

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Blair-Huntingdon Conference

June 2020 – March 2021

As we all know this past year has transformed how we do ministry both in our congregations and in the conference. We have had a few Rostered Leader transitions in the conference. Pastor Karen Ward concluded her call at St. John's Lutheran Church, Sinking Valley and took a new call as an Interim-Pastor at Christ Lutheran Church, Buffalo Mills. This congregation is situated in the Bedford Conference. Pastor Karen continued to serve out the rest of her term. This was decided by the Blair-Huntingdon Conference in collaboration with the Bishop's Office. Pastor Drew McCaffery transitioned to a 2-point call. He continues to serve at Bethany Lutheran Church, Altoona and has begun serving at Simpson Temple United Parish, Altoona. Pastor Jenn Soltis has concluded her 2-point call at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Marklesburg and Zion Lutheran Church, Petersburg. At the time this report was submitted she was conducting interviews with possible future calls.

Pastor Ralph Hamer, at The Lutheran Home in Hollidaysburg, served in the midst of many changes and challenges. In an effort to keep residents safe, the weekly practice of visiting pastors leading worship was suspended. Many pastors and congregations from the Blair-Huntingdon conference sent cards of support to residents as they were in lock-down. Text Studies, which

once were held in various coffee shops and restaurants around the conference, moved online via Zoom. At the start of the pandemic I checked in with our Rostered Leaders regularly and I believe our conference has worked to support one another during this difficult time. We have been unable to hold our regular conference meetings. The Deans and the Synod staff have met regularly for Dean meetings. Many Rostered Leaders in this conference attend the monthly Ministerium meetings.

Unfortunately, the Synod Youth Task Force has postponed the Synod Youth event that was scheduled for this Fall, 2021. The task force was unable to meet regularly to plan for this second event in the midst of many questions and unknowns. The goal is to have a safe, spectacular event that will continue to build upon the first youth event in 2019. Please stay posted for new dates.

A new Dean will be elected during the Spring Caucus meeting. It has been an honor and a pleasure to serve as the dean of the Blair-Huntingdon Conference over the past four years. I continue to pray for this conference and for its new leadership. Thank you.

Rev. Karen Ward
Dean – Blair-Huntingdon Conference

Clearfield Conference

The Clearfield Conference includes eleven congregations, nine of which are in parish partnerships. The rostered leaders are: the Reverends Amy Godshall Miller and John Miller (Christ Lutheran), Bob Way (St. John), Vicki Beilfuss (Holy Shepherd Parish), and Christine Roe (First Faith Lutheran Cooperative). Bob Way also serves as the vacancy pastor for St. Peter, Luthersburg, and St. John, Rockton. The communities of Olanta, Grace and Salem, are served by Authorized Lay Minister, Richard Sternagle.

At the Fall Caucus Zoom, Christine Roe officially finished her term as dean of the conference and Vicki Beilfuss was voted to serve as the next dean.

As everywhere, covid restrictions put a strain on all of us. The pastors have continued to meet monthly. Since the pandemic shutdowns our usual meeting place was replaced by Zoom. The fellowship, support and idea sharing at these meetings were immensely helpful. We look forward to meeting in person again, hopefully soon.

We all found ways to adapt worship practices to virtual formats, and eventually in-person. It didn't take too long for pastors and congregations to learn how to meet virtually with students, councils, committees and bible studies. Unfortunately, for some of our congregations the lack of good internet service and older members afraid of the internet have been a bit of a challenge.

The people of Christ continued to actively support their community through the DuBois Food Pantry. First Evangelical's pet pantry continued to serve the people of Philipsburg. Faith United decided to close their preschool for the year due to covid and are now considering if, and how, to reopen in the fall. Shepherd of the Hills Preschool's beloved Director/Teacher of 20+ years died after surgery in September. Thankfully the long term substitute agreed to become the interim teacher. So far, they have been able to continue school in-person (virtual as needed) without a covid outbreak.

The October 2020 trip to Israel, led by the Pastors Miller, was of course canceled, and is now rescheduled for October 2021. We are hopeful it will happen.

May the Holy Spirit disperse residual fears from covid, strengthen resolve and rekindle excitement for worshipping God and serving our neighbors—not just here in Clearfield County, but throughout the synod and churchwide congregations and ministry partners.

Respectfully submitted,

Vicki Beilfuss
Clearfield Conference Dean

Johnstown Conference

Greetings to all,

As we all have experienced, 2020 has been a year of learning to be creative in how we as the church proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The Johnstown Conference met three times in-person during 2020, the months of January, February, and March and then meetings were suspended due to the pandemic. Meetings have resumed via ZOOM in January, 2021.

Many thanks to Pastor Ruth Jensen for her service as the Dean of the conference during this difficult time. In November, 2020, Pastor Mark W. Fischer of First Lutheran Church, Portage was chosen as Dean of the Johnstown Conference.

Two pieces of good news to share from the conference:

Pastor Mark W. Fischer was called to be the Pastor of First Lutheran Church, Portage. He began his call on December 1, 2019 and was installed as their pastor on March 15, 2020.

The other blessing is the ordination of Pastor Rebecca West on January 30, 2021 and her call to be the pastor at Moxham Lutheran Church (*photos, right*). The service was held outdoors in the parking lot of the church with Bishop Michael Rhyne presiding. With the temperatures hovering less than 20 degrees on a sunny day, those attending stayed warm in their cars while the participants dressed as warm as possible.

Congratulations to Pastor Rebecca West and to Moxham Lutheran Church.



Laurel Highlands Conference

The Laurel Highlands Conference has had a variety of transitions since the last synod assembly, in particular welcoming Pastor John Barichivich to Friedens Lutheran, Pastor Tyler Graham to the Salisbury Parish, and Vicar Regina Holliday to the Journey in Faith Parish.

We celebrated with Vicar Rebecca West who had been serving internship in the southern end of our conference, and has since been called to serve Moxham Lutheran in Johnstown and ordained.

Grace Delivered, the cooperative “mobile” ministry born out of brainstorming from congregations across our conference has completed all of the appropriate paperwork to establish itself as its own independent

ministry. The actual purchase and deployment of the trailer has been delayed multiple times due to COVID, but we are hopeful to have things back on track (and a trailer on the road) in the near future.

We’re excited about the ongoing conversation and discernment regarding the call of a new bishop, and look forward to welcoming the bishop elect into the congregations of Somerset County (and Grantsville, Maryland, too!)

Respectfully Submitted

Pastor Jono Adams
Dean, Laurel Highlands Conference

Nittany Conference

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic the rostered ministers of the Nittany Conference have continued to meet monthly via Zoom. In our meetings we practice mutual care and consolation, we share updates about our ministries, and we brainstorm together and encourage one another in our common work. Our faith communities have adapted and, in many cases, expanded our ministry. To accomplish this we have utilized various forms of media and communication, including live-streaming, video, podcasts, radio, and the written word. We have witnessed spiritual growth in our congregations despite all of the challenges of this past year.

Another sign of growth in our conference is the presence of the Gloria de Dios community, which has recently

called Flor Hernandez as their part-time lay Mission Developer and is now working toward Synodically Authorized Worship Community status.

As much as we might look forward to a return to “normal” as the pandemic subsides, we also look forward to the challenges to come, knowing that the Holy Spirit brings growth to the Body of Christ through those challenges.

In the peace of Christ,

The Rev. Kevin Shock, Acting Dean