

Issue No. 1 | February 2020

Wayfarer

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**SOUTHWESTERN
PENNSYLVANIA
SYNOD** EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA

MISSION:

TO SERVE, CONNECT,
AND EQUIP ELCA
CONGREGATIONS
IN SOUTHWESTERN
PENNSYLVANIA TO TELL
THE STORY OF JESUS

As the sun with longer journey melts
the winter's snow and ice, with its
slowly growing radiance warms the
seed beneath the earth, may the sun
of Christ's uprising gently bring our
hearts to life.



ELW 329

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SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

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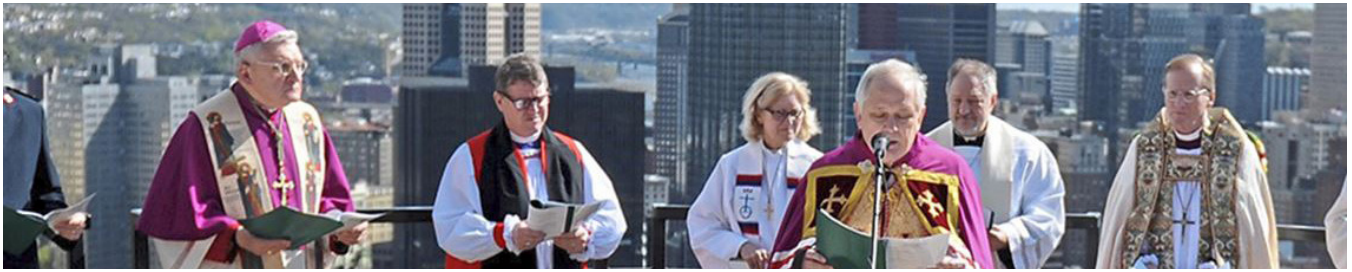
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THE VIEW FROM HOLY WEEK



Bishop Kurt F. Kusserow

Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Bishop

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From where I am seated I can see hundreds of faces very clearly. They have come to observe the most solemn mystery of our faith—that God in human flesh should die for people such as us. It is Good Friday, the Tenebrae liturgy, so the lighting is dim and the mood is somber, but my heart is thrilled once again for the invitation to join other Christian leaders to worship together in St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland. What I see in the faces of so many is a kind of quiet wonder at the love of God made known to us in Christ Jesus. To see that sight is to catch a glimpse of God's promised redemption of all things.

The Pittsburgh area enjoys strong ecumenical relationships and has for decades. I don't know exactly why this is, but I do know that relationships never just happen—they take work. So along with a word of celebration for the joyful state of church-to-church relationships in southwestern Pennsylvania, I want to speak a clear word of appreciation for all those who have made the effort and taken the time to establish and foster good relationships among Christians from various traditions in this place.

Two other events, both more joyful and more visible, illustrate the strong and favorable ecumenical relationships we enjoy. One is the blessing of the Crèche. At the invitation of the Catholic Diocese, leaders of a dozen or more Christian traditions come together around the larger-than-life manger scene displayed outside the US Steel building, directly across Grant Street from our downtown

Lutheran congregation. Then at Easter, the same group of Christian leaders gathers on the observation deck just across Grandview Avenue from St. Mary of the Mount Catholic parish to bless the city of Pittsburgh.

Faith traditions resulting from schisms centuries ago come together in peace and bear joyful public witness to a common faith at these events. Together we confess that the one who became incarnate, who suffered and died for us, rose from the dead and lives eternally: our one Lord Jesus Christ.

You may have seen one or both of these events on the local news, or perhaps even in person. If so, I am glad for that. But better yet, look into the faces of people who gather to worship with you, and behold such a gift as can hardly be found anywhere else.



Pastor Melissa L. Stoller

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On March 8, 2020 communities, nations and international organizations will observe the International Day of the Woman, drawing attention to women's empowerment and gender justice across the globe. In the US, March has held observances of women's history in various forms since the late 1970s, and was officially designated as Women's History Month in 1987 by Congressional action.

This March holds many significant commemorations in women's history, including 100 years since the ratification of the 19th Amendment, and 50 years since the first woman was ordained in the Lutheran Church. The Rev. Elizabeth A. Platz was ordained in November 1970 to serve as chaplain at the Lutheran Campus Ministry of the University of Maryland, College Park, a congregation of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), a predecessor body to the ELCA.

Like many historical events, culture did not shift immediately after the official change had been made. For many years, women, particularly women of color, struggled to vote, work, and lead in pastoral ministry. 2019 marked 40 years since the first

woman of color was ordained, and 10 years since ministry policy resolutions were passed in the ELCA that opened the way for those in committed same-gender partnerships to be rostered leaders within the ELCA. Even though it has been 100, 50, 40 and 10 years since these institutional changes have occurred, many of the barriers to women in leadership roles still remain. And women's history month reminds us that we still have far to go to reach gender equity.

According to a 2016 report of the ELCA Research and Evaluation division of the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, there is, on average, a 14% pay gap between men and women who are pastors in the ELCA. Women pastors of

color still have more trouble receiving calls than their white counterparts. And of all women who are pastors, 32% report having experienced sexual harassment in their ministry setting, compared to 6.5% of male pastors.

This harassment is a part of the gender-based violence that is still an ever-present reality throughout the world. The United Nations reports that globally, more than eight out of ten girls experience street harassment before they are 17; one in three women today experience physical or sexual violence, mostly by an intimate partner; and women and girls represent 70 percent of human trafficking victims.

The church, however, has not remained silent in the face of this sin. Through direct services and advocacy, the ELCA works with many partners to end the immediate crisis of gender-based violence and to respond to people who experience it, while also working to address the root causes of this violence and discrimination locally, nationally and globally.

The ELCA Justice for Women program seeks to gather diverse voices and experiences to provide resources, encouragement and care for those who have been pushed to the margins in our church.

Globally, we join our voices with the World Council of Churches' "Thursdays in Black" movement, which seeks to draw attention to and eradicate gender-based violence and engage the 2013 Gender Justice Policy of the Lutheran World Federation.

Nationally, a wide variety of partners worked together to guide the social statement and teaching document: *Faith, Sexism and Justice: A Call to Action* in a 10-year process of study, listening, reflection and research throughout the ELCA.

These faithful documents and movements seek to name the sin of sexism and racism while encouraging us to live out our baptismal call to work for justice and peace in all the earth. Resources, Bible studies, book and film suggestions are available to further the discussion at all levels.

As a synod, we invite you this March to gather as church to affirm the work we do as people set free to love and serve our neighbors and live into the fullness of the kingdom of equity and justice.

Where to Find Resources

ELCA Justice for Women
elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Justice-for-Women

LWF Women Empowerment Network
wicas.lutheranworld.org

ELCA Social Statements
elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society

WCC Thursdays in Black
oikoumene.org/en/get-involved/thursdays-in-black

LENT-MEETS-PASSOVER IN INTERFAITH SYNOD PROGRAM



Pastor Natalie L.G. Hall

Canon for Evangelism and Faith Formation / Pastor, St. Mary Magdalene
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The Lenten season coincides with the Jewish celebrations of Purim and Passover, all of which bear themes of freedom. Christians look toward Easter in confidence that Jesus' cross frees humanity from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Jews recall moments in history when they were saved from the brink.

This February, everyone in the Lutheran Synod, Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh, and Jewish communities throughout Pittsburgh is invited to participate in an interfaith experience exploring Jewish and Christian themes of freedom using tools of study, prayer, and service with Jewish and Christian faith leaders.

In my work with the Episcopal Diocese— together with Rabbis Seth Adelson and Jeremy Markiz and Bishop Dorsey McConnell—we have developed a number of interfaith events over the years for the sake of mutual education, understanding, and plain enjoyment of one another. Yet since the 2018 Tree of Life massacre, recent Hanukkah stabbing, and incidents between and since, we are reminded that stakes are high for Jewish people to exist publicly as Jews, prompting us to urgently develop opportunities for our traditions to connect.

During summer 2019, our partnership led to a 7-week series titled *Wholly Holy: Exploring Faith, Practice, and Belonging*, exploring highlights in Jewish and Christian life cycle observances. As people began to know one another by name, conversation hedged into increasingly daring territory. "Can I touch your collar? How do you fasten it?" "What are you looking for in a messiah if you don't think Jesus is it?" "Do you think Jews are going to hell?"

We always began with an outline for respectful conversation. Participants agreed to "respect and love God so that we do not speak poorly or dishonestly to or about others and their beliefs. Rather, we regard one another with respect, speak well of them, and always explain their actions in the kindest possible way," a near-direct quotation from Martin Luther's explanation of the 8th Commandment.

Second, we explained that interfaith experiences do not seek to convince or convert. We arrive for conversation and expect to discover something new about ourselves and our beliefs as well as others and their beliefs. Successful interfaith interactions are found in answers to three questions:

1. What do you believe and why does it matter?
2. What do those from the other tradition believe and why does it matter?
3. Did you/will you spend time with someone from another tradition at least once outside of our scheduled event?

Over seven weeks we enjoyed the company of over 50 people, like the widowed observant Jewish man now courting an observant Lutheran woman.

We develop these events because, as weighty and wrought as it sounds, we believe it is harder to harm your neighbor when you know your neighbor's name, eat at their tables, and learn from their traditions.

These interfaith experiences are for us all, so that we might know our own faith and the faith of others, and find ways to flourish under God together.

Consider this for your 2020 Lenten practice: Give up your time (rather than chocolate!) for two hours a week to gain knowledge, friends, and new perspectives on freedom in the sight of God.



Lent-Meets-Passover
Thursdays, Beginning On
February 27, 2020
7 – 9 PM

Watch Synod News
for More Details

PULPIT SUPPLY BY THE NUMBERS



Janice Jeletic

Chair, Communications Services Committee
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Each month Carol Ruckert, receptionist and administrative assistant in the Synod Office, performs miracles as she matches supply worship leaders to congregations. It's a juggling act of Biblical proportions.

Take Reformation Sunday in October 2019, for example. All the congregations and worship leaders had been matched for the day, when it came to Carol's attention that Faith Lutheran Church in New Florence was holding confirmation on that date and needed an ordained pastor rather than the lay person already scheduled.

As Carol considered how to meet the congregation's need, Rev. Robert Hawk called the Synod Office to say that he was available to lead worship that day. Crisis averted!

These are the challenges that Carol faces on a regular basis. **Twenty-one** congregations in the Synod are without a pastor and require supply leaders every week. To serve those congregations, Carol deploys **18**

pastors (mostly retired), **22** lay leaders, and members of the Synod staff. She must take into consideration worship times and travel distances. Then there's the challenge of additional worship services for holy seasons.



But the challenge doesn't stop there. Additional congregations need support when a pastor or worship leader is away or becomes sick. In total, she fills an average of **55** different pulpits each year.

Carol's dedication to this ministry enables hundreds of Lutherans throughout the Synod to worship on a weekly basis. It's one example of the support provided to congregations throughout the Synod.



METHODISTS AND LUTHERANS: A SEASON OF CELEBRATING



Pastor Jennifer Peters McCurry

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The ELCA has a record of engaging in ecumenical dialogues, with the theological and ecclesial goal of living more fully into Jesus's prayer that all his followers may be one. (*John 17:20-21*) For over 40 years, we have been in official dialogue with the United Methodists, exploring similarities and differences on such central topics as baptism, the role of bishops, and the life and witness of the church. Our dialogue led to a shared acknowledgement of theological agreement on much of ministry and the Christian life.

In recognition of all this, we spent several years in an interim Eucharistic sharing. In 2009, our two churches signed a full communion agreement, opening up the possibility of sharing clergy. There is much that we share, both historically and theologically, given our shared grounding in the Western church tradition. However, our extended relationship and conversations made clear that each of our distinctive traditions also bears particular gifts and strengths. As many of us cherish, we Lutherans are strong in our theological understanding of salvation by grace through faith, the distinction between law and gospel, and the importance and

effect of the sacraments in the Christian life. Yet we also give thanks that the United Methodist Church offers an "unwavering confession of the work of the Holy Spirit in the renewing of Christian life, the need to translate faith into action, and the necessity of Christian engagement in this world." (*Confessing Our Faith Together*, page 3)

In honor of the ten year anniversary of the full communion agreement with the United Methodist Church, our Synod's Ecumenical Affairs Committee collaborated with the Methodist Conference's Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships Committee

to mark this year. The intention was not just to celebrate official paperwork, but to draw attention to the opportunity for ecumenical ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

On Sunday, October 20, 2019, Methodists and Lutherans gathered for liturgy with holy communion at St. John's Lutheran Church of Highland in McCandless. Methodist Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi served as presiding minister and Lutheran Bishop Kurt Kusserow as preacher. Worshipping with a Methodist presiding at a Lutheran altar, in liturgy of Holy Communion, embodied our churches' shared beliefs and understandings of ministry. Though

both of our churches have their own breadth of theology and liturgical expressions, our foundational beliefs are based on the same understanding of Christ and God's generous grace. We understand ourselves as grafted as branches into Christ's vine, blessed by the faith and witness of one another, and called to grow in unity together.

Our official full communion relationship is an invitation for us all to learn more about our sisters and brothers in the Methodist church and to grow in gospel-guided relationship with them. Check out the suggestions below for you and your congregation to consider!

IS THERE A METHODIST CONGREGATION OR COLLEAGUE NEAR YOU?

Here are some things you could consider:



- Meet a Methodist colleague or neighbor for coffee or tea and learn about their perspective on faith.
- Plan a joint worship service with Holy Communion.
- Do a pulpit exchange with a neighboring Methodist congregation.
- Plan a joint local mission project.
- Offer joint Lutheran-Methodist education opportunities, such as a midweek Bible study or summer Vacation Bible School.
- Invite a speaker from a local Methodist agency.
- In Methodist/Lutheran groups, or just in our own congregations, explore the Methodist tradition and strengths. Find ideas on pages 3 to 7 of Living and Growing into Full Communion. (download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Local_Formation_Model_Template_Lutheran_Methodist.pdf)
- Participating churches are invited to complete a survey so that the Synod and Conference ecumenical committees can learn more about our collaborative ministry efforts: bit.ly/ELCAUMC



MISSION ENDOWMENT SPOTLIGHT: WESTVIEW HUB



Pastor Heather Lubold

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The West View HUB opened in June 2019, three months after receiving a grant from the Ethel L. Verney Foundation. Dedicated volunteers from Berkeley Hills Lutheran renovated an old bank in West View—accomplishing what would have cost over \$120,000—for roughly \$10,000.

Beyond library and computer access, the HUB enables collaborations with the community, schools, businesses, spiritual centers, and local leadership.

The first five months:

- **400 Library Cards issued:** The HUB fills a gap for a community that previously had limited access to library services.
- **150 Summer Children's Programs:** Daily trips on the "airplane" for movies, paired with crafts, and books filled children's "passports."

Others came for chess club, computer classes, and reading programs. Free cones were awarded by the new ice cream shop for every 10 books read.

- **As students returned to school,** programming refocused on serving the entire community. Many groups are offering creative ideas for a very active schedule.
- **After-School Tutoring:** One of the greatest indicators of the challenges facing West View is academic performance. Local schools perform significantly lower than neighboring communities within the same school district. Partnering with the North Hills District, tutoring is offered by National Honor Society students.



- **Mindfulness Tuesdays:** Meditation classes followed by yoga at the Borough Building (the HUB is out of space!).
- **1000 Books Before Kindergarten:** At the HUB, preschool children participate in this national program with daily reading, crafts, and snacks.
- **Girl Scouts and Daisy Scouts:** Local troops with nowhere to meet now use the HUB.
- **Field Trips:** West View Elementary is only 1 block away. The HUB has become an ancillary resource for the school.
- **First Friday Oil Change:** West View Express Lube donates \$5 for every oil change. The HUB invites support from local businesses through donations, programs, and event sponsorship.
- **International Walk to School Day:** HUB "DJ at the Door" greeted children and parents.
- **Other Programs:** Flu Shots, Knitting Club, Dungeons and Dragons, Girls who Code, Music and Movement, Book Review Club, Medicare Planning, Tax Preparation.

- **Management:** In addition to start-up costs, the Verney Grant provides rent, utilities, and two part-time employees who manage the facilities, programs, and hundreds of volunteers. A church board manages the grant.

A community board will coordinate programs and partnerships that reflect the needs of the community. Being a 501c3 entity enables the HUB to seek other grants and funding streams.

The HUB began with a simple question – “What could we do with a grant?” Listening to the needs of our community and the passion for ministry of our members, the HUB was born.

Photos, Left to Right:

1. *Over 500 people attended the Grand Opening. The HUB features a community library with over 8,500 books; a children’s theater in the interior of a Boeing 727; a reading room in the bank vault; a food pantry in a storage room; computers in the teller windows; and free wi-fi and coffee.*
2. *150 attended Back-to-School Bingo. Students received school supplies and prizes.*
3. *75 fourth graders learn local history. John Schalcosky, renowned local historian and ghost hunter, shared many cool facts, including: West View was named after an old hotel that looked west; Pittsburgh was home to many firsts – from first professional athletes to first radio station.*
4. *The HUB is intentionally active in the community.*



SUPPORTING GOOD SHEPHERDS



Pastor Peter D. Asplin

Assistant to the Bishop

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Pictured below are ministry candidate and intern Christopher Combs serving at Good Shepherd Lutheran in New Castle, and his internship supervisor, Rev. Peggy Suhr-Barkley, Pastor of Trinity Ellwood City and Dean of Conference One.

Vicar Chris, a student at United Lutheran Seminary and a member of Hope Lutheran in Cranberry Township, began his internship in August. Good Shepherd Lutheran is a church built on a rock literally, as well as upon the Rock that is Jesus Christ, our head! And Vicar Chris is learning what it means to be a pastor among the people of Good Shepherd: preaching, leading worship, planning for Christmas, doing hospital visits and nursing home visits, and all the varied duties of a parish pastor. Pastor Suhr-Barkley, in addition to leading the people of Trinity Ellwood City, meets regularly and guides Vicar Chris in his formation as a pastor.

One challenge for every intern is learning to balance being both ministry candidate and a real person. Vicar Chris is a father as well as a ministry candidate. When Chris was entering the internship process in the Spring of 2019 he reached out to me as the Assistant to the Bishop responsible for Candidacy in our Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod. Chris was asking for help so that he would be able to attend his home congregation on Reformation Sunday 2019, as that was the Sunday his



son was going to be confirmed by Pastor Ron Brown and Pastor Amy Michelson.

In our Lutheran tradition, confirmation is the culmination of a long process of spiritual formation of a young person. The congregation, pastors, parents and other faithful Christians contribute to a growing young person's faith journey during this time. Much like Vicar Chris has been studying Lutheran theology, Bible, worship and learning about serving God's people, his son has been learning the Small Catechism, what the Bible is all about and what it means to live in Christian community. **Vicar Chris's desire to be present as "Dad" for his son's confirmation was as holy a moment as sitting by the bedside in a hospital**

room. I was delighted to support Chris's vocation as intern and as parent in this way.

When I am out visiting congregations of the Synod I have a couple of goals. First, of course, is to share the Good News of God's grace and love in preaching and in the sacraments. But I also want to listen to the stories of the congregation. At Good Shepherd, I heard the story of that rock you see in the picture, on which the sacrament is celebrated. A member of the congregation had a vision for a special way to remember God's promise to the congregation. And that foundation is supporting not only the table top, but the raising up of this new pastor.

SYNOD STAFF PRESENCE | OCT-DEC 2019

Whether in the joy of celebrating milestones, uncertainty of pastoral transitions, or trauma of congregational crisis, the synod supports members during the biggest changes & needs. **Bishop Kusserow and Assistants, Pastors Asplin and Stoller, have been present with the following congregations during Sunday worship, council meetings, or one-on-one visits:**

Emmanuel, Prospect	St. Paul's, Hazelwood	St. Mark's, Brookline	Trinity, New Brighton
St. John's, Connoquenessing	St. John's Stone, Harmony	Nativity, Allison Park	Camp Lutherlyn, Prospect
Bethlehem, Glenshaw	Spring Church, Apollo	English, Zelienople	St. Andrew, Carnegie
Faith, Natrona Heights	Mt. Lebanon United, Mt. Lebanon	Good Shepherd, New Castle	Grace @ Calvary, Butler
Trinity, Freeport	Berkeley Hills, North Hills	Trinity, Wexford	Pittsburgh Lutheran United Ministries
Camp Agape	St. James, Ligonier	Trinity, Avalon	Grace, Manorville
St. Paul's, Sewickley	Zion, Harmony	Good Shepherd, Bower Hill	Penn-Zion's Lutheran Parish, Harrison City
St. John's of Highland, North Hills	St. Paul, Zelienople	Trinity, Ellwood City	Brush Creek, Irwin
Hebron, Blairsville	Messiah, Munhall	Immanuel, Irwin	Oak Grove, Zelienople
Jacob's, Masontown	Emmanuel (Heilman), Ford City	Paintertown, Irwin	St. John's, Perrysville
St. Paul's, Carmichaels	St. John's, North Versailles	Forks-Zion, Leechburg	St. Andrew, Shadyside
Christ, Duquesne	Hope, Brighton Township	First Lutheran, Greensburg	Bethesda Lutheran Services, Meadville
First English, Butler	Holy Trinity, Beaver	Harrold Zion, Greensburg	Lutheran Campus Ministry in Greater Pittsburgh
Trinity, Verona		Trinity, Latrobe	
First English, Sharpsburg			

Colleague Connections

Marriages:

Barbara Ravenstahl and Mark Thompson: September 21, 2019

Deacon Amy Santoriello and Nick Harkins: November 2, 2019

Pastor Jennifer Fuhr and Pastor Scott Hall: November 21, 2019

Births:

Nora Jayne Kobert, daughter of Pastor Ryan and Cindy Kobert, born August 27, 2019

These listings are complete to the best of the knowledge of the synod staff. If you feel there has been an omission, please contact Sandy DeLorenze at sandy.delorenze@swpasynod.org or 412-367-8222.

Ordination Anniversaries:

50 Years: Pastor Richard L. Merkner, January 1, 1970

30 Years: Pastor Roger R. Fischer, January 13, 1990

10 Years: Deacon Janet J. Montelaro, January 16, 2010

40 Years: Pastor Beth L. Siefert, February 1, 1980

55 Years: Pastor Charles J. Hartbauer, March 7, 1965

New Ordinations:

The Reverend Brenda N. Henry, ordained November 3, 2019. Serving Pittsburgh Lutheran United Ministries (PLUM) *Pictured*

The Reverend Robert Krueel (United Church of Christ), ordained December 15, 2019. Serving St. John's, Mt. Pleasant in ecumenical ministry



In Memoriam:

Pastor Randy Gullickson
November 10, 2019

Lay worship leader Ron "Bubba"
Hileman, December 21, 2019

Pastor Gordon C. Hills
January 4, 2020

Pastor Horst Bandle
January 16, 2020

Prayer Requests:

Pastor Jack Hernstrom, recovering from lung transplant surgery in July

Pastor Frank Kantz, recovering from heart valve replacement surgery in August

Pastor Frank Zeman, recovering from hernia surgery in October

Synod Staff – Bob Cairns, Beth Caywood, and Sandy DeLorenze, all of whom have health concerns

CAMP AGAPÉ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Deacon Richard Frederick has accepted the invitation from Agapé's Board of Directors to become Camp Agapé's next Executive Director, and began the new role on January 1, 2020.

He and his wife DeAnna moved from eastern North Dakota to Washington County during the latter part of December. Deacon Rick brings with him 16 years of outdoor ministry experience.



LUTHERAN SERVICE SOCIETY ADMINISTRATOR

Lutheran SeniorLife is pleased to announce that Sarah Israel has been named Administrator of Lutheran Service Society and Community Services.

Prior to this appointment, Sarah served as director of children and family services at Lutheran Service Society for 12 years. She is a licensed clinical social worker with 18 years of experience in the human services field, focusing on therapeutic social work, clinical leadership, and program management. In her new role, Sarah will direct and support the current leaders of Lutheran Service Society's programs, which include senior centers in Beaver and Allegheny counties, Meals on Wheels, adoption services, foster care and permanency services, and HUD properties.

ULS INTERIM PRESIDENT

United Lutheran Seminary appointed Rev. Dr. Angela Zimmann, Ph.D., CFRE Interim President. With Interim President Dr. Richard Green's return to Arizona to retire, Pastor Angela Zimmann will be taking on responsibilities of Interim President. Pastor Angela will fulfill this Interim role until a permanent president is called to ULS. She will return to her role in the Advancement office when a new president is in place.



MAKE THIS YEAR A 'LEEP' YEAR

Lutherlyn's 660 acres provide an incredible learning environment that encompasses forests, streams, marshes, geologic formations, archaeology sites, and recreational opportunities. **The Lutherlyn Environmental Education Program (LEEP) uses these vast resources to provide incredible learning experiences and teach others about God's amazing creation.** Anchored by

an expert staff of naturalists, LEEP provides customized adventures for schools, scout groups, churches, and the public. Program offerings vary from ecology to geology, maple sugaring, orienteering, renewable energy, history, and survival skills. Check out their website to see why over 8,000 people a year participate in a LEEP experience: www.lutherlyn.com/EE.



Calendar of Causes

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL MINISTRY PARTNERS

February



Camp Agapé is an outdoor ministry of the Lutheran Church, providing summer camping programs and retreat facilities. This beautiful rustic site allows you to enjoy the beauty and wonder of God's creation while experiencing an intentional Christian community.

campagape.org

March



**Lutheran
SeniorLife**

Lutheran SeniorLife provides the finest senior living communities and care options for seniors, as well as community-based health, wellness, and social services in western Pennsylvania.

lutheranseniorlife.org

April



**Lutheran SeniorLife**
Lutheran Service Society

Lutheran Service Society has been helping people of all ages, faith backgrounds, and financial circumstances for over 100 years. As part of Lutheran SeniorLife's family of services, Lutheran Service Society empowers neighbors to lead independent, dignified, and secure lives.

lutheranseniorlife.org



**SOUTHWESTERN
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Wayfarer

Issue No. 1

STORIES FROM THE ROAD



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Devotional: A LEAP DAY WAYLAY



Pastor Brian Evans

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Here it comes: my tenth birthday. I've been waiting nearly 40 years for this.

That is not a misprint. I was born on a leap day, February 29, which, with some complex exceptions, comes around every four years. Astronomically speaking, the purpose of a leap day is to prevent us from getting too far ahead of reality. That is because the Gregorian calendar now in use is imperfect. If we didn't add an extra day about every four years, the calendar would get ahead of the earth and moon orbiting around the sun. And important to Pope Gregory XIII, for whom the calendar is named, leap days prevent the date of Easter from drifting to before the spring equinox, which would violate the edicts of the Council of Nicaea (AD 325).

A leap day says, "Wait! You're getting ahead of yourselves!" It is, of course, impossible to get ahead of God. God, who is at once before and behind us, traces our journeys, knows our resting places, and is acquainted with all our ways. (Psalm 139) But the infinite and mysterious workings of God do not perfectly fit into our human systems of measurement or understanding—no matter how accurately we think our instruments are calibrated.

In the way a leap day recalibrates the calendar, sometimes we need rest stops to contemplate how our human wisdom could be ever so slightly skewed from divine wisdom. Those slight errors, uncorrected, all add up, and sometimes we suddenly find ourselves quite far from reality and distant from God's will and purpose.

Perhaps we all need the occasional leap day to get us back on track: to recalibrate our lives and our faith: Stop. Pray. Meditate. Read scripture. Spend time with those we love. Go on a retreat. Consider where we have mismeasured. Ask God for wisdom. In being so waylaid, we ought to be prepared to receive the occasional course correction. But fear not: the destination remains the same. Yesterday, today, and forever, we belong to Christ. Together, beloved of God, we are on the Way.