House.

The money was gifted for Zion’s Joyous Generosity program from a variety of sources, including a large portion from a former Altoona congregation that had closed years ago. The instructions from that congregation was that the

money go toward helping the community.

Congregation members were given \$100, \$250 or \$500 with a blank on the “Pay to the order of” line.

Zion members Denny and Grace Rodriguez decided to split their \$500 between two worthy causes. They gave \$300 to The Door of Bellwood, a project that provides food, family and faith for at-risk youth. They gave the other \$200 to the American Rescue Workers in Hollidaysburg, a Christian-based food pantry for low-income people.

“My wife and I sat down. We had a decision to make because that was a lot of money,” Denny Rodriguez said. “We wanted to make sure we chose well.”

He said they think The Door is a good project because it also provides teenagers with adults who offer advice, along with food and shelter.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left many people seeking extra help from area food banks. The money they gave to the American Rescue Workers went to putting food on the table for someone in need.

“It’s a hard time right now for a lot of people,” Rodriguez said, adding that he and his wife prayed a lot about the decision. They wanted to make sure the money would be quickly put to good work.

“Our faith came into play on this,” he said. “We wanted to be guided by God — what Christ said about helping people.”

Roger Johnson and Patricia Savage wrote a letter describing how they decided to give away the \$100 they were given.

They said they both have experienced the happiness that results from giving. They decided they wanted to see the money be used through a “pay it forward” strategy. Roger teaches a small writing class at Mount Aloysius in Cresson. The first assignment of the semester was a personal narrative.

They added to the check from Zion and gave each student \$10 and the directive to “use the money to increase someone’s sense of well-being.”

The students then wrote an essay on the experience. Johnson and Savage said the results were “satisfying.”

“The most consistent result was happiness on the part of the giver,” they wrote. “One young lady paid toward a manicure for an elderly woman, who upon thanking her, burst into tears.”

Well-wishes and gifts to friends in need, or expressions of kindness to someone who helped a student in the past were also part of the pay-it-forward results.

Several students added more money to the amounts they were provided, strengthening the good works.

Students helped people buy gas for their cars. One student bought a toy for a distraught mother to give to her child. The assignment included a lecture on the nature and causes of happiness, Johnson and Savage wrote.

“Some of the recipients of the students’ generosity have pledged to continue the process and ‘pay it forward’ for someone else,” Johnson and Savage wrote.

“The blessings continue.” †

## Abide

(Continued from Page 8)

Recalling that “the saints are to be remembered so that we may strengthen our faith when we see how they experienced grace and how they were helped by faith” (Augsburg Confession XXI) and that we have “so great a cloud of witnesses” that “we might run with perse-

verance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1), a commemoration of our saint/sinner sibling “Golden Mouth” might begin by praying for those whose witness to Christ has found them in exile and giving thanks for the lives of those whose witness has got them killed. Chrysostom might have encouraged that we:

**Commit to being fully engaged in the world.**

**Pay attention to the poor and hungry.**

**Preach against abuse of privilege.**

**Practice what we preach. †**

# Salem Steps Up for Community



Submitted photos

Salem Lutheran Church in Aaronburg hosted the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank in May to distribute food to the community. "Thanks to all who worked to care for our neighbors," was the message posted on the Allegheny Synod's Facebook page on May 29.



Photo courtesy ELCA Archives



Pastor Elizabeth Platz participates in a service in 1974. She was ordained on Nov. 21, 1970. This is being published as part of the ongoing celebration of the first female Lutheran pastor in America. Platz visited the Allegheny Synod on Nov. 17 to share in worship and to answer questions from local faithful. She still serves God at St. Luke Lutheran Church in Silver Spring, Maryland.

*Pastor Elizabeth Platz said that at first she was mainly interested in a theological education, not necessarily presiding over services. But God called her to campus, where she has introduced students to Him for decades at the University of Maryland Campus Ministry, College Park.*

*— Pastor Elizabeth Platz described her journey during an interview last year with The Lutheran Letter. The number of women pastors in the church has grown greatly, including about 50% of the Allegheny Synod's roster.*



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## Home & Garden

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# A Cast-Iron Skillet Can Create Great Campfire Cuisine

By COURTNEY KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Home & Garden Editor

A campfire smells so good.

A campfire with food cooking over it smells even better. A good hot dog, a juicy burger or a toasted marshmallow are all classic campfire foods. But have you ever thought of making a pizza over the fire? How about cinnamon buns?

You should, because the result is scrumptious.

A recent Christmas present from my mother-in-law has opened up endless possibilities with campfire cuisine.

A camping trip in May began our love of campfire pizza using the present, a new cast-iron skillet.

It is so easy to make and it cooks in no time at all.

The first step is to roll out your store-bought pizza dough, which can be found in the cooler section. Roll it out in the cast-iron skillet as best you can so all sides are even.

Put the skillet over the fire, checking the bottom of the dough every few minutes to make sure it doesn't burn.

When it is a nice golden brown color, remove the skillet and add your ingredients. Spread out the pizza sauce, add cheese and load up the top with all the tasty toppings — pepperoni, mushrooms and peppers. Round it off with a little extra cheese. My mouth is watering just thinking about it now.

Once you place the skillet back over the fire you will have delicious, mouth-watering piz-



Staff photo by Courtney Kazmer

**This cast-iron skillet pizza needs about five more minutes on the fire to finish melting the cheese and crisping the pepperoni. We put a cast-iron lid on the skillet to help melt the cheese quickly.**

za quickly. I was so surprised at how fast it cooked.

We also made cinnamon buns with store-bought dough. These took a little longer to make, but they were worth it.

They took around 10 minutes to cook over the fire. We did not put the icing over them

until we took them out of the skillet to avoid a sticky situation.

I am excited to keep trying new dishes with our skillet. There is nothing like a campfire and some good, hearty food. Send us your cast-iron skillet cooking ideas. We'd love to share them with readers. †



# Details on Upcoming Virtual Assembly

*(Editor's note: This article is an edited letter that was sent to congregations by Allegheny Synod Assembly Chairwoman Jeanne Fleege.)*

The Allegheny Synod Assembly is scheduled to be a virtual event this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is scheduled from Sept. 18-19.

Select congregations will host regional sites where voting and other business will take place.

Assembly is typically a time where synod faithful meet to worship, plan for the future and elect people to serve on important boards, among other business.

This year's assembly will also include the election of a new bishop. Bishop Michael Rhyne is not seeking another term. He will serve through the end of the year.

Congregations hosting assembly sites this

year need the following information:

- Sites need reliable internet service. The Zoom program will be used most of the time. Each site needs to have a copier and a computer available. Also, a tech person who is familiar with the local system would be helpful.

- Depending on the number attending, if social distancing is in place, some sites may need several areas to hold meetings.

- Attendance at this assembly will only be voting members and needed volunteers. Facebook may be used for some parts of the meeting.

- Beverages are to be made available — coffee, tea, water, etc. Snack foods may also be served. Lunch time will be about 90 minutes. Voting members are being encouraged to bring a lunch, but time is being allotted for people who wish to leave the building. Each congrega-

tion will receive a stipend after the assembly is concluded.

- The meeting will be adjourned in time for the evening meal. If there is no election, the assembly will resume on Saturday morning.

- The synod office will serve as home base. Each conference will have a site captain who will be a member of the synod council or (bishop) transition team.

- Three volunteers, who are not voting members, will be needed. Their responsibility will be to serve as registration, election or page chairs. If others are needed due to large numbers, that is fine, but these three are in charge and will work together.

- A day of training will be held prior to the assembly. Plans are to have the training at the same time and place so volunteers can travel together. †

## Assembly Host Sites

The following congregations have agreed to host the assembly: Blair-Huntingdon Conference: Evangelical Lutheran, Duncansville; Bedford Conference: Zion Lutheran, Everett; Clearfield Conference: St. John Lutheran, Clearfield; Johnstown Conference: Mt. Calvary Lutheran, Johnstown; Laurel Highlands Conference: Friedens Lutheran, Friedens; and Nittany Conference: Trinity Lutheran, State College. These congregations have also agreed to host the conference caucus meetings at 6 p.m. July 15. This will be an opportunity to check out how Zoom works.

Allegheny Synod Bishop Michael Rhyne regularly updates the synod Facebook page with special messages, news and other updates.

Pastors from around the synod are also sharing stories from their congregations. Check out the page for unique information about your synod.

The Lutheran Letter regularly provides more in-depth coverage of some of the stories on the page. |

## Special Messages

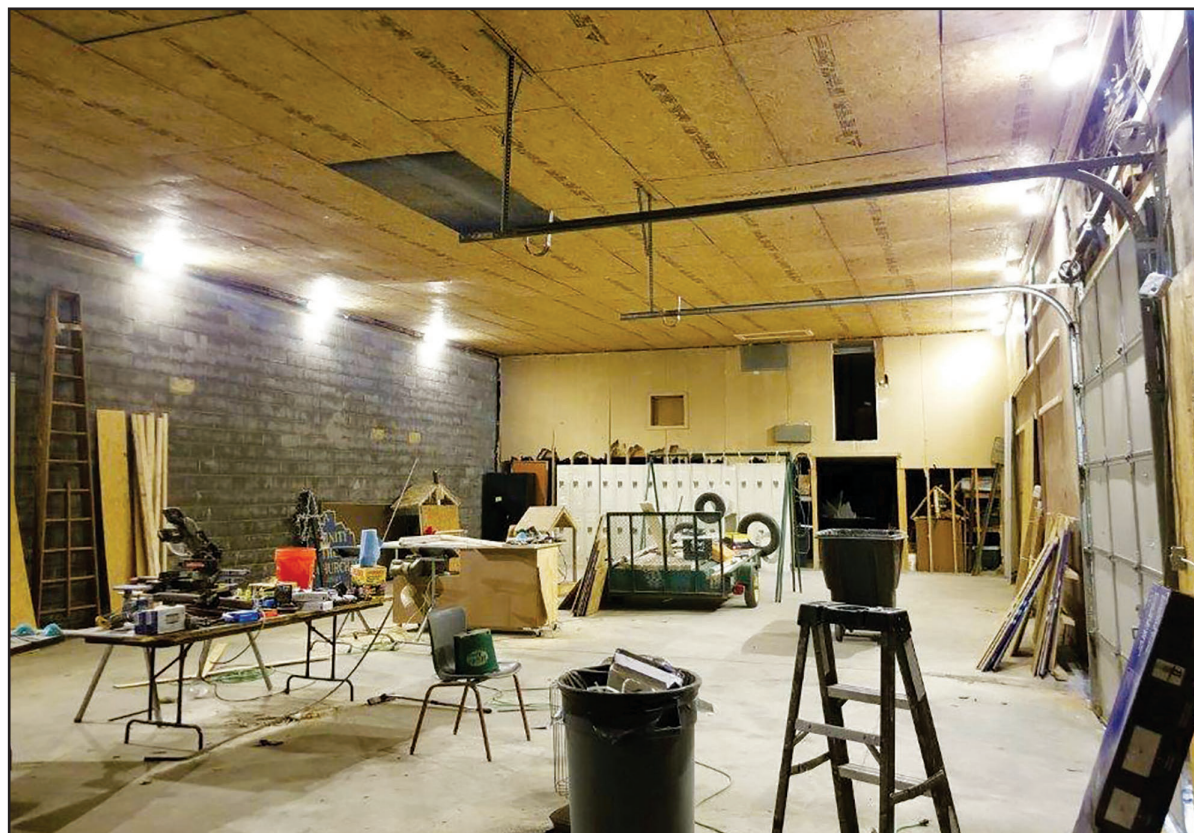
Bishop Rhyne shares a reflection on the love of Christ and standing against the sin of racism. May the Holy Spirit lead and guide us to see all people as beloved Children of God.



A screenshot from a message Bishop Michael Rhyne posted on Facebook.



# Scenes of Change at Old Theater



Submitted photos  
More scenes from the work being completed at Trinity Lutheran in Juniata to turn an old theater into a youth room.

*“It’s going to be great, our youth are looking forward to it.”*

## Room

(Continued from Page 1)

According to Pastor Eli Hess, the building will also be a place for fellowship.

“We are very excited,” she said. “It’s going to be great, our youth are looking forward to it.”

Trinity has an average Sunday worship size of about 150 people. There are between 15-20 youth active with the church.

The congregation has been key to the project, which has a cost of about \$3,000, Hess said. She

said the building was “full of junk” and needed a lot of cleaning.

“It’s all volunteer work,” she said. “The kids are doing some work, too.” Photos show the volunteers putting up plywood on the ceiling, cutting materials and completing other labor.

Like mostly all other aspects of life, the project was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

But Hess said the hope is to have the room ready

in a few months.

“It should be ready this fall for being able to have kids in there,” she said. “We got sidetracked by COVID.”

The second phase of the project includes creating classrooms for after-school programs. Hess said the hope is to start that work in a couple of years.

The first phase will create the youth activity area, but the plan is for many people to enjoy it.

“For anyone who wants to use it,” she said. †



# Advocates

(Continued from Page 1)

It's a topic of heightened importance. The COVID-19 pandemic has left tens of millions of Americans jobless and has lengthened lines at local food banks.

"Ending hunger and poverty and addressing their root causes is always at the core of our work," she said, noting that more than 1.6 million Pennsylvanians, or 12.5% of the state's population, qualify as food insecure.

That means that they lack consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Nearly three million residents turned to food pantries and meal service programs to feed themselves and their families last year.

Those statistics were from before the pandemic hit.

DePasquale said the advocates educate disciples on how to speak with policymakers in their area about hunger.

The goal is to gain funding for crucial programs at schools and for other community food aid programs.

"LAMPa equips Lutherans in Pennsylvania to live into their baptismal call to strive for justice and peace in all the earth," she said, adding that "our work on hunger and poverty is interrelated with so many other issues — from education to health care, environmental stewardship and good government."

Synod Bishop Michael Rhyne is serving on LAMPa's policy council.

Bishops from the state's seven synods rotate service on the council, which works to advise the policy agenda for LAMPa for the coming year.

"The Lutheran Church has a long history of advocacy and working for just laws and policies in the communities, states and nations where it is found. As a rule our advocacy partners work for just policies and don't try and support a particular political position," Rhyne said.

Jesus' command to provide for the hungry, poor and vulnerable are of important concern.

"None of us can do this alone," he said, noting the importance of partnering with other religious organizations to build advocacy coalitions.

Susan Barclay, from St. Luke Lutheran Church in Rockwood, is one of three Allegheny Synod faithful serving on the policy council. Rhyne and Pastor Will Osman, of St. John in Bellefonte, are the other two.

"This ministry gives Pennsylvania legislators a much needed view of the concerns facing this state. As a recognized lobbying group, LAMPa offers conversations that address concerns of many in this state without a voice in the legislature process," Barclay said.

She listed human trafficking, poverty and civil rights as other points of concern on LAMPa's agenda.

"This ministry is consistent with the constitution of the ELCA and the social statements adopted by the ELCA," she said.

Part of the work this year is helping congregations participate in the 2020 Census. The data is crucial for counties. Each person counted results in government funding to help the commonwealth.

The Census "determines Pennsylvania's representation in Congress, but also billions in federal dollars that come to the state. Our congregations can be key to making certain no one is missed, particularly in rural and urban areas at risk of an undercount," DePasquale said.

Protecting the environment and safeguarding against predatory lending is also part of the mission, she said.

Among the biggest successes DePasquale mentioned was the Safe Harbor law, passed in 2018.

"That law protects child sex trafficking victims by directing them away from the criminal justice system and into appropriate social services," she said, noting that this year Gov. Tom Wolf signed Act 1 of 2020. "Which

increases penalties against those engaged in modern-day slavery — from the traffickers themselves to advertisers and buyers of those in forced servitude. Lutheran advocates helped keep the momentum going, and still do, in the fight against human trafficking. Its existence is an indictment of our failure to address the factors such as poverty, violence, trauma and addiction that make people so vulnerable to exploitation. All of these have been bipartisan efforts."

It's a lot of work for a staff of two.

Connecting a half a million Lutherans among seven synods is among the group's biggest challenges, she said.

"The broader challenge goes to the question of how the church helps disciples realize that advocacy — this striving for peace and justice — is part of their baptismal promise. As such, God promises that we are equipped to do it and we are not alone in it," DePasquale said. †

**"LAMPa equips Lutherans in Pennsylvania to live into their baptismal call to strive for justice and peace in all the earth," she said, ADDING THAT "our work on hunger and poverty is interrelated with so many other issues — from education to health care, environmental stewardship and good government."**



# Koths Entering Seminary with Army, Worship Leading Experience

BY RICK KAZMER

The Lutheran Letter Editor

Steve Koths is entering seminary with a unique background.

The 66-year-old served 20 years in the United States Army. He has spent another 27 years at Penn State University as the senior director of finance and administration in the College of Nursing.

Now he is answering a call he has tried to heed his entire life.

"I've tried to answer God's call in my life by living my faith in all aspects of my life. Sometimes I have done that well and at other times not so well," said Koths, whose home church is Grace Lutheran in State College. He is a regular worship leader at Shiloh Lutheran.

"Since serving as lay worship leader at Shiloh for the past 12 years I've heard a different call. Also, being lifted by the Shiloh congregation has affirmed my call to ordination," he said.

Koths said his Army background will be



## HEEDING THE CALL

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



Seminarian Steve Koths

pertinent in seminary. He will be in the TEEM program, which allows him to study in part at home and with mentor pastors.

"In the Army, I worked with people from a range of backgrounds. I came to not only appreciate people's differences, but to enjoy and celebrate our differences. I think finding joy in our differences will be helpful as a pastor. I enjoy listening to people and hearing their life experiences," he said.

His experience includes interacting with people during good, bad and dark times during their lives.

"I came to understand that comforting someone sometimes consists of just being present and listening," he said.

Koths is going into seminary with a lot of experience. He has been a lay worship leader for 25 years, about half of them at Shiloh, where he regularly leads worship. He hopes to one day be the pastor at Shiloh. He said it has been decades since he has studied formally.

"So that might be a challenge," he said.

Koths is married to Yvonne Koths. They have five grown children and seven grandchildren. He enjoys gardening and reading. †



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# Go in PEACE

The summer has so far served as a return to some normalcy, but COVID fears and social unrest remain.

The last four months have been a time for society to reflect, and hopefully, improve.

I recently listened to one person say that they felt empathy is the key thing missing in society.

**Empathy.**

That's the ability to understand another person's viewpoint from their perspective. It doesn't mean everyone will agree on every point. But the ability to consider why others feel and act the way they do is important for societal harmony.

I think Jesus had empathy for the blind man, the leper and certainly the sinner.

I think we should have empathy for each other. It feels as though sometimes it's getting harder to tell right from wrong. Empathy can be tough under such circumstances. But Jesus truly loves everyone on earth.

If we all deserve His love, we deserve each other's empathy, too.

— 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](http://www.tinyurl.com/synodyoutube)).





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



## 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.



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