

BULLETIN OF REPORTS

REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEES

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CHURCH IN SOCIETY

This committee is comprised of several teams and taskforces charged with listening to and educating our synod on issues of justice and the common good, especially in lifting up the needs and voices of those who experience marginalization in our congregations and communities.

With Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa), **advocacy** efforts combine the voices of Lutherans from across the state. This year, LAMPa representatives and staff were part of planning and participating in SWPA MLK Day events, including a workshop on advocacy and housing. Lutheran Day for 2023 is returning to an in-person format with a focus on fostering conversation across divides. Current LAMPa representatives from our synod are Rev. Erin Jones and Mr. Jim Needles. See LAMPa's report for more.

Members of the **Immigration Working Group** are always eager to share information with pastors and congregations about refugees, asylum seekers, and the struggles of other immigrants. They keep up with the ELCA work about immigrants: Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, AMMPARO and ELCA Advocacy. "Families separated" and "families reunited" is the unifying theme for advocacy and action for this group. Special focus is American Families United and Drop Colcom. Members of this group also work to sponsor asylum seekers, participated in the Shut Down Berks Coalition. Good news in Pennsylvania: the Berks County Detention Center, which closed in January 2023. Rev. Ross Carmichael chairs this group.

The **Hunger Education and Advocacy Team** (HEAT) continues to encourage and facilitate education, service, and advocacy. The *Apostles in Action Grant Program* did not issue any grants for this cycle, but team members helped review ELCA World Hunger domestic grants. Rev. Jocelyn Johnston is chair.

Members of the Church in Society are still forming a synod **Green Team**. Current efforts include articles for synod and congregational newsletters in the "Creation Care Corner," published through synod emails. Members have also participated in state and national programs. More activities and resources will be forthcoming. Rev. Sarah Rossing is forming this group.

Articles and resources for **Mental Health** month were shared through synod communications. Future efforts will offer educational opportunities and the sharing of local resources. Mr. Robert Errett of First Lutheran, Greensburg is leading these efforts.

The **Authentic Diversity and Justice** team hosted another MLK Day worship service, followed by an educational panel on housing justice. A Lenten challenge on struggling with white privilege was shared throughout the synod. Other offerings included a Justice and Scripture discussion in May and an art exhibit at the Lutheran Campus Ministry Center in December. This team also has a monthly newsletter sent out by email to any who sign up for it. Upcoming events will be anti-racism trainings held online and throughout the synod. Rev. Ryan Pusch is chair.

The local chapter of **Reconciling Works** participated in the June 2022 Pride Fest downtown, Bloomfield, and Millvale, sharing information about welcoming Lutheran congregations and the work of Glade Run. They also spent time reorganizing and meeting at RIC congregations in our synod. Our committee liaison is Ms. Kelly Spaninger of St. Andrew's, Shadyside.

Another team on addressing **domestic violence** is also in formation, led by Pastor Ryan Kobert. Our Synod Council Representative is Rev. Allyn Iitterly.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Sarah Rossing, Chairperson

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CARE AND LEADERSHIP FOR ROSTERED LEADERS

The Care and Leadership for Rostered Leaders Committee is responsible for affirmation and support for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service. This committee replaces the Committee on Ministry. The lay worship leaders are now under the auspices of the Committee of Care and Leadership for Congregations.

During this past year we have continued to meet via Zoom. The exception to this was my meeting with the Standing Committee Implementation Team for reorganization of the standing committees of the synod. I am the representative as chair of the old Committee on Ministry.

I thank the new current members of our committee on meeting and discussing the compensation guidelines for 2024. We looked at guidelines from 8 synods surrounding us geographically.

A subcommittee from our group is working on an educational video on the Sabbatical and Family Leave policies of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod. We hope to complete this by the fall.

We also looked at surrounding synod guidelines on Worship Supply Compensation and made some changes for 2024. We also changed Interim Ministry monthly stipend slightly. We plan to look in the future at Years of Service stipends. The current \$400 amounts have been in place for many years and do not reflect cost of living changes.

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We are grateful for the retired pastors who continue to serve as interim pastors and as pulpit supplies throughout our synod. We are grateful for Carol Ruckert's diligence in arranging and finding pulpit supplies.

I would like to thank Rev. Peter D. Asplin and all our committee members for their work this year.

Respectfully submitted,

Herbert R. Guenther, Chairperson

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON STEWARDSHIP AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The committee continued with our efforts to build Mission Support by communicating the tools we already have made available.

We published our annual Devotional Booklet for Congregations to be used during the congregation council meetings and other leadership meetings. The devotions were focused on Caring for our Creation.

We planned a Fall "in person" event focused on telling our story. We invited other groups from within our Synod to join us in leading how people can share their story through care of creation, advocacy, authentic diversity, digital communications, etc., as well as reaching out within their own congregations including creating a Narrative Budget, crafting a Mission Statement, planned giving, etc. Unfortunately we had to postpone the event due to lack of interest. We are hoping people will be more willing to get together in person come Fall 2023.

We have started working with the Budget & Finance Committee on seeking new ways to create income for our Synod.

We are so very grateful for the faithful support of our congregations and individuals who support our Synod. Each of our congregations receive support from the Bishop, his Assistants, and our Synod staff at some point in the life of our church. Stepping up our giving to fill in the gaps left by congregations who are unable to financially support our Synod is exactly what we are called to do. Thank you. Thank you for being such a faithful people. Stewardship is about taking care of one another. Thanks for being good Stewards.

I want to thank our committee for the work and time they have invested in growing Stewardship and Mission Support in Southwestern PA. I want to begin by thanking two of our members who are no longer part of our group but have shared their creativity with us for many years; Pastor Nathaniel Christman and Pastor Susan Devine. We newly welcome Pastor Wayne Gillespie. I also give thanks for Mary Anne Novak, Pastor Erin Jones, Pastor Martin Galbraith, Ray Dittenhafer, and Pastor Melissa Stoller as our liaison to the Bishop. Their endless spark of ideas is exciting. Thank you.

Blessings,

Barbara Nugent, Chairperson

Members for the newly constituted Standing Committees will be appointed in July. The Standing Committees will be:

- **Care and Leadership for Congregations:** to coordinate those ministries in our synod that provide support to congregations through training, education, and collaboration so that they can effectively tell the Story of Jesus.
- **Care and Leadership for Rostered Ministers:** to coordinate those ministries in our synod that provide support to Rostered Ministers of our synod through professional development, by establishing policies and guidelines, and by promoting collegiality, renewal, and refreshment. Care of families of Rostered Ministers is an additional concern of this committee.
- **Care and Leadership for All Generations:** to coordinate those ministries in our synod that reach people in all stages of life through events, educational opportunities and support for established ministry partnerships.
- **Church In Society:** to coordinate those ministries in our synod that address our call to seek the common good by engaging social concerns, especially those addressed by church social statements and messages.
- **Church Throughout the World:** to connect, support, and advocate for those ministries that are in relationship with our synod, including national and international partners of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

The work of the committee is still currently on hold as we await the decision from the Tri-Synod Archives Committee on the future of the archives at Thiel, whether that ministry will continue or we will be joining with the Region 8 archives at Gettysburg.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. David Williams Hanssen, Chairperson

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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS

Members: the Rev. Brian Bennett, the Rev. Sara Irwin, the Rev. Torrey Johnson, the Rev. Erin Jones, the Rev. Alina Kanaski, the Rev. Jennifer Peters McCurry, the Rev. Frank Podolinski, the Rev. Linda Theophilus, the Rev. Kurt Kusserow (ex-officio)

Over the last year, the Ecumenical Affairs Committee has continued in our Synod's intentional relationships with AME and Methodist neighbors.

Following the initial relationship development of the Ecumenical Affairs Committee, members of our Synod have journeyed with the Rev. Dale Snyder and Bethel AME Church (Hill District, Pittsburgh) as they have advocated for reparations. Pastor Erin Jones, Pastor Ross Carmichael, and Bishop Kurt Kusserow have all offered visible leadership in Bethel's community education and advocacy efforts, though many others from our Synod have participated in relationship development, planning, networking, and educating. Bethel's growing coalition of leaders and allies have secured a Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Penguins. They are beginning a visioning process about how to faithfully tend to the property and financial resources that they have received, in ways that will minister to the community and its needs. For the Holy Spirit's profound witness of reconciliation and healing happening across racial, neighborhood, and denominational divisions, and for our Synod's opportunity to participate in the Spirit's work, we give God thanks and praise.

For several years, we have been in intentional conversation with leaders of the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. A joint subcommittee clarified many details about how our respective polities would be open to an orderly exchange of ministers. We were preparing to finalize this information and formally invite both Lutheran and Methodist pastors to consider the possibility of serving in a cross-denominational ministry site, but the internal, relational dynamics in the Methodist communion have delayed this goal.

Growing from these conversations, our committee invited our Synod to consider two opportunities to grow in relationship and mission with our neighboring United Methodist pastors and ministries. Drawing upon our ELCA tradition of a "God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday, we encouraged Lutheran and United Methodist congregations to collaborate in a one-day project in mission to their neighborhood. Later in the fall, two United Methodist-Lutheran Clergy Communities of Practice began meeting via Zoom, involving Lutheran and United Methodist pastors from Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Northwestern Pennsylvania (NWPA) Synod, and the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. Pastor Sara Irwin and Pastor Kimberly Greway jointly facilitate one group and Pastor Doug Dyson from NWPA Synod facilitates the other. Groups meet regularly for reflection and mutual support while following an ecumenically grounded syllabus of books, video, and podcast resources.

Our relationship with the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh continues, including our joint Christ Mass which was held at First Lutheran in Downtown Pittsburgh on April 4, 2023. As an expression of support for our downtown community, participants were encouraged to enjoy lunch with colleagues at local restaurants.

For deepening relationships and mission with our Methodist and Episcopal siblings in Christ, we give God thanks and praise.

At the Synod Council's invitation, our committee looked closely at several SWPA Synod Assembly documents that relate to Ecumenical Affairs. We considered whether to suggest that their language would be refreshed so that they may continue to enliven our Synod life, or whether they should be considered historical documents of a previous era in our Synod's life. This has led us to consider more proactive ways that Assembly legislation might better facilitate the presence and participation of colleagues from ecumenical partners. For the Word's guidance and inspiration for how we order our life together, we give God thanks and praise.

Our Synod, including its leaders, congregations, and members, remain invested in and blessed by the leadership and ministry of organizations like Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, the Christian Leaders Fellowship Breakfast, as well as the national Lutheran Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Network, on whose board I have served for several years. For these organizations that encourage us to grow in how we live our Christian faith in the world, we give God thanks and praise.

The 2023 Synod Assembly marks the completion of Pastor Brian Bennett and my time of serving on this committee. In the last year, our committee welcomed Pastor Sara Irwin and Pastor Frank Podolinski as new members. For spiritual gifts shared and received, and for our Synod's continuing ministry in relationship with both Christian and non-Christian neighbors, we give God thanks and praise.

It has been a joy!

The Rev. Jennifer Peters McCurry, Chairperson (Outgoing)

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONS AND BYLAWS

With the easing of restrictions on gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, congregations have once again begun to hold meetings and included constitution and bylaw approvals in those meetings. We have reviewed the constitutions of thirty congregations and they continue in the process. The constitutions of three congregations, Rehoboth, Baden; Lynnwood, Belle Vernon; and Zion's, Greensburg were approved. Two constitutions are awaiting congregation adoption,

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and three are awaiting ratification.

For congregations who are updating their constitutions, our synod website has the synod-personalized *Model Constitution for Congregations - 2022* posted, with the name of the synod already inserted in the appropriate blanks.

This committee participated in the Congregation Council Workshop at Christ's, Murrysville in February, providing attendees first-hand information on updating congregation constitutions.

The committee has also been working on updating the synod constitution, using the *Model Constitution for Synods, 2022*.

The synod staff has been helpful in our work, and we appreciate it.

The members of this committee are Pr. William L. Hauser, R. Brandon James, Pr. Larry Kemp, John B. Kepple, and Pr. William Schaefer. Contact any of these individuals if you would like to serve on this committee.

Finally, John Wilver, a long-time member of this committee, died this past January. We are grateful to him for his service, not only to this committee, but to the synod that he so dearly loved.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. William L. Hauser, Chairperson

REPORT OF THE MISSION ENDOWMENT FUND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Mission Endowment Fund Board administers two funds – the *Mission Endowment Fund* and the *Ethel L. Verney Fund*. These two funds were established by the Synod Council and are governed by policies and procedures approved by Synod Council. Application for grants are made available on the synod website from November through mid-January. Each February the board reviews all grant requests, makes grants, and reports them to Synod Council.

Mission Endowment Fund Grants: The board makes grants in the amount of 3% to 8% of the fund's market value. February 2023, the board approved 26 grants for a total of \$33,690. Grants were made for outreach to neighboring communities, congregational food pantries, community meals, geriatric care, devotional materials, supporting an American Sign Language initiative for worship, workday projects, supporting rostered leaders' free day of rest and renewal, and many other ministries.

Ethel L. Verney Fund Grants: This fund was established in 2014 as a result of a bequest from Ethel L. Verney for "relief and support of people living in poverty" on the territory of the synod. February 2023, the board approved 14 grants for a total of \$271,550. Grants were made for camperships, camp outreach projects, Grandpads for low-income seniors, used furniture ministry, food truck, community meals, food and personal care pantries, programs for children and youth, welcoming immigrants, a warming and homeless shelter, and other ministries.

The MEF board continues to acknowledge how our synod is blessed with these funds and how these blessings continue to be spread around our synod to help initiate new and creative ministries along with supporting many other significant ministries through our synod's congregations, agencies, camps, and rostered leaders. Most especially, we are thankful for the many people who are touched with the Gospel in these very real and tangible ways.

We are also grateful for the Rev. Melissa Stoller who helps to tell the story of many of these ministries you read of in the synod's *Wayfarer*. The board encourages you to think of possible ministries one of these grants could make possible in your setting.

Members of the board are: Philip Koch, Eric Kofmehl, Pamela McCurdy, Rolf Otterness, the Rev. Sarah Rossing, the Rev. Michael Sourwine (secretary). The Rev. Melissa Stoller and Synod Treasurer Gary Teti both serve as *ex officio* members. I am grateful for each member, their genuine commitment to the work of this board, and the good spirit in which we gather to serve.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Jeffrey Schock, Chairperson

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGET AND FINANCE

Over the last several months, the budget and finance committee, in consultation with Bp Kusserow, Pr Stoller, and Bob Cairns have met to discern and discuss the ways in which the synod budget for 2024 may reflect the goals and priorities of the synod as well as where the Spirit appears to be leading the work of the synod. As you look over the budget for 2024, you will notice the following highlights:

- Mission Support continues the prior years' trend of 1.36M. We give each of you thanks for your financial gifts and support of the synod, its work, and its partners.
- The Legacy Fund Principle of 24K which, in lieu of giving to mission support of the synod, stem from direct contributions by congregations/individuals to the Legacy Fund.
- The draw from the Thrivent Pooled Trust Fund (which stem from the sale proceeds of the synod building) of 103K is based on a 5.5% interest draw. While this is not considered to be a "conservative" interest percent in

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the withdrawal, it is a necessary one at this time.

- The Individual Contributions line item has been increased from prior years' to \$19K for 2024. In consultation with the Synod Stewardship Committee, Executive, and Synod Councils, the committee has discerned and looked into concrete avenues in which funds from individuals in congregations may be given to the synod in support of its work. These avenues will be explored beginning at the end of 2023 and into 2024.
- The Churchwide ELCA proportionate share (\$625,600) is 46% of mission support to the synod.
- The rent/utilities expense of 117K is still deemed lower and more cost-efficient for the synod to manage in comparison to maintenance of the old synod property.
- Synod Staff support expense has been adjusted slightly to reflect the new year.
- Synod Ministries and Grants amount remains unchanged as these continue to be priorities of the synod's mission and support of congregations, rostered leaders, and individual members. A new line item "Authentic Diversity and Justice Faith Formation" has been introduced for 2024 to go towards continuing education and special events.
- Grants to ministry partners remain unchanged from what was proposed in the budget for 2023. The budget and finance committee (along with synod council and executive committee) uplifts the current trend of giving towards building relationships/partnerships between synod ministries and individuals/congregations *in addition to* the yearly synod grants given to these partners in ministry.

As you look over the budget for 2024, you will notice a deficit remains. While not ideal, we believe that it speaks to the current reality of the synod and its funding. We remain hopeful that through developing new relationships with individuals in congregations will lead to new relationships and more sustainable giving. Overall, the committee continues to discern how best the synod may be good stewards of what God has given it to use. While there are challenges ahead with an ever-changing landscape, the committee is confident that by the grace of God we will be equipped and financially able to meet those challenges.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Martha C. R. McCreight, Chairperson

REPORT OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

The Governance Committee held its organizational meeting on April 20, 2022. Its primary purpose is to advance the work of refreshing our synod's Policy Manual. Committee members are Pr. Beth Clementson, Mr. Dennis Lane, Pr. JJ Lynn, Pr. William Schaefer, Ms. Holly Schmitt, and Bishop Kusserow.

The committee reviewed the bishop's sabbatical work to refresh the Policy Manual, receiving draft copies of the five groups into which items from the existing Policy Manual had been organized:

- Relational Agreements with Ministry Partners
- Synod Staff Employee Handbook
- Rostered Ministers Handbook
- Synod Finances Handbook
- Continuing Resolutions

The committee reviewed items that are out of date or that no longer reflect our practice, noting with appreciation the diligent and faithful work of those who have come before us and also the tremendous change in the nature of record-keeping that has taken place just in the last two decades.

On June 20 the committee reviewed the Relational Agreements section and asked the Synod Council to forward the agreements we have in place to various ministry partners for their review. Some of our ministry partners have replied with helpful updates and edits. Some relational agreements are still being reviewed.

On August 22 the committee reviewed the Continuing Resolutions and asked the Synod Council to approve edits and revisions and other updates at its September meeting. In time we hope to include the continuing resolutions in our synod's constitution and bylaws so that each continuing resolution will be placed in the section of the constitution to which it applies.

On December 8, and then again on February 9, 2023, the committee reviewed the Synod Finances Handbook. Recommended revisions were brought to the March, 2023 Synod Council meeting for action.

The committee will next address the Synod Employee Handbook. The existing policies were provided to the synod staff for their reflection and response in advance of the next Governance Committee meeting.

In creating the Governance Committee, the Synod Council anticipated that when this primary work is complete the committee would be charged with a different, ongoing task: to bring portions of our synod's policies to each meeting of the Synod Council to help inform our elected leaders about the various agreements, policies and continuing resolutions we have in place, and to review and revise them as needed.

Respectfully submitted,

Bishop Kurt Kusserow

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REPORTS OF THE AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS

REPORT OF UNITED LUTHERAN SEMINARY (Gettysburg + Philadelphia) *Unifying, Learning, Serving*

United Lutheran Seminary continues to build and sustain an affirming and diverse learning community of faithful, well-educated leaders skilled at guiding grace-filled encounters. Deeply rooted in the history of Lutheranism within Christianity, we witness to and participate in the work of God in the world through spiritual leadership and accompaniment, public advocacy, impactful worship, and care of neighbor.

In three years, we will be observing the bicentennial of our origins when Samuel Simon Schmucker founded the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg in part because its bucolic setting would ensure a place of study and contemplation free from the distractions of the world. Of course, our national narrative put an abrupt end to that concept in 1863, and shortly thereafter C.P. Krauth felt that the center of Lutheran theological learning would be better off in the growing city of Philadelphia. After 154 years and several failed attempts, the two campuses were re-united under the banner of United. This word is a lofty aspirational sentiment, given the fractious world in which we find ourselves.

The church of Christ is struggling to be seen against a backdrop of political drama and escalating tensions over our history, our climate, and our future. Nevertheless, it is a good time to be the church. It is a good time to be United under the banner of God's intended formation for all of us. The seminary has adapted quickly to the world emerging from Covid, providing new technologies and learning platforms that make theological education accessible to people as far away as Palestine, Ghana, and Myanmar. No longer bound by archaic notions of geographical limitations, our two campuses have broken down old barriers and assumptions, creating a new campus that is both geographical and without boundaries, offering our students to gather in person and virtually. Our faculty is working to provide learning opportunities in Guatemala, Germany, Palestine, and India.

In the past year we have dedicated a great deal of time and resources to developing a Strategic Plan for the seminary which gives us a wide-angle view of future aspirations to fulfill the needs of a changing church and world. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of the ELCA Mission Investment Fund and support from your synod, we will continue to offer degree programs at little or no cost to the student, allowing a higher ed. degree without crippling educational loan debt. In addition, our endowment allows us to apply funding to a new and exciting horizon of learning opportunities for rostered and lay folks.

The Strategic Plan recognizes that learning and formation never end. Our faith narrative is never fully formed. Sanctification is a life-long process full of fits and starts, mountaintops and valleys. This is the reason United Lutheran Seminary will continue to focus on building a lifelong community of learning through Kindling Faith, the Center for Sabbath Rest and Formation. Already in its first year of existence, Kindling Faith has created over sixty opportunities for learning across a wide range of topics, demographics, and learning platforms. While much of the programming takes place in a virtual setting, multi-day events take place on both United campuses, offering alums and lay folk the opportunity to spend time in a place apart where they can engage in learning and fellowship with like-minded colleagues and friends. Kindling Faith has a learning opportunity for you—simply go to uls.edu and click on "Learn" to see what we are offering.

Thank you for walking with us on this portion of our common journey. In the year ahead, I hope to see and meet more of you on the territory of your synod, on zoom, or on one of our beautiful historic campuses. Peace be with you.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, Seminary President

REPORT OF THIEL COLLEGE

Greetings from Thiel College,

I am delighted to report that the 2022-23 Academic year began with a marked increase in participation and enthusiasm on the part of our students, who are showing great resilience during the challenges that have faced us all over the last few years. It is this increased engagement, participation in groups, clubs and other offerings, and generally a new disposition on campus that reflects how far we have come in recent times. The return to a semblance of "normal" on our campus is also highlighting the very difficult and dedicated work of building and maintaining community during such a difficult time in our lives together since the Spring of 2020. In this expanding environment, we are able to be fully oriented to the future- and the future is bright!

Since its founding in 1866, Thiel College has been an institution that prepares a diverse student population for careers and lives of meaning and purpose. As we live out our current strategic plan, our focus remains on the student, and cultivating a deep reflection on meaning and purpose that enlivens and enriches each Thiel Graduate. I invite you to look at the entire strategic plan on our website at <https://www.thiel.edu/about/presidents-office/thiel-2026>, but in short, our focus on student success continues to be the hallmark of our activity, as we make investments across campus to provide a safe, inclusive, exciting and rigorous academic atmosphere for our students to explore themselves in the context of their expanding academic, social, and personal growth. As we build these capacities, our commitment to *Innovation and*

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Leadership, creating *Dynamic and Bold* initiatives and partnerships, broadening and deepening our *Reach and Impact* and making *Investments in Resources* of all kinds is keeping Thiel at the cutting edge of undergraduate and graduate education.

For example, one facet of these initiatives, “The Tomcat Way,” which is now in its third year of development, is beginning to pay dividends. As a framework for doing the thoughtful and demanding work of developing our students into the “Leaders the World Needs Now,” the Tomcat Way has found many expressions across campus, including in the Career Development office, Athletics, Greek organizations and more. This Spring we offered a leadership summit for Sophomores and Juniors that encouraged them to think and dig deeper into their own college experience and ask the question: “What kind of leader do I want to be?” This program and others like it has emboldened our students to see themselves as leaders in many different capacities, and they are taking the subject of their continued growth as leaders very seriously as many have begun new projects and on campus organizations.

In the broader context of Lutheran Higher education, we have been blessed with the willingness for deep involvement in resources developed by the ELCA to aid us and other Lutheran colleges in this work. I would personally like to lift up and thank our President, Susan Traverso, for her outstanding leadership and consistent involvement in NECU (Network for Evangelical Lutheran Colleges and Universities). In January, Dr. Traverso concluded her term as President of NECU having accomplished much, including the completion of a new strategic plan for the organization, navigating the transition and saying a fond and thankful farewell to Mark Wilhelm on his retirement, and installing the new Executive Director Lamont Wells. Our continued commitment to NECU and the wider witness of Lutheran Higher education is continuing to feed innovation and enhance our capacity to do our good work.

Closer to home, our campus saw the full return of our celebrated Con~Spirito concert series, which enables us to host a range of fabulous world-class music ensembles on campus, and offer these concerts to the Campus and Greenville communities free of charge. These concerts, held in our Johnson Memorial chapel, is an ongoing labor of love supported by the Johnson family, and has this year included the 2022 Fischhoff Award winning saxophone group “Mixed Media,” the sublime “Vox Lumina” and international stars the “Beijing Guitar Duo,” all this academic year.

We were also thrilled to host the 68th annual Thiel Christmas Festival this year, fully open to the public with resounding success! Under the direction of Nicolas and Brienne Samson, this holiday tradition includes carols and hot chocolate around the Bistro in the Howard Miller Student center, and concludes with the singing of selections from Handel’s “Messiah,” where Thiel’s Choir performed alongside our friends from the Youngstown State University Choral Department and members of the Greenville Symphony Orchestra.

This spring, and on into the summer, President Traverso and I will be touring churches in the SWPA and NWPA Synods, talking about the value of Lutheran Higher education in the 21st century, and speaking on the NECU resource “Rooted and Open,” which is a living document detailing the mission and vision of the 27 ELCA affiliated Colleges and Universities across the United States. As this document has had a huge influence on our work at Thiel, for the sake of our students we are excited to continue to foster a faithful conversation about Lutheran Higher Education with all of our stakeholders, especially the individual congregations in our region that support us. If you would like to be part of that tour this Summer, please contact Thiel’s Campus Ministry office.

I am truly amazed at the work we have done this year, and how well we have as an institution met the challenges of the past few years with renewed boldness and clear vision for the future. No one deserves more credit for this than our amazing and caring staff and faculty. The care our students receive from these amazing people is another great reason why Thiel should be in the conversation for any family looking for an outstanding college experience in our region.

For ongoing information about the happenings at Thiel College, I invite you to stay connected and read stories of student achievement and success on social media throughout the year. You can follow us on Twitter (www.twitter.com/thielcollege), “like” us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/thielcollege), YouTube (www.youtube.com/thielcollege) or visit our website at www.thiel.edu.

In closing, I once again extend my gratitude to the congregations of the **Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod**. You are among our most important supporters, and we are a stronger institution thanks to our relationship with you. We are proud and thankful for your Synod’s continuing support of our institution and our spiritual life here!

In Christ,

The Rev. Brian Riddle, Campus Pastor

REPORT OF BETHESDA LUTHERAN SERVICES

Bethesda Lutheran Services continues to fulfill our mission of being a Christian ministry that provides promising futures to children, youth and families; more than 3000 each day. We take a great deal of pride in the programs and services we provide. Yet we never rest on our past success. We are always looking for ways to improve as well as for new ways to reach the people who need us the most.

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The newest residence facility, Wise Hall, opened in February. The older residential facilities consisted of pre-fabricated building, which have been removed; or redesigned spaces in a century-old building. With the transfer in 2021 to specialized settings, we knew it was clearly time for something new. Wise Hall is home to two different programs. The first program, the Ida May Right Specialized Setting, is home to 10 youth. Their space includes a full kitchen where staff work with the girls to teach basic cooking skills. It also includes full laundry facilities, a large common room, a classroom/meeting space, a therapist's office and a staff office. Most importantly, perhaps, is that each youth has their own bedroom. We have learned over the years that, being away from home is difficult enough and it is made more difficult without a space to call your own. There have been so many comments from the youth that having their own room has helped them during their transition here.

Wise Hall is also home to the Yeany Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF). The space for this program is exactly the same as the space for the Ida May Right Specialized Program. The PRTF is an intensive mental health program that works with youth who have severe mental health issues. Their treatment consists of individual and family therapy. Family therapy is so important that it is a condition of acceptance into the program.

Wise Hall also has a common area which separates the two programs. This space is used for visitation space and some program activities. Currently, a gymnasium / sport court is being added. This space will be used by all of the youth we serve in Meadville.

Several years ago, we added a new maintenance building to our campus. This was a much-needed addition to the maintenance department. This left the old maintenance space sitting empty. Due to its proximity to the swimming pool, it was decided that the building could be turned into something that included new changing rooms for the pool. The final outcome is absolutely amazing and the new favorite spot on our Meadville campus. There is a game room that includes air hockey, a pin ball machine and an arcade game; a meeting room and a 21-seat movie theater complete with theater sound and seating. This building is used for family visits, movie and game nights and even staff trainings and meetings.

Meadville is only one part of our agency's "footprint." We have two locations in Erie, PA. The first is our Leadership Center. This is home to our Erie County Independent Living Program (ECILP). It is also home to the ILP Snack Shack which is a Youth Driven Business (YDB). The Snack Shack owns and operates a food truck. The food-truck employs youth in the ECILP program. Typically, at the end of the season, the food truck is moved to a storage space. In 2022, Bethesda got the funding to build a garage to store the truck. It was decided that, because the money came from Erie County, it was fitting to build a garage for the food truck. This way, we eliminate the storage fees and keep the truck on our property. It will be more convenient for the employees to move supplies to the truck. The garage is designed with doors on each end so it can be driven right into the garage and not backed in.

Another thing that we focus on are the vehicles that we use to transport the children and youth we serve to recreational outings, to the doctor and to various other places. Several years ago, our facilities director began creating a capital improvement plan. In that plan, he outlines what upgrades need to happen in the upcoming year. He also began to plan for the rotation of our agency vehicles. In 2022, we added three new vehicles to our fleet. Our staff and our youth all take pride in the vehicles and focus on keeping them in great condition.

These are a few of the major changes that occurred to the facilities at Bethesda Lutheran Services in 2022. We are grateful for the continued support of the members of the Southwest Lutheran Synod. I would like to extend an invitation for you to visit our campus and see all that is happening.

Respectfully submitted,

George Trauner, CEO

REPORT OF GLADE RUN LUTHERAN SERVICES

Greetings and gratitude from Glade Run Lutheran Services. This past year has seen record growth both programmatically and physically for our historic agency. We're pleased to have this opportunity to share with you our successes and ongoing expansion that occurred during our 2021-22 fiscal year.

- **Acute Partial Hospitalization** served 113 youth
- **Blended Case Management** served 223 individuals
- **Community Monitoring** served 743 individuals (new)
- **Family Based Services** served 113 individuals
- **Family Wellness Program** served 7 families
- **Forensic Support Services Program** served 87 individuals
- **Glade Run Adventures** served 664 individuals through educational classes, therapeutic lessons, equine assisted activities and more.
- **Independent Living Experience** served 45 young adults
- **Intensive Behavioral Health Services** served 267 individuals
- **Jeremiah Village Support** served 50 individuals
- **Psychiatric Mobile Medication** served 52 individuals

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- **Outpatient Services (including Mental Health Partnerships and Therapeutic Classrooms)** served 2,523 individuals
- **St. Stephen's Lutheran Academies** served 299 students through K-12 education, Extended School Year, Day Treatment and Transitions
- **EPIC (Empowering People in Communities) Psychiatric Rehabilitation** served 159
- **Counties served:** 18
- **School districts served:** 59

During the past fiscal year, we had the opportunity to expand our physical presence in Butler County with the purchase of the former Grace at Calvary Lutheran Church in downtown Butler. The new Grace Community Wellness Center immediately opened a Community Monitoring Program and has continued to develop new offerings to better serve our neighbors.

Butler was not the only county to see growth during 2021-22. School based mental health continues to expand throughout Western PA, providing students access to supports within public, private and charter schools. Summer programming experienced record growth with full camp sessions, and our innovative Independent Living Experience also saw record attendance. During this time, Glade Run was also the recipient of *Butler County Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year* award – an honor we cherish – and multiple other awards. Truly, 2021-22 was a year that we were able to fulfill and expand our mission, and we're grateful for our partners who allow us to help others. In addition to progress on our strategic plan goals and the launch of new programming, 2021-22 agency accomplishments and highlights include:

- Awarded the 2022 Butler County Chamber of Commerce **Business of the Year Award**
- Named a **2022 Community Champion** by the Pittsburgh North Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Glade Run was named as one of the region's **Largest Health and Social Service Organizations** by the Pittsburgh Business Times
- Glade Run Lutheran Services was named as a **2022 Top Nonprofit** by GreatNonprofits
- Purchased the former Grace at Calvary Lutheran Church and immediately launched new and needed programming from the site. These new offerings that began during the fiscal year included a robust **Community Monitoring** program.
- Demand for summer programming, including **Glade Run Adventures summer camps and Independent Living Experience** events for transitioning young adults, led to full rosters and wait lists.
- Successfully held several special events to introduce Glade Run to our communities and garner needs supports and resources, including the **Highmark Walk**, our signature **Family Food Truck Festival**, and **Polar Express** events.
- Provided additional emergency and basic needs support to hundreds of individuals and families through the **Good Neighbor** and **Winnie McGee Funds**
- Conducted successful **Back to School** and **Christmas Angel** in kind drives with the assistance of a number of our Lutheran congregations
- **School Based Mental Health Partnerships**, which allows public and private schools to have a licensed therapist on staff in the school building, continued its growth with new partnerships throughout the tri-county area

As the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to recede in our rearview mirror, the road ahead continues to blossom with opportunity. We remain grateful for the support of our Lutheran congregations and the Southwestern PA Synod and the Lutheran congregations that support us in prayer and gifts of time, talent and treasure.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven T. Green, MA.

President/CEO, Glade Run Lutheran Services

REPORT OF LUTHERAN SENIORLIFE

In 2022, Lutheran SeniorLife continued to deliver, transform and elevate its services by expanding our network, forging new relationships and celebrating our successes. Most importantly, we remained steadfast in our mission of serving, and valued our ongoing relationship with the ELCA and members of the congregations.

LIFE (Living Independence for the Elderly)

In 2022, LIFE received its license to open the first of two "small homes" in the City of Butler. The small homes program is a function of LIFE Butler County, owned and operated as a partnership between Butler Health System and Lutheran SeniorLife. The handicap-accessible home is designed for low income, frail older adults, and can accommodate up to six, Medicaid-eligible residents. It comes equipped with appliances, an open floor plan as well as a large great room opening up to a kitchen and dining area. Residents also have access to the services offered at LIFE Butler County including transportation, meals, social activities, physical and occupational therapy as well as routine doctor examinations. With the addition of the small homes, and access to LIFE Butler County, residents are able to remain active, and part of their community.

Passavant Community

With the introduction of Rosey the Robot, the Passavant Community continued its efforts in creating a life affirming culture with residents and team members in the Baron's Inn.

Following a naming contest, the residents decided to name it Rosey, after the 60s television, cartoon series—The

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Jetsons. Rosey is an all-in-one solution for carrying out essential food services while combatting labor shortages. Produced by Bear Robotics, Rosey comes equipped with radar detectors and multiple cameras for navigation, enabling her to maneuver relatively easily between tables and chairs.

Rosey works closely with servers to deliver food and drink trays to the residents. By doing so, it helps eliminate the fatigue servers may experience while lifting heavy trays throughout the meal. It also provides the servers more time to interact and address the needs and desires of the residents they are serving. Rosey is currently the only robot certified by the National Restaurant Association.

St. John Community

It has been a little more than a year, since the St. John Community broke ground to expand its mission by offering personal care and residential living options on campus. The primary objective is to serve individuals in the middle-income segment of our community. In 2022, the St. John Community realized the completion of the project and began its marketing efforts. Built on its reputation of delivering quality care for over 100 years, the St. John Community now offers 39 new personal care apartments – Edgewood Grove – and 27 new residential (independent) living apartments through The Residence at St. John.

Rehabilitation Services

In the spring of 2022, the Rehabilitation Services of Lutheran SeniorLife expanded its offerings with the implementation of urban poles across the system as a way to improve the overall health and safety of patients and residents. Nordic walking or also referred to as “urban poles” is a low-impact, full-body workout. It combines cardiovascular exercise with a vigorous muscle workout for your shoulders, arms, core, and legs. The use of urban poles provides extra support to help with stability, balance, and confidence, while improving the overall health, safety and fitness of our residents, participants and patients.

Visiting Nurses Association of Western Pennsylvania

In 2022, Lutheran SeniorLife VNA (Visiting Nurses Association) of Western Pennsylvania provided a total of 44,465 home health visits and 9,626 hospice visits to patients in Armstrong, Butler, Lawrence and parts of the surrounding counties. In addition to in-person visits, and the in-home delivery of COVID 19 vaccines, nurses at the VNA conducted 1,207 virtual, telehealth nursing, and therapy visits.

Lutheran Service Society

In 2022, Lutheran Service Society (LSS) provided adoption and foster care services to approximately 75 children and their families in Western Pennsylvania. LSS also provided life-engaging services to approximately 2,000 participants at the Center at the Mall and the PrimeTime senior centers. In addition, the Beaver County Meals on Wheels program delivered 44,196 meals to low income seniors throughout the county thanks to the financial support of the Beaver County Office on Aging and the United Way of Beaver County.

The Foundation

The Lutheran SeniorLife Foundation embarked on a two-year capital campaign to raise funds for St. John Community expansion project with the goal of raising \$750,000. To date, the Foundation has raised nearly \$725,000. The campaign will continue through end of 2023. Furthermore, in the fall of 2022, the Foundation celebrated 30 years of championing our causes by collecting donor gifts in support of our mission of serving. The evening included a social hour, dinner, entertainment and a silent auction with all funds raised in support of the Lutheran SeniorLife Mission Fund. Because of the generosity of our friends, partners and sponsors, we are able to uplift our residents, participants and patients with the programs and services they need to live life abundantly.

By year's end, Lutheran SeniorLife expanded its network, forged new relationships and celebrated its mission to continually transform and elevate health, wellness, and social services while fostering an Abundant Life® for those we serve and those who serve.

Respectfully submitted,

David Fenogletto, President & CEO

REPORT OF LUTHERAN SERVICE SOCIETY

Adoption and Permanency Services

At the completion of 2022, the Lutheran Service Society Children and Family Services program (Adoption and Foster Care) had completed 102 years of uninterrupted service. Over the past decade, the program has extended its service area to include Westmoreland, Fayette, Greene, Allegheny, Lawrence, Indiana, and Beaver counties. During this same time, the program has grown by approximately 90% supporting all forms of permanency and growing families.

Lutheran Service Society (LSS) serves children and families at all stages of the adoption or foster care process. Services include private infant adoptions, older child adoptions, foster care services, post-adoption services, and training. Lutheran Service Society is committed to continuing its legacy of supporting permanency in all facets as well as extended services in order to support the needs of the children and families we serve.

The program completed just over 150 Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN), foster, and private services in 2022, serving approximately 75 children and their families. There were four children in the Lutheran Service Society foster care program—in which, one of the four children has been adopted, while the three remaining children were preparing for adoption.

Affordable Housing Program for Senior Citizens

In 2022, the Lutheran Service Society managed five LSS HUD housing properties and one Lutheran SeniorLife

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apartment building encompassing 217 apartments. Our properties provide quality rental housing solutions for low to moderate-income senior citizens in six western Pennsylvania counties including, Beaver, Butler, Crawford, Erie, Mercer, and Venango. This area of Lutheran Service Society's ministry expands our outreach mission into the northwestern corridor of Pennsylvania.

Lutheran Village in Chippewa, PA
Von Bora Place in Titusville, PA
Luther Place in Oil City, PA
Martin's Landing in Girard, PA
Lutheran Village in Jamestown, PA
Luther Court in Zelienople, PA (LSL property managed by LSS)

Beaver County Meals On Wheels

The Meals on Wheels program continues to be a lifeline for older adults with travel limitations and a need to remain in their homes. At the core of the program are the dedicated staff and volunteers, who selflessly serve their neighbors throughout Beaver County. In 2022, this dedicated group of individuals delivered 44,196 meals to an average of 172 clients per month. This is an increase in over 15,000 meals delivered compared to 2021. The staff and volunteers also delivered hot turkey meals on Thanksgiving Day and hot ham meals on Christmas Day for homebound clients during the holidays.

Senior Centers

Throughout 2022, the Primetime and CATM senior centers were operating at full capacity.

The staff of the PrimeTime Center in Bellevue launched a new exercise program with a well-respected exercise guru from the Pittsburgh area. His energy draws in participants eager to exercise two times a week with approximately 25 participants each time.

The Primetime Center has seen an increase in attendees and participation, which has excelled the program to Tier II of the county contract level, which offers an increase in county funds to support the program. The Primetime Senior Center signed up 58 new members in 2022, and continues to partner with Bona Fide Bellevue for the community herb garden and hosts fun events all year long. In 2022, the program had approximately 137 unduplicated participants every six months.

The Center at the Mall continues to be a staple at the Beaver Valley Mall hosting all sorts of events throughout the year. The Mother's Day Tea, Spaghetti dinners, trips, and Veterans Day celebrations are just a few of the events that draw big crowds. For the year, the program had approximately 1,800 unduplicated participants and signed up 464 new members.

Lutheran Service Society is dedicated to serving, transforming, and delivering health and social services with dignity, respect, and compassion.

Respectfully submitted,
Sarah Israel, Administrator

REPORT OF AGAPÉ MINISTRY

Agape Ministry (formerly the Ohio Valley Lutheran Bible Camp Association) is, like many congregations and other organizations, struggling to emerge from the effects of Covid. With no summer camp in 2020, a partial schedule for a greatly reduced number of campers, and no camp in 2022 due to the resignation and departure of the Program Director and Executive Director by early 2022 and the return of Pastor Wayne Harrison as Interim Executive Director in May. There simply was not enough time to put a program together, find staff, and get campers to register.

But that does not mean nothing has been happening. A full camp schedule is planned for 2023, and an expanded year-round retreat season will kick off in the Fall. As important, however, is that in these intervening months the Board of Directors undertook the process of developing a Strategic Plan for the next 3-5 years. There are 5 goals Agape will be focusing on:

- A. Examine our facility and infrastructure needs in order to develop the programs and meet the needs of the camp and retreat center of the future and develop a Master Plan.
- B. Develop a full-service year-round program to reach all ages and demographics.
- C. Establish a firm foundation for the management and operation of Agape Ministry in: *Staffing, *Board Recruitment and Development, *Volunteers, *Committees
- D. Devise a comprehensive strategy(ies) for financial stability and sustainability.
- E. Devise a written marketing strategy to introduce Agape Ministry to congregations, Synods and other venues.

In order to evaluate whether steps proposed for the ministry are appropriate, the Mission Statement and Core Values were examined and revised as follows:

Mission Statement:

As a community grounded in God's unconditional love, we challenge and nurture ALL God's people to achieve their full potential physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

*With Christ as our Cornerstone, our **Core Values** in this mission are:*

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Community Building (Romans 12:5)

Hospitality for all (Leviticus 19:34)

Relationships (I Thessalonians 5:11a)

Inclusive Diversity (Galatians 3:28)

Safety (Isaiah 28:4)

Trustworthy Stewards of God's gifts (Luke 16:10)

Romans 12:5 So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Leviticus 19:34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Isaiah 25:4a You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in their distress, a shelter from the storm, and a shade from the heat.

Luke 16:10 Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

On a personal note, it is a pleasure for me to return to the Southwest Pennsylvania Synod and now rostered here. As of January 1, I began serving as the Executive Director as Agape seeks to move to stability in leadership as we move forward in the ministry to which God has called us. There are many challenges ahead, but together and with God's help, we will accomplish the tasks before us.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Wayne Harrison, Executive Director

REPORT OF LUTHERLYN

Greetings from Lutherlyn!

It has been a great year at Lutherlyn and we are so thankful for the support that the SWPA Synod, the NWPA Synod, and each of the congregations in those synods extends to Lutherlyn. 2023 is Lutherlyn's 75th anniversary; for 75 years the Lutheran congregations of Western Pennsylvania and Lutherlyn have been partners in ministry.

Lutherlyn is a God-given place to be accepted, challenged, and sent out into the world to make a difference. Lutherlyn serves around 15,000 people each year through 5 core areas of ministry: Summer Camp, Retreats/Events, the Lutherlyn Environmental Education Program, the Lutherlyn Equestrian Center, and Adventure Programs. Lutherlyn, with the help of many faithful donors, maintains the un-broken promise that no child is turned away from a week of camp for financial reasons.

Summer Camp 2022 was a wonderful return to a more "normal" camp routine. 700 campers experienced life-changing adventures in faith at Lutherlyn last summer. Thanks to an Ethel Verney grant and camper's offering from their camp store accounts, Lutherlyn's campers made 800 hygiene kits for those experiencing homelessness in Western PA. Unfortunately, like many camps across the country, we had to reduce our capacity for the summer of 2022 and cancel our "Lutherlyn on Location" (Day Camp) program due to a staffing shortage. Registration for the summer of 2023 is going great and several programs are full. Our theme for the summer of 2023 is "Holy Trinity, Wholly Love." Hiring summer staff continues to be a challenge. We are working hard to increase pay, work with applicants to accommodate other summer commitments, and work with schools to allow for internship credit while working at Lutherlyn. Your help would be greatly appreciated; not only in encouraging kids to come to summer camp, but also in pointing out the gifts that you see in young people and encouraging them to consider working at Lutherlyn when they are 17 or older.

The **Building for the Future** Capital Campaign is off to a great start. As of March 20, 2023, \$1.3 million of the \$2 million goal is already pledged. We have received enough donations to proceed with the first project of the campaign; in the fall of 2023, the Amphitheater will have a complete renovation. You are invited to join us for the final worship service in the current Amphitheater on August 6 at 3:30pm. We are now in the congregation phase of the **Building for the Future** Campaign. Hopefully, your congregation has already been approached about participating in this campaign. If not, please anticipate contact from a campaign volunteer in the fall. Thank you to all the congregations who have already participated in this important effort to improve Lutherlyn's facilities for the future!

An exciting possibility presented itself to Lutherlyn this past year. We entered into an agreement with a solar energy company to possibly lease approximately 100 acres of Lutherlyn's land for a solar farm (acres that are currently farmed – not program space). **At this point, this is a future possibility.** The solar company is in the permitting process with the state and power companies. Lutherlyn has signed an agreement to proceed if all permits are obtained and the solar company chooses to proceed. We anticipate a more definitive answer in 2024. We believe a solar farm is compatible with Lutherlyn's Environmental Impact Statement and will be used as a teaching tool in our Environmental Education Program. We are excited about this possibility and will provide updates as this process progresses.

Again, thank you for being Lutherlyn's partner in ministry. Lutherlyn is your camp; if there are ways that we can better

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serve you or your congregation, please reach out to me. This report is a brief summary of some of what is happening at camp, please visit www.lutherlyn.com to see the complete calendar and details about everything happening at Lutherlyn. I hope to see you at camp sometime soon!

Your Partner in Ministry,
Deacon Deb Roberts, Executive Director

REPORT OF LUTHERAN CAMPUS MINISTRY IN GREATER PITTSBURGH

Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace in the name of Christ Jesus, our Savior and surest hope.

The campus ministry continues its faithful ministry to the university communities of Pitt, Carnegie Mellon, Chatham and Carlow. Returning from pandemic restrictions, the student groups are in the process of rebuilding to their pre-pandemic levels. The inability to meet in person and recruit for two years has reduced those groups' numbers. However, the numbers of participants continue to rise.

A pleasant addition to our ministry is the presence of seminarians from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. In the 2021-2022 academic year, Kori Robbins, PC(USA), worked with us as a field education student. Wonderfully, Kori graduated and was ordained to be the pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Mineral Ridge, OH. In the spring semester of 2023, Nicole Schilder is working with us to gain experience in chaplaincy and campus ministry. Both students have added immensely to the ministry and honed their pastoral skills in the meantime.

In the fall of 2022, the campus ministry hosted the art exhibit Truth Be Told, an art exhibit assembled by polymer clay artists who began gathering after the murder of George Floyd, and met and built relationships for a year before creating this exhibit. Fourteen women, seven Black women and seven white women, each reflected on a word around race and crafted a 10-inch square piece with polymer clay. The campus ministry obtained a grant from the Philip N. Knutson Endowment for Lutheran Campus Ministry to help with this exhibit to engage the academic community in important conversations for higher education. Individuals and groups came to view the exhibit during that semester.

On March 11, 2023, the Pittsburgh Compline Choir, a ministry of the Lutheran Campus Ministry in Greater Pittsburgh, in partnership with First Lutheran Church on Grant St., held a service honoring the life of the founding director, John W. Becker. The Pittsburgh Compline Choir was joined by Una Voce, the Chamber Choir of Seton Hill University. It was a truly special evening. Compline continues to be held every Sunday of the academic term at Pitt, in Heinz Memorial Chapel, 8:00 p.m.

The actions of the 2022 Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly, reducing the mission support for the 2023 year by one third from the previous year, created an urgent scenario for the campus ministry. However the board and the campus pastor responded by putting together a Fundraising Development Strategy that will help create an annual fundraising plan that will help secure a full-time campus ministry now and into the future. While this urgency is great, the existence of such a plan has allowed us to face the year with hope and excitement. The promise that God will provide continues to ring true for us.

The campus ministry has been fortunate to hold Sunday morning worship services for years. However, to build relationships with congregations, worship has been moved to Thursday evenings following the midweek meal and also on Sunday evenings. Both services are now held in the Lutheran University Center. Compline remains on Sunday evenings at 8:00 p.m. Pastor Brian is available to visit congregations on Sunday morning to share a temple talk, and always offers to preach, and hold an adult forum if one is taking place.

The board is planning for more connection and ways to build relationships. Please keep an eye out for more details about events and happenings as exciting stories and news from the campus ministry continue to be told.

The board is in need of board and committee members who want to participate in the exciting work that helps support and continue the campus ministry. If you are interested or know someone who might be, please talk with Pastor Brian, campus pastor, or Sam Sesti, board chair, for more information.

The Lutheran Campus Ministry in Greater Pittsburgh continues to trust in the source of all good things, hopeful for the continued mission to the university communities, working to create a community centered on Jesus' love for all to send out faithful leaders.

Respectfully submitted,
The Rev. Brian O. Bennett, Campus Pastor/Executive Director
Lutheran Campus Ministry in Greater Pittsburgh

REPORT OF THE SYNODICAL ORGANIZATION

REPORT OF WOMEN OF THE ELCA of SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

This past year has been a busy one for the Women of the ELCA here in Southwest PA. First and foremost is that many of our gatherings have been in person. There is a sense of joy at getting back to a feeling of normalcy and that was evident at the annual retreat at Camp Lutherlyn where we joined with our Sisters in Christ from Northwest PA. We may have been few in number, but the camaraderie was contagious.

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In-gatherings took place on both the local and synodical levels to support our Designated Outreach for 2022, “New Start Furniture Ministry”. Our women donated \$4,141.25 towards helping those who need furniture and other items to get back on their feet. The Designated Outreach for 2023 is TryLife Center in Lower Burrell. This organization cares for the health of families from pregnancy to birth until a child is three years of age. The main program offers free education, peer counseling, material assistance, community referrals, etc.

There was a churchwide leadership event held in mid-February via Zoom entitled, “Living Faithful – Called and Thriving”. Over 100 women joined in this 2-day event to hear how God is preparing us now for what is ahead.

As I write this, our Women of the ELCA are looking ahead to cluster events (both via Zoom and in person) for the spring, a leadership event at Camp Lutherlyn in April and our annual NWPA/SWPA retreat at Camp Lutherlyn in late fall. The Women of the ELCA will also be having a Triennial Convention and Gathering in Phoenix, AZ in September 2023. How exciting to be able to join with over 3000 other faith-filled women from across the United States!!

Respectfully submitted,
Barb Guenther, President
Southwestern Pennsylvania Women of the ELCA

REPORTS OF OTHER SYNODICALLY RELATED UNITS

REPORT OF LUTHERAN ADVOCACY MINISTRY IN PENNSYLVANIA

In response to God’s love in Jesus Christ, we advocate for wise and just public policies in Pennsylvania that promote the common good. Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania is a shared ministry of seven Pennsylvania synods, ELCA Service and Justice, and Pennsylvania ELCA agencies and institutions. Through LAMPa, Lutherans called to be part of God’s healing and reconciling mission in the world are supported to voice their faith convictions in the public square with and on behalf of our most vulnerable neighbors and the world we share, while seeking to create a more just Commonwealth.

Since last year’s assembly, LAMPa celebrated 43 years of advocacy ministry that supported and deepened your congregational efforts to address hunger, poverty, health care, civic engagement, housing and homelessness, and care for creation. Our decades of advocacy on these issues have enabled us to lift up the needs of your ministries and communities to secure emergency food, shelter and access to health care as the nation emerged from pandemic. In the midst of a nationwide housing crisis, your advocacy through LAMPa lifted the cap on funding for the state housing trust fund, which Lutherans helped create more than a decade ago, and won passage of a Whole-Home Repairs law, a first-of-its kind program that will help maintain and improve the state’s aging housing stock, increase energy efficiency, and help keep Pennsylvanians in their homes -- particularly important to preserving generational wealth for communities that have experienced racial discrimination in housing and lending. Your care for creation was turned into bipartisan support for investments in environmental conservation and protection for waterways (and the drinking water we draw from them) at a time when one third of the state’s streams have been deemed impaired.

In its work of equipping disciples, growing leaders and supporting vital congregations, LAMPa assisted with the Homeless Remembrance Blanket Project on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol, soliciting and delivering invitations from ELCA-affiliated ministries around the country (including this synod) to members of Congress to visit and learn from their work with neighbors experiencing homelessness. LAMPa continues to educate faithful advocates through our website, e-news and other resources, as well as teaching. LAMPa supports congregations in adding advocacy to their service on God’s work. Our hands, Sunday, and would welcome the opportunity to help SWPA Synod ministries take their service another step toward justice by adding advocacy. LAMPa staff continues to serve in consultation to the ELCA task force developing the social statement on Faith and Civic Life, and urges all to devote time to the newly released study and to offer feedback.

To receive action alerts that allow you to act from your faith on developing policy, or to learn how LAMPa can help your congregation deepen its ministry of service and accompaniment with public witness, send a note to LAMPa@LutheranAdvocacyPA.org.

We give thanks to God for you and for the support of our Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Policy Council representatives, Jim Needles and the Rev. Erin Jones.

With deep gratitude for all the ways in which you support LAMPa’s ministry,

Respectfully submitted,
Tracey DePasquale
Director, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA

REPORT OF REGION 7 & 8 CANDIDACY

Gracious God, we thank you for the new life you give us through holy baptism. Especially, we ask you to bless those gathered in Synod Assembly and all who are discerning a call to rostered ministry. Continue to strengthen them with the Holy Spirit, and increase in them your gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and

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might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (adapted from Anniversary of a Baptism, ELW Pastoral Care, p.131)

Grace to you and peace as you gather in assembly. Thank you for answering the call to serve the church by attending to the work we do together. Thank you also for taking time to read this report about our shared ministry of Candidacy and First Call in Regions 7 and 8.

What is Candidacy? It is the process of formation and discernment that prepares someone considering a call to be a deacon or pastor in the ELCA. It is the avenue by which a candidate is evaluated for public service in the church in partnership with home congregations, seminaries, churchwide, and synods. Your Synod Candidacy Committee works confidentially to accompany and prepare potential candidates for ordained ministry through prayerful discernment, intentional conversation, and thoughtful interviewing. They act to make decisions regarding a person's readiness for ordained ministry.

What is First Call? Near the end of candidacy, one may be approved for ordination. As a candidate approaches approval, a potential pastor or deacon enters a process where bishops meet by region to discern and determine in which synod God might be calling that candidate to serve.

What is my role? In my call as a deployed staff person of the ELCA, I listen to people share their sense of how God might be calling them to serve. I assist committees in their prayerful deliberation of candidates and provide education about candidacy and the first call process. In September 2023, candidacy committee members will have the opportunity to participate in a national online candidacy summit.

You are a part of this ministry. When you pray for people who are considering a call to ordained ministry; when you pray for your bishop, synod staff, and other leaders; when you ask a young person or a retiree or your lay Bible study leader if they have ever considered being a pastor or a deacon, you are a part of candidacy ministry.

How can you learn more about Candidacy?

- To learn more about the current candidacy process, go to elca.org/resources/candidacy. There are many materials for those considering becoming a pastor or deacon. I particularly recommend a discernment document, "Called to Lead" as a guide for considering the many ways a person's baptismal call might be lived out in the world.
- We have also recently launched a new online discernment tool at www.journi.faith for anyone who is interested in exploring how their gifts for ministry can be used in the church and beyond.
- In March 2022, a Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group convened for the purpose of formally reviewing the entire candidacy process. You can learn more about the progress of the Working Group at [ELCA.org/our-work/leadership/candidacy-leadership-development](https://elca.org/our-work/leadership/candidacy-leadership-development)

Thank you for your synod's participation in this shared ministry and for the privilege to serve among you.

In Christ,

The Rev. A. Rebecca Resch
Candidacy and Leadership Manager, Regions 7 & 8

REPORT OF REGION 8 STEERING COMMITTEE

The synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are grouped in regions as a partnership between groups of synods and the churchwide organization for the purpose of exercising mutual responsibilities. According to the ELCA Constitution, the functions of regions shall be a means for coordinated responses by synods and the churchwide organization to mission and program opportunities within the region.

Region 8, of which we are part, includes the following synods: Northwestern Pennsylvania, Southwestern Pennsylvania, Allegheny, Lower Susquehanna, Upper Susquehanna, Delaware-Maryland, Metropolitan Washington DC, West Virginia-Western Maryland.

The Region 8 Steering committee consists of the bishops and vice presidents of the eight synods. The committee meets annually and on occasion more often when need arises. The Committee met in December, 2022 at Sequanota Lutheran Camp and Conference Center in the Allegheny Synod. The committee discussed business and strengthened ties as a region, considering our joint work and shared finances. The accounts for Region 8 are managed at the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod office. The committee has been faithfully chaired by John Auger, vice president of the Delaware-Maryland Synod. His term came to an end in 2022. Jen Lau, vice president of the Lower Susquehanna Synod, was elected chair of the steering committee.

Region 8 employs the Rev. Beth Martini in a part-time position of Region 8 Coordinator of Shared Ministries. Rev. Martini is the point person for the First Call Theological Education (FCTE) retreat held annually in November. This retreat welcomes all ministers for continuing education and support in the first three years following ordination. Additionally, the Rev. Martini carries out the desires of the Steering Committee, such as encouraging communications and sharing of continuing education opportunities.

The Region 8 Steering Committee will meet again at Sequanota in September, 2023.

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Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Beth Martini, Coordinator, Region 8 Shared Ministries
John Auger, Chair, Region 8 Steering Committee in 2022
Jen Lau, Chair, Region 8 Steering Committee in 2023

REPORT OF CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATES OF SOUTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA

Dear friends of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod,

If indeed “two are better than one,” as we read in Ecclesiastes in this Synod Assembly’s scriptural motto, then surely twenty-eight are better still!

Through the Synod’s longstanding membership in Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, you are partners in ministry with twenty-seven other regional church bodies: diverse Christian churches that are Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox; Black and white; progressive and conservative; rural and urban. Guided by our core values of collegiality, collaboration, communication, and connectedness, our member churches come together as a unifying voice for the mission of the Gospel and the wholeness of our communities.

I am so grateful for the Synod’s faithfulness to this mission. Your financial partnership helps to sustain our ministries. Bishop Kusserow’s leadership in our Council of Bishops & Judicatory Executives and Executive Committee provides a steady voice of committed experience, welcoming new colleagues to the table and grounding our institutional memory. I am also grateful for the creative work of the Synod’s Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs committee, and the many clergy and lay people of the Synod who have participated in our programs and events, or made personal gifts to sustain our ministries.

With your help, Christian Associates is working to heal divisions and spark collaboration among the diverse churches of Southwest Pennsylvania. Here are just a few of the projects that your support is making possible:

- We are building new bridges with our brothers and sisters from evangelical and independent churches, discovering common ground and opportunities for partnership. In doing so, we are uncovering our own founding values as an organization: working for unity where that work is a challenge, not only where it comes easily.
- We continue to respond rapidly when our neighbors need support. After the devastating earthquakes in Turkiye and Syria, Christian Associates took the lead in planning an interfaith community vigil, lifting prayers from nine religious traditions. I am grateful for Bishop Kusserow’s participation in this liturgy.
- Our ministries continued at full speed in summer 2022 even as I enjoyed a three-month sabbatical after eight years of service to Christian Associates. Under the interim leadership of the Rev. Linda Miller-Pretz, Christian Associates came alongside Bethel AME in its quest for reparations and engaged in several initiatives to end violence in the community.
- Sofa Spirituality, an online interfaith dialogue initiative, continues to expand and flourish. Visit sofaspirituality.org to watch interviews with diverse spiritual leaders and sign up for small-group conversations to explore our fascinating differences and discover our shared values: our next season begins in June. In addition to these public dialogues, we also offer customized Sofa Spirituality experiences for congregations, ministeriums, or community groups; please reach out to bring this tool to your setting.
- Christian Associates partners with an array of civic, community, and interfaith groups to offer educational and relationship-building programming: from the local chapter of Bread for the World to the annual Pittsburgh Pastoral Care Conference to Braver Angels’ work to reduce political polarization. Be sure to subscribe to our e-newsletter, Unity n’At, for all the latest updates and events: casp.org/signup. You can also follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/christianassociatesswpa.

All these projects—and many, many more!—are made possible by the generous support of our member church bodies and our community supporters. Although the gifts we receive from judicatories such as the Synod are vitally important to our work, we also look to individual, congregational, corporate, and foundation donors to support our mission. We are especially grateful to the members of the John 17 Society, who support our work with gifts of \$250 or more each year. For more information about giving opportunities, visit www.casp.org/donate.

Across all our differences, the Spirit calls us to experience and to celebrate our true unity in Jesus Christ. Thank you so much, SWPA Synod, for your faithful ministry and your commitment to this ecumenical journey. We are indeed **Better Together**.

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister, Christian Associates of Southwest PA

REPORT OF THE PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Recently, in preparation for a Board of Director’s meeting we received a gift of confirmation for why it is so important that the Pennsylvania Council of Churches exists. Upon answering the phone call a caller on the other end asked: “how

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do you feel about the way the Jews and 'niggers' are dividing this country." When I heard it the first time, I thought that I misheard the caller. So I twice asked him to repeat what he said, the same question was forthcoming.

This call produced sadness, alarm, and anxiety, all at the same time. It was a reminder that our faith journeys and ecumenical commitment are grounded in the real-life challenges facing our nation and congregations. As a people we face communities that are divided, strife torn and filled with contempt for those who are "othered."

The Pennsylvania Council of Churches is organized to create a space for faith communities to organize, strategize, and engage in common ministry. This continues to be a challenging time of transition for the Council and in this context, we are all being challenged to transform the way that we do our work if we are to exist in the future and remain relevant.

Programs

The Council of Churches sponsored a workshop and panel discussion on Christian Nationalism that was held at the Cumberland Avenue United Church of Christ. Our keynote speaker, Robert Jones, author of *White Too Long*, unpacked the theology behind Christian nationalism as a vessel for white supremacy, xenophobia and anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment. This discussion was well received by pastors and academics. We anticipate doing these type of forums in the coming year around themes of community interest and importance.

We have provided significant accompaniment to the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in its quest to receive reparations. In 1957 Bethel Church had its property taken by eminent domain. The Church was not adequately compensated for the property and was forced to move. Bethel began seeking reparations from the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Penguins Hockey Club which owns development rights in the area where Bethel Church was previously located. The church is negotiating reparative steps with the Penguins that will include economic development and a relocation of the church to the Lower Hill District of Pittsburgh. The pastor of Bethel, Rev. Dr. Dale Snyder and I did a presentation on Bethel's story in a workshop at the World Council of Churches Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. This is an exciting ecumenical effort that has involved my ecumenical and interfaith partners.

Development

One of the realities of our times is that we are facing shrinking dollars that communions can make available for ecumenical endeavors. Therefore it is incumbent upon the Council of Churches to create opportunities for fund development. I see this happening through fundraising, grant writing- seeking both government grants and foundation support. We are also exploring ways to offer estate planning opportunities.

Program Development

Program Development is critical to the future of the Council of Churches. There has to be intentional work done to develop programs and initiatives that are responsive to community and congregational needs and realities. Looking forward, the Council seeks to create a program staff position that would enable the Council to create and sustain programs that further promote its ministry and footprint throughout the Commonwealth.

Social Media and Web Footprint

It will be important for the Council of Churches to develop its Website by making it more contemporary and interactive for the public. We need a redesign of our website and a greater social media footprint. Staffing this initiative will be important for us as we consider our ability to share our story.

Interfaith Relationships

The world of "othering" in which we live requires the Council to begin conversations and create relationships with people of other faiths. The Council will take the lead in developing interfaith prayer experiences and conversations designed to create understanding between Christians and people of other faith communities. We will explore the potential of having board members from interfaith communities, and other settings; this will enhance our opportunities for dialogue and the ability to work across the barriers that often separate our faith communities. This is also how we all can work together to combat the evil and sin that plagues our world.

The Future Has to Be Creative

Our future calls us to be creative and think outside of the box, as we consider the future use of our assets, our mission, and the way in which we order the life of the Council. There is a great deal of potential in the Pennsylvania Council of Churches.

Blacks and Jews are not dividing our country, but hatred is, fueled by antisemitism, racism, misogyny, homophobia, and othering. It is incumbent upon the Council of Churches to strike a blow against hatred and division. We celebrate our partnership with the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. We join you in enabling the people of God embrace ministry in a 21st century world. We are the light that the world has been waiting for; we will allow it shine as we all boldly show the way.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens

Executive Director, Pennsylvania Council of Churches

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REPORT OF THE ELCA MISSION INVESTMENT FUND

The Mission Investment Fund: Your financial partner

The Mission Investment Fund, a financial services ministry of the ELCA, provides a strong, stable, faith-based way for individuals, congregations and ministries to achieve their financial goals. MIF offers a range of investments for individuals, congregations and ministries. We put those investments to work to fund building and renovation loans for congregations and partner ministries, including outdoor camps, senior housing and social service agencies.

The result? Impact investments, with a transformative impact on our communities: Expanded worship spaces ... new space for education and youth ministry ... much-needed day care centers for working families ... industrial-grade kitchens and fellowship halls for community meals.

Why is MIF the right choice?

- **MIF has demonstrated expertise** in church and ministry financing. With longstanding experience in congregation and ministry building projects, we're unique among lending institutions.
- **We consistently offer competitive rates and terms.**
- **We offer a full suite of financial services.** MIF offers congregations, ministries and individuals a host of investment options. We work in deep partnership with the ELCA Federal Credit Union to offer a wide range of financial products and services.
- **The faithful stewardship of Lutheran congregations and their members funds our loans.** The money invested in MIF finances hundreds of capital projects across the church.

MIF has a longstanding tradition of strength and stability. At year-end 2022, MIF had 812 loans outstanding, totaling \$582.7 million. Investment obligations totaled \$559.4 million. With total assets of \$776.3 million and net assets of \$202.9 million at year-end 2022, MIF maintains a capital ratio of 26.14 percent— positioning MIF in the top tier of well-capitalized church extension funds.

Our steadfast support continues for the members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA and the many ways you minister to a world in need. We are honored to walk alongside you as a trusted partner.

MIF at work in the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod (as of December 31, 2022):

- 5 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$3,021,909
- \$4,500,558 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations

For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, mif.elca.org, or contact your Regional Manager, the Rev. Kent Peterson: 276-698-7970 kent.peterson@elca.org

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Kent E. Peterson
Regional Manager, ELCA Investment Fund

REPORT OF THE ELCA FOUNDATION & REGIONAL GIFT PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

The vision of the ELCA Foundation is to be a thriving ministry that develops a culture of intentional generosity and financial stewardship to expand the work of the ELCA. Our mission is to support and sustain ELCA ministries by enhancing gifting capacity and stewarding resources.

As a ministry of the ELCA, we serve individuals, congregations, and worship communities; synods; the churchwide organization; and institutions, agencies and other related ELCA organizations.

The ELCA Foundation exists to:

- Provide gift planning, administration and processing.
- Manage endowment funds and offer investment management services as an acknowledged fiduciary.
- Engage individuals and organizations in thoughtful planning to pass on philanthropic values and support ministry passions.

In 2022 the ELCA Foundation's gift planning network walked alongside 200 donors/families in developing their gift plans, which resulted in \$76.5 million in future planned-gift commitments. Nearly \$26 million of this will go to provide direct support to individual ELCA congregations. The network generated \$116.1 million in total gifts and investment assets. This includes new planned-gift commitments, \$10.3 million in current gifts, including funded trusts, gift annuities and individual endowments, and \$29.3 million in new assets invested in the Ministry Growth Fund (previously known as Fund A). Thank you for the opportunity to work in your synod, for trusting your endowment dollars to the ELCA Foundation and for allowing us to work alongside your ministries.

The ELCA Foundation and your regional gift planner are here to support your ministry through shared expertise with endowments, gift acceptance policies and practices to promote planned giving. We also work with individual donors

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to ease the complexity of estate plans, planned gifts, trusts and noncash gifts. Our services are free of charge to your congregation and its members. A local representative from our network of regional gift planners is available to work with you. Learn more about the ELCA Foundation by watching “[ELCA Foundation: Make a Plan. Change the World.](#),” visiting our updated website at foundation.elca.org or contacting your regional gift planner to help your congregation grow its culture of giving today.

Contact your regional gift planner:

Ryan Ebner
Regional Gift Planner
ryan.ebner@elca.org
814-823-3285

REPORTS OF OTHER CHURCH PARTNERS

REPORT OF PORTICO BENEFIT SERVICES

Helping Members Refill Their Cup with Responsive Benefits

In 2022, Portico invited plan members to use their full range of benefits to care for themselves following the challenges and stress of the last few pandemic years. We continually seek cost-effective and nimble ways to support ELCA leaders, congregations, and organizations with high-quality, innovative, and stable benefits that promote holistic well-being.

- ELCA-Primary health benefits provided both in-person and virtual access to health care and wellness resources.
- Portico’s Financial Planners and LSS of Minnesota helped ELCA Retirement Plan members navigate the weight of rising interest rates and market downturns through no- or low-cost financial planning, coaching services, and financial education.

In recent years, we’ve added several eligible ELCA- and full-communion-partner organizations to the Portico community. Growing the number of members we serve helps us manage costs and offer innovative benefits not typically available to smaller groups, affirming the importance of church together.

Meeting the Need in 2022

- **232 Podcast Plays** of the “Creative Approaches to Innovative Ministry” episode of Being Here last year.
- **16,002 Total Pounds Lost** through the Omada prevention program since it launched in 2018, with 2,643 pounds lost in 2022.
- **591 Retired** with Portico’s bundled benefits program — Congratulations to these faithful servants!
- **1,132 Webinar Views** of the annual Retirement Readiness Series (live and on-demand).
- **3,080 Medical Visits via Text Based Care** through 98point6, our virtual primary health care service
- **9.75 % Increase in Net Membership** over the past 5 years.
- **3,952 Health & Fitness Classes Completed** on Portico’s online Burnalong platform.
- **Over \$2M Debt Paid Off** by plan members working with LSS of Minnesota Financial Counseling since the partnership began.
- **86% Very Satisfied** with our Customer Care Center, certified for excellence since 2015.

Data as of Dec. 31, 2022; sources available upon request. Availability of and eligibility for benefits will vary. 60-302 (2/2023)

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Jeffrey D. Thiemann
President and CEO, Portico Benefit Services

REPORT OF LUTHERAN IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICE

Partners in Ministry,

For many of us, 2022 represented a moment of hope. After the darkness and isolation of the pandemic, life has begun to return to normal —offering new opportunities for connection and renewed commitment to serving our neighbor.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has embraced this moment; in the past year, we have grown exponentially in both size and scale, expanding our capacity to welcome immigrants and refugees.

With the help of people of faith and communities like yours, we were able to...

- help **16,690 children** reunify with their families or find safe, loving foster homes
- resettle nearly **12,000 Afghans** forced to flee after Afghanistan fell under Taliban control
- welcome **3,169 refugees** from countries across the world
- assist **18,262 people** seeking safety from Central America and beyond

We continue to expand our slate of innovative programming to move beyond traditional resettlement into an empowered living experience that promotes not just surviving, but thriving.

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That work reaches, too, into our media and advocacy footprint. You may have seen LIRS President and CEO Krish O'Mara Vignarajah on national news programs like PBS Newshour, MSNBC, NPR, the BBC, and others, advocating on behalf of our immigrant and refugee neighbors from Ukraine to Venezuela.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

It remains a priority of ours in 2023 to combat the divisive, xenophobic rhetoric surrounding immigration and instead promote kindness, compassion, and inherent human dignity.

We invite you to join us in that work! This year, we will continue to offer opportunities to get involved in the work of welcome, including:

- advocating alongside LIRS and our newest neighbors in celebration of [World Refugee Day](#) on June 20th,
- sharing notes of welcome with children and families impacted by immigration detention through LIRS' **Hope for the Holidays™ program** each fall,
- and equipping leaders and faith communities to create more just and welcoming communities through the [LIRS Ambassador Network](#) and [EMMAUS Network for Congregations](#) throughout the year.

Together, we can realize Jesus's ministry of compassion and welcome. We're so grateful for your support and look forward to working alongside you in the coming year.

In peace,

Chelsey Johnson, LIRS Mobilization and Faith Relations
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service