

Issue No. 16 | November 2023

# Wayfarer

STORIES FROM THE ROAD.



*In this issue...*

STEWARDSHIP  
AT STEWART  
AVENUE

p. 4

INTENTIONAL  
INTERIMS

p. 5

THE MUSIC OF  
ADVOCACY

p. 9



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

Published by Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod

## MISSION:

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

“O give thanks to the  
Lord, for he is good; for  
his steadfast love endures  
forever.”

1 Chronicles 16:34

Cover Photo: Margaret Ellis,  
St. John's Anglican Church,  
North Vancouver

## CONTACT:

1014 PERRY HWY, SUITE 200  
PITTSBURGH, PA 15237

412-367-8222  
WWW.SWPASYNOD.ORG

## BISHOP & ASSISTANTS

kurt.kusserow@swpasynod.org  
peter.asplin@swpasynod.org  
melissa.stoller@elca.org

## RESOURCE MINISTRY

beth.caywood@swpasynod.org

## ACCOUNTING

meredythe.hlasnik@swpasynod.org

## ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

sandy.delorenze@swpasynod.org  
carol.ruckert@swpasynod.org

## COMMUNICATIONS

lauren.wolcott@swpasynod.org

# INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 02 *Studying a New Landscape*
- 04 *Stewardship at Stewart Avenue*
- 05 *Intentional Interims*
- 07 *Remnant Confirmation Camp*
- 08 *Through New Eyes*
- 09 *The Music of Advocacy*
- 11 *First English Meal Ministry*
- 12 *Lutheran Disaster Response*
- 13 *Bob Cairns: 30 Years of Service*
- 14 *Calendar of Causes*
- 15 *Colleague Connections*

## SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

Rev. Kurt F. Kusserow  
BISHOP

Barbara Nugent  
VICE PRESIDENT

Rev. William Schaefer  
SECRETARY

Gary N. Teti  
TREASURER

Rev. Peter D. Asplin  
ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP

Rev. Melissa L. Stoller  
DIRECTOR FOR EVANGELICAL MISSION  
& ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP

Deacon Elizabeth Caywood  
RESOURCE MINISTRY DIRECTOR

### SYNOD COUNCIL

Jennifer Armstrong-Schaefer  
Loran Bohman  
Rebecca Brunetta  
Rev. Beth Clementson  
Rev. Eric Damon  
Emily Dazen  
Rev. Susan Devine  
Landon Dishart  
Beryl Gundy  
Rev. Brenda Henry  
Kathe Houck  
Tom Hough  
Rev. Allyn Itterly  
Janice Jeletic  
Jen King  
Rev. Heather Lubold  
Rev. JJ Lynn  
Pam Neale  
Holly Schmitt  
Rev. Michael Sourwine



## STUDYING A NEW LANDSCAPE



### Bishop Kurt F. Kusserow

Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Bishop  
kurt.kusserow@swpasynod.org | 412-367-8222

Our synod's oldest congregations were founded in the early 1770s. These early faith ancestors spoke German and purchased the land for their church buildings with British pounds. Their long histories mark transitions we find hard to imagine today: their first pastor to drive a car rather than ride a horse, the year they sold all their oil lamps and put electricity in the building, and the pain of parting ways over whether or not to use English in worship. Early illustrations and somewhat later photographs reveal a landscape unfamiliar to us—small log or frame buildings with front steps leading onto dirt roads, and often without a tree in sight.

It's nearly impossible to imagine what our lives will be like 250 years from now, but we do share with the generations that have come before us with and those who will come after the experience of going through significant transitions. **At our best, in every age, we learn to engage times of transition as opportunities to refresh the pursuit of our central purpose.**

I am reminded of the poetic exhortation that opens that great hymn by F. Pratt Green, *The Church of Christ, in Every Age*:

*The Church of Christ, in ev'ry age  
Beset by change, but Spirit-led,  
Must claim and test its heritage  
And keep on rising from the dead.*

To help us realize just such a resurrection today, our synod council has authorized a

second Landscape Study to be conducted throughout our synod this fall. Our first was in 2017, at a time when the whole Lutheran world was celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. We are not currently facing so significant a milestone, but as we look to the horizon we can see, among other things, that in 2025 our synod will elect a new bishop and the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church will bring its report to the churchwide assembly. (Yes, we will also celebrate the very significant 1,700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed in 2025, but that's not the prime motivation driving this project.)

The Landscape Study is designed to listen to the voices of synod leaders: pastors and deacons, synod staff and congregation staff, congregation council members and synod council members, synod assembly voting

members, and other synod leaders. In 2017 we had 485 synod leaders respond to the survey's 58 questions.

What we learned then was that on the whole, our synod placed squarely mid-pack. The Landscape Study measures energy and satisfaction, and then locates the results within the context of dozens of other middle judicatories that have taken the survey. (A middle judicatory is a synod, diocese, presbytery, annual conference, or other regional grouping within a national church body.)

At first glance, it seemed a little anticlimactic to go to all the effort of distributing and collating the survey only to discover that our synod is perfectly average. But then we broke out the results and found that our lay leaders scored very high in energy and satisfaction, while our rostered ministers scored very low. That certainly caught the attention of our synod council and synod staff!

With this result rather clearly demanding some kind of response, we studied the results more closely and held focus conversations. We dedicated a synod council retreat to this work and developed four Strategic Initiatives. The shock of discovery and the work of response has led to notable and positive changes in our life and ministry as a synod.

Here are a few of those changes:

- We hired a Director of Communications.
- We sold and relocated our synod office.

- We produced a book responding to the question, "What is the Gospel?"
- We moved to a near-paperless synod assembly.
- We increased the frequency of day-long continuing education events.

**Now we'd like to do it again. And we'd be very glad for your voice to be included.** In the same way that a congregation seeking to call a new pastor conducts an internal study and produces a ministry site profile, our synod is seeking to use the Landscape Study to produce a public-facing document about where we are headed at this moment in our faith journey.

The instrument tests for energy and satisfaction, not orthodoxy or solvency. So it does not evaluate every aspect of our life and ministry. But it does provide a clear assessment of the level of community engagement around our synod's shared work. In some respects, this second Landscape Study will be like receiving a report card on our synod's response to the first results. More importantly, the study will identify those needs to which we are currently paying less attention than we ought.

This fall, when you see the link to the survey show up in your e-mail or Facebook feed, take a moment to respond. Your voice will help shape our future. 💧



**Save the Date:  
June 14 & 15, 2024 at PennWest California**



## STEWARDSHIP AT STEWART AVENUE



### Pastor Daniel Clark

Pastor of Stewart Avenue Lutheran Church  
dnlclark22@gmail.com | 412-881-0171

I was recently informed by the offering counters that our congregation had received a sizeable donation. A gift of \$1,800 was made in cash! I began to get excited. Maybe our recent emphasis on stewardship has been paying off. I was excited that someone at our congregation felt blessed by God and desired to share these blessings with Stewart Avenue Evangelical Lutheran Church.

It turned out that the donor was my six-year-old son using fake money that he constructed. Before receiving instruction on stewardship from Pastor Melissa Stoller, I would have quickly told my son not to put fake money in the offering plate. It is embarrassing!

Graciously, at this point I had already been equipped by Pastor Stoller with the new book, *Abundance*, by Michael Ward. The book makes the case that the heart of teaching about stewardship is telling the story of God's abundance and allowing others to tell their own story. Therefore, instead of correcting my son's actions, I had some questions.

I asked him, "You could have used that money anywhere else. Why did you want to give it to the church?"

He said, "My Sunday school teacher taught me about how some children do not have enough food and my teacher showed me the ways that the church helps feed people with the food bank."

My son's story highlighted the great ministry happening at Stewart Avenue, and I was happy that a portion of my real money was going to the offering plate.

**I am also glad to serve a congregation that requested help from Pastor Stoller. While many congregations face financial issues, few ask for help.** She guided our council to set up a yearlong stewardship plan that features one or two intentional actions a month, such as teaching a Sunday school class about tithing, writing a newsletter article about stewardship, having a temple talk, or changing the mission statement. Through this process, I have been personally energized to tell the story of Stewart Ave!

Thank you to the ELCA and SWPA Synod for supporting the work of Pastor Stoller in guiding congregations to a better understanding of stewardship. Through her work, Stewart Avenue is more equipped to tell the story of Jesus. 💧



## INTENTIONAL INTERIMS



### Pastor Ed Sheehan

*Interim Assistant to the Bishop & Retired Pastor*  
edsheehan81@gmail.com

**T**his past summer, I served as Interim Assistant to the Bishop, while Pastor Peter Asplin was on a three-month sabbatical. It's been over six years since I retired from the synod staff. Since then, so much of how the staff operates has changed. The primary reason was the Covid pandemic, which forced the staff to learn how to work from home and use online technology much more. The Covid restrictions are past, but the new ways of operating as a synod staff have stayed. It took me some time (and occasional frustration) to get used to these new ways.

It reminded me of my Introduction to Philosophy college course. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher who lived around 500 BC, wrote "The only thing in life that is constant is change." To a young student, his statement seemed both intriguing and contradictory. Yet as I have gotten older, its meaning becomes clearer. Life cannot go on without change. From the moment of our birth, life brings about changes. As humans, we are created for change, and God has given us the capacity to grow with the changes that come into our lives.

**Change is also part of the life of congregations. Families visit and join; children grow up and move away; neighborhoods are transformed over time; pastors come and go.**

This last change, when a pastor leaves the congregation, is a time of great transition. Over the years of her pastorate, the pastor

helps set the tone of the congregation. She becomes part of families' lives.

During the summer, several congregations were transitioning from their previous pastor to a new one. Bishop Kusserow, Pastor Melissa Stoller, and I worked with the councils to provide pastoral leadership during the time of vacancy, while the congregations began the process of looking for a new pastor.

**There are three types of Interim Pastors. The first is a Local Interim/Supply.** In this arrangement, a local pastor under call to a neighboring congregation will provide pastoral care to the congregation while the synod arranges for supply pastors or lay leaders for Sunday services.

**The second type is a Transitional Interim.** This is for congregations that expect to move through the call process as expediently as possible. The interim pastor (often retired)

serves 20 to 40 hours a week, and is not under call.

**The third type is an Intentional Interim.** It is appropriate following a period of conflict, a long pastorate, or when a congregation is uncertain about its future. The pastor serves the congregation for at least 12 months, 20 to 40 hours a week, and is either retired or called by synod council. Often, an intentional interim pastor has received special training for this work. The goals of an intentional interim pastor are assisting the congregation in moving beyond their previous pastoral experience, helping the council understand who they are as a congregation, and working together to provide a vision for the future of the congregation.

When a pastor needs to leave a congregation following conflict or misconduct, there is understandably a whole range of emotions among the congregation—grief, anger, mistrust, disillusionment, and uncertainty about the future. Members of the congregation may have been on different sides of the conflict and exchanged words with one another. Sometimes members are the victims of the misconduct, or have been affected by it. Others may have dropped out of the congregation during the conflict, not wanting to be involved in the fighting.

In these cases, the intentional interim pastor will seek first to let those who have been most affected share their stories. The interim pastor may provide opportunities for members to speak to him in private, or in small groups. For healing to take place, it is imperative that honest discussion happens. The goal is not to rehash all the previous arguments, but to acknowledge the hurts and hard feelings that have occurred, seek confession and forgiveness from each other, and then start again as a community to work together for the sake of the gospel.

If the previous pastor has been at the congregation for many years, the dynamics of the transition are different. More than an entire generation of members will have known only the previous pastor, and the

style of leadership that they provided. There will be a variety of emotions in this situation also—sadness at saying goodbye; anxiety about next steps, after several decades of stability; and questions about what the future will hold.

When I began my first call years ago at a two-congregation parish, the congregation's former pastor had served there for more than 40 years. When I arrived as a new young pastor, I heard over and over about how Pastor So-and-so had not only led worship and visited the sick and homebound, but he had helped put roofs on members' houses, would stop for coffee and cake at members' homes every day of the week, sometimes take a nap while visiting, and in general seemed to be in several places at the same time—at least in the memory of the members. It was a hard act to follow!

**In situations where the previous pastor has served a congregation a long time, the intentional interim pastor will listen to what members have to say about the former pastor, and all that they accomplished. But she will also be attentive to the challenges brought about by doing things the same way over the years. She will help the council sort out between “that's the way we've always done it” and what is essential to the life and growth of a congregation. Every pastor, no matter how good they may be, is only one person, after all, and there are many ways for a new pastor to lead a congregation.**

One final note: Though an intentional interim pastor helps the council and congregation look to their future, he is not involved in the actual call process. That is the proper work of the congregation's call committee and council. Unless it had been discussed when the interim pastor first began, he would not be available to be called by the congregation. One of my colleagues who served as an intentional interim pastor several times summed it up this way. “My job is to work myself out of a job.” With the support of the synod staff, and the partnership of the congregation's leadership, that's what an intentional interim pastor will do. 💧

# REMNANT CONFIRMATION CAMP



**Pastor Heather Lubold**

*Pastor of Berkeley Hills Lutheran Church*  
hslbold@msn.com | 412-486-4010

**A** long time ago, God said, “Let there be confirmation camp,” and there was confirmation camp. And God separated the north from the south and the east from the west. And said, “Good.” But lo and behold, God saw that some of the pastors were scattered and alone—a holy remnant, worthy of attention. And God gathered the remnant and called them to be a camp for congregations from every place. Or something like that...

The confirmation camp known as Remnant is a group of pastors and churches who have been coming together for about 40 years to offer a week of camp for their confirmation students together. The group truly is scattered throughout the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod. These churches have confirmation programs of their own throughout the year, and a week of summer camp at Lutherlyn supplements that faith formation.

Each year has a theme: something about the Old Testament or the New; something about the promises of baptism or confirmation or about the church; or something about serving in the community or in the world. Often the theme will focus on something going on in the students' lives or in the world, such as bullying or being community after Covid.

The lessons and experiences of confirmation camp are intentionally hands-on, experiential, active, and engaging. Instead of sitting reading the Bible, we will experience the story of God through activity stations, a guided hike, or a scavenger hunt. Students also get to spend half the day just doing camp



stuff: swimming, crafts, nature, worship, and campfire. Students also benefit from building relationships with other Lutheran kids from other churches who they might meet again at a retreat, mission trip, or national gathering. And, the camp staff model living their faith for them.

The true beauty of the camp though is the coming together of pastors from every kind of congregation and experience and working together. For myself, I know that I am more creative and energized when I work with others. We learn together, play together, and through these collegial relationships that develop, support and pray for one another.

There's always room for more participants. Contact Pastor Kerri Clark or me for more information. 💧



## THROUGH NEW EYES



### Deacon Elizabeth Caywood

Synod Resource Ministry Director

beth.caywood@swpasynod.org | 412-367-8222

**C**reative resources for the Christmas season abound at this time of the year. But is it worth changing our Christmas traditions? After all, they *are* traditions! Perhaps we can enhance our beloved traditions and see them in new and exciting ways? The use of art or music brings to life and boosts understanding of what we're trying to convey and often adds an emotional response to familiar stories. We're working with a universal language!

**Pastor James Arter (First, Leechburg) appreciates the opportunity to “engage the word of God through the senses.” He frequently uses both art and music to help tell a story.** A favorite Christmas study in our synod is *A Thrill of Hope: The Christmas Story in Word and Art* (Morehouse Publishing). Pastor Arter notes, “There is great benefit in having the imagination inspired by a particular artist, in this case John August Swanson.” Those who participated in this study were so captivated by the images of Swanson's interpretations of Scripture, DVD commentary by Biblical scholars, plus excellent study guide questions, that despite Pr. Arter's expectations to close the study with Jesus' birth, they continued on to “see the story through to the very end (Epiphany).”

Another study Pastor Arter recommends is *Mary Had a Baby: An Advent Study Based on African American Spirituals* (Abingdon Press). In four sessions, participants explore stories behind four familiar spirituals. Through related scripture, song lyrics, and discussion

questions, participants deepened their faith and sense of community.

To create a cohesive journey through the Christmas season, Pastor Erin Evans (Christ, Millvale) recommends looking to A Sanctified Art or Barn Geese Worship. Both offer lectionary-based resources that can be bundled to provide a multitude of helpful tools, such as sermon preparation, children's pageant, Blue Christmas service, devotional materials, and much more.

Pastor Evans recognizes that some congregations may not have access to certain equipment such as a full-color printer or a projection screen, but noted that these resources provide social media connections to share ideas and inspire new ways to incorporate the inspirational materials. In fact, Pastor Evans found these resources so useful that she subsequently considered materials in Lenten planning that likely would not have in the past. The proof of the value was the excellent feedback within the community. 💧



## THE MUSIC OF ADVOCACY



### Pastor Erin Jones

Communications and Advocacy Engagement Manager, LAMPa  
erin.jones@elca.org | 412-204-7105

**A**s I write this article, I am singing hymns to lure my two-and-a-half week old baby to sleep. The words that live deep in my bones from years of worship attendance and church choir rehearsals flow out of me without a second thought. I am grateful for the ways in which the language of music of the Church connects me to my past, and allows me to share its joy and comfort with the future.

My job with Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) is only a few weeks older than my son (the Holy Spirit had *hilarious* timing with this change of call). But similarly in that short amount of time, I have felt the language of the Church—of Good News and comfort and joy—bubble up within me and help me connect with our advocacy work at the state and national levels.

**Like those hymns, I find the words of justice and the tune of caring for those in need flow out of me, not because they are my own, but because I share them with others across time and space. Advocacy, like our hymnody, connects us beyond boundaries.**

For those of you unfamiliar with the work of LAMPa, or more broadly the advocacy work of the ELCA, it is Lutheran connection and relationality at its finest. LAMPa organizes seven synods (over 1,000 congregations), as well as Lutheran social services organizations, colleges, and outdoor ministries for the work of advocating for just

policies, especially here in Pennsylvania. We are the *only* organization that works with all PA ELCA Lutherans.

You might be thinking, “How on earth do you get seven bishops to agree on anything, let alone 1,000 congregations?” The answer is not dissimilar to how one gets a choir to sing all together—a lot of listening, a lot of empowering the right gifts and passions, and a lot of practice.

LAMPa decides what issues to work on through a long listening process that never ends. We begin with the ELCA Social Statements and Social Messages, which have been crafted through years of listening to Lutherans across the U.S. While these social statements are not perfect, they are faithful documents discerning where scripture, Lutheran theology, and real Lutherans on the ground find themselves in relationship to the social questions of our time. These documents function as a score for us to follow, guiding us and giving suggestions

on how big issues might be played out at different levels of advocacy.

But as beautiful as the social statements are, they are not performed advocacy, merely the map we study and follow and interpret for ourselves. (If you or your congregation want to work through any of the social statements and/or the new draft social statement on civic life and faith available in December, let me know! I'd love to come and lead study sessions/adult forums with you!)

LAMPa's advocacy is brought to life by the people engaging in the work, like a piece of music is brought to life by the performers. Yes, we have our stellar director, Tracey DePasquale, and I'm glad to be a second staff person on the team, but it is really our policy council that embodies the work we do. Two representatives from each synod are appointed by their bishop to serve for three-year terms.

These are the actual "choir" which gives voice to the issues they and people in their synod care about. They are the ones who know what ministries in their synod might bring color and dynamics to a discussion of a certain issue. For example, when we need to discuss the importance of funding food programs, we call upon our policy council and the people they know to connect policymakers with those who work in food pantries and meal programs, highlighting the impact of funding choices on real lives. This is what gives the music of advocacy its heart and color.

Fun fact, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod has two new policy council representatives! Pastor Eric Damon and Amy Kelly started serving with LAMPa just this September! Please reach out to them and let them know what awesome ministries you and your congregation are doing so they can lift up your stories in our shared work!

We also do not engage in this work in a Lutheran "bubble." While it is our job to bring Lutheran voices and our faith perspective to the table, there are many others we work with also singing out for justice. We are part

of a number of coalitions throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that work on hunger, housing, immigration, care of creation and sustainability, and other issue areas. We seek to be in harmony with diverse voices of others engaged in advocacy, while maintaining our authentic Lutheran voice. This takes careful balance and building of trust and relationships, which LAMPa has been doing since 1979. We are known for the ways in which Lutherans are faithful and trustworthy partners by a variety of coalitions and lawmakers. When Lutherans are part of the ensemble, people listen.

Finally, doing the work of advocacy takes practice. I know it is scary and intimidating to engage in conversations with people in power, but by doing it together, we benefit from the experience of those who have done it before and the excitement of those who are just starting to learn the art of advocacy.

I invite you and your congregation to consider joining us and adding your voice and perspective to the mix. It can be as simple as following us on social media, or as elaborate as coordinating a group from your congregation to join us for Lutheran Day at the Capitol (May 9, 2024 – save the date!).

The staff and policy council of LAMPa are delighted to introduce you to this work, and practice with you until the rhythms and tune of advocacy are as natural to you as hymn singing. I hope you'll join us! 💧





## FIRST ENGLISH MEAL MINISTRY



### Pastor Melissa L. Stoller

Director for Evangelical Mission & Assistant to the Bishop

melissa.stoller@elca.org | 412-367-8222

Outreach has been a part of the fabric of the congregation of First English Lutheran, Pittsburgh, since its founding in 1837 as the first English-speaking Lutheran congregation west of the Allegheny Mountains. For years, the social ministry committee had worked with area ministries and non-profit organizations to provide meals. Seeing the impact of Covid on neighbors downtown and in neighboring communities had the group wondering how they could engage people in new ways.

Richard King, a member of First English and their social ministry committee for over 35 years, has always understood ministry as feeding people. "I know there are other ways of attracting people to the table for conversation other than food, but food works for me!" Susan Bruder coordinates much of the meal planning and then a dedicated team of volunteers from the congregation and the community gathers every Wednesday to prepare 60 to 110 meals, which are then delivered by volunteers to places like Bethlehem Haven and Community 341.

Recently they began partnering with 412 Food Rescue, an organization that seeks to reduce food waste by transferring food that traditionally would be discarded by restaurants and stores to food pantries, community centers, and meal programs. "412 would call me and say they have cases of one thing or another and I pick up what I can," King said. **"Having a commercial freezer that we purchased with the Verney Fund grant**

**makes it possible to store food so it is not wasted, and it helps as the cost of food goes up."**

The meal ministry continues to flourish as connections with other congregational feeding ministries grow. "Sometimes the Meals on Wheels coordinator at St. Mark's Lutheran in Brookline may have a few things she isn't using, so she offers them to me," King said. "And last fall, Christ Lutheran in Millvale called to say they had turkeys they were not able to distribute, and since we had room, because of the freezer, we used those turkeys for 3 ½ months for different dishes!"

It's a ministry that has had a positive effect on the congregation at First and the downtown community. As the ministry has grown, so has congregational support. King reflected, "You don't have to know how to cook or be a good cook, but you can help put out a good product that will make someone feel warm and loved." 💧



## LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE



### Maryn Olson

Director, Lutheran Disaster Response  
maryn.olson@elca.org

In September 2021, Hurricane Ida made landfall in Louisiana. It then swung northeast through Pennsylvania, bringing tornadoes and extensive flooding to several communities. Latania is one of many people in eastern Pennsylvania impacted by Ida. “[My daughter and I] had never experienced anything like this before,” she said. “The water just ruined everything. It came up from the basement and in through the roof.”

The floodwater ruined most of their personal belongings and caused mold to grow. When the landlord refused to help with clean-up, Latania and her daughter moved in with her other daughter. “I do a pretty good job of keeping my head above water, but this time I was drowning,” said Latania. This is when a Lutheran Disaster Response partner, Lutheran Congregational Services (LCS), stepped in. LCS reached out to Latania and connected her with a disaster case manager, Linda, who walked with Latania through the recovery process. Latania secured an apartment and Linda connected her with an organization that donated furniture and appliances. Latania expressed her gratitude for Linda, LSC, and Lutheran Disaster Response. In response, Linda said, “It continues to amaze me how grateful people are. They thank me for what I have done but the bottom line is they are doing the work.”

Lutheran Disaster Response empowers people, like Latania, impacted by disasters in the United States and around the world.

**Whether flooding, hurricanes, migration or another kind of disaster, Lutheran Disaster Response offers support for survivors and helps communities recover and become more resilient before the next disaster.**

Every disaster is different, so accompaniment by Lutheran Disaster Response looks different in each situation. In the case of Ida recovery, it was disaster case management. Other times, accompaniment comes in the form of funding for construction materials, emotional and spiritual care, or resilience building. This is why working with local partners—such as LCS—is so important. They know better than anyone what their impacted community needs in a time of uncertainty.

The resilience of disaster survivors like Latania and the dedication of helpers like Linda show that even in the most difficult circumstances, God is at work through the people around us. We thank your synod for your partnership with and support for Lutheran Disaster Response! 💧



## BOB CAIRNS: 30 YEARS OF SERVICE



**John Frantz**  
*Former Synod Treasurer*

In August, our synod accountant, Bob Cairns, retired after an astounding 30 years of service. Over that time, Bob served under two bishops, seven synod treasurers, supported many committee chairs, and assisted and advised numerous congregation treasurers with their questions and accounting needs.

Accounting operations at the synod are fairly complex, employing an accounting system containing over 900 general ledger accounts and subsidiary ledgers to allocate income and expense to the general fund, the Mission Endowment Fund, the Ethel Verney Fund, and numerous designated special purpose funds. Yet Bob was always available and willing to share his knowledge of accounting and control, payroll taxes, record keeping, and reporting.

Readers may recall the global concerns over the potential for major system failures at the millennium, referred to as Y2K. The synod's systems and hardware were at risk, as were those of many congregations. It fell upon Bob to guide the research, evaluation, and the selection of Y2K compliant systems and manage the conversion. Through his research and knowledge, Bob was able to assist congregations with their own research and evaluation. When January 1, 2000, arrived, the synod and the congregations were ready and no major failures were encountered.

The synod has experienced significant events and changes over the past 30 years. Most recently, Meredythe Hlasnik has been hired to fulfill most of Bob's responsibilities. There will be some changes in financial processes. Congregation treasurers will continue to send their monthly Mission Support and designated gift remittances to the synod office. The accounting for the annual budgeted income and expense and the entire staff payroll processing functions have been contracted out to professional accounting and payroll firms, both of whom have been approved by the synod's auditors. Congregation treasurers may continue to direct all finance related questions to Meredythe. Please be understanding as she continues to grow in her new position. We are thankful for Meredythe's acceptance of our call and welcome her to the synod.

We sincerely thank Bob for his 30 years of dedicated and trusted service to the synod and wish him and his wife Sheri many happy and blessed years in their retirement. 💧

# Calendar of Causes

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL MINISTRY PARTNERS

*November*



## *Promising Futures*

Promising futures for children, youth, and families through individualized mental and behavioral health services provided in a residential, school or community setting.

**BETHESDA1919.ORG**

*December*



**GLADE RUN**  
LUTHERAN SERVICES

*Serving Our Communities Since 1854*

With a focus on education, mental health, autism, and unique therapeutic offerings, Glade Run has a long tradition of linking faith and service.

**GLADERUN.ORG**

# Colleague Connections

*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](mailto:sandy.delorenze@swpasynod.org) or 412-367-8222.*

## Ordination Anniversaries:

**November 2023–January 2024**

20 Years: Pastor Torrey Johnson

40 Years: Pastor Kevin Anderson  
Pastor Bruce Nordeen  
Pastor Jeffrey Schock

## Ordinations:

Pastor Stephen Slepecki, October 8, 2023

## New Calls:

Pastor Jin Kyung Ko, St. Matthew's, Crafton

Pastor Stephen Slepecki, Oak Grove, Zelienople

## Installations:

Pastor Jonathan "Jono" Adams, St. James, Ligonier

Pastor Scott Bryte, Peace, Greenock and  
St. John Mark, Homestead

Pastor Larry Kemp, Trinity, Wexford

## Welcome:

Meredythe Hlasnik, Synod Financial Assistant

Pastor Jin Kyung Ko,  
Transferred from Southeastern Synod



*Ordination of Pastor Stephen Slepecki*

## Births:

Asher Lewis Jones,  
son of Pastor Erin and Tim Jones,  
born on September 14

## Congratulations:

Jennifer Armstrong Schaefer  
elected treasurer of the churchwide  
Women of the ELCA

Amy Kelly and Pastor Eric Damon,  
appointed to the LAMPa Policy Council

## Retirement:

Pastor John Smaligo, August 1

## In Memoriam:

Dolores Fruth,  
widow of Pastor William Fruth,  
July 31, 2023

Kathy Conrad  
September 3, 2023

Suzanne Schaffer,  
mother of Pastor Heather Lubold,  
September 25, 2023

Lynn Landis,  
October 14, 2023

## Prayer Requests:

Pastor Andy Carlsson;  
Pastor Wayne Gillespie;  
Pastor Don and Kathy Green  
View the most up-to-date list at:  
[swpasynod.org/prayer](http://swpasynod.org/prayer)



# CON VO<sup>20</sup><sub>23</sub>

## SYNOD STAFF PRESENCE | JUL-SEP '23

Whether in the joy of celebrating milestones, the uncertainty of pastoral transitions, or the trauma of congregational crises, the synod supports members during the biggest changes and needs. **Bishop Kusserow and assistants, Pastors Asplin and Stoller, have been present with the following congregations during in-person and online visits to ministers, lay leaders, and councils:**

Ascension, McKees Rocks  
 Bethany, Dormont  
 Bethesda, Lower Burrell  
 Bethlehem, Glenshaw  
 Camp Lutherlyn  
 Christ, Millvale  
 Christ, Ross Township  
 Emmanuel, Castle Shannon  
 Faith, Laurel Gardens  
 First, New Kensington  
 Good Shepherd, Greensburg  
 Hebron, Leechburg  
 Holy Trinity, Beaver

Hope, Cranberry  
 Hope, Forest Hills  
 Jacob's, Masontown  
 Nativity, Allison Park  
 Oak Grove, Zelienople  
 Our Redeemer, McMurray  
 Passavant Retirement  
 Community  
 Peace, Greenock  
 Prince of Peace, Latrobe  
 Rehoboth, Baden  
 Salem, Delmont  
 Seaman Memorial,  
 Zelienople

St. Andrew, Shadyside  
 St. James, Ligonier  
 St. John Mark, Homestead  
 St. John's Stone, Harmony  
 St. John's, Perrysville  
 St. Luke's, West View  
 St. Matthew's, Crafton  
 St. Paul's, Carmichaels  
 St. Paul's, North Park  
 St. Peter's, Uniontown  
 Trinity, Ellwood City  
 Trinity, Wexford  
 Van Kirk, Monaca



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

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
WEXFORD, PA  
PERMIT NO. 286

1014 PERRY HWY, SUITE 200, PITTSBURGH, PA 15237  
[WWW.SWPASYNOD.ORG](http://WWW.SWPASYNOD.ORG) | 412-367-8222

*Wayfarer*

Issue No. 16 **STORIES FROM THE ROAD**



MORE STORIES & CONNECTIONS:  
[facebook.com/swpasynod](https://facebook.com/swpasynod)

## *Devotional*: **THANKSGIVING REFLECTION**



### **Pastor Katie McCullough**

*Chaplain, Veteran Affairs Pittsburgh Healthcare System*  
katherine.mccullough@va.gov | 412-360-1832

I heard a story once about the highly decorated WWI American fighter pilot, Captain Eddie Rickenbacker. During WWII, he was asked by the Secretary of War to review air bases in the Pacific Theater. The B-17 in which Eddie was being transported went off course and ran out of fuel, forcing the plane's captain to ditch in the ocean. For 24 days, Eddie and seven other men drifted in three life rafts that they managed to tie together. Their food supply consisted of four oranges, and when that ran out, the men began to hold prayer services, looking for a miracle. Then on the eighth day, a seagull landed on Eddie's head. He quickly grabbed it, and it became both a meal for the men and fishing bait. All but one of the men survived. Eddie never forgot the sacrifice of that life-saving seagull. As the story goes, every week for many years he would feed gulls off the end of a pier with a bucket full of shrimp and a heart full of gratitude.

There is much to be thankful for in life. We could focus on the not-so-good of feeling stranded in places, not having what we want, stuck in the unknown of life. Or we can be thankful that we have a God who provides. A God who provides in extraordinary ways. A God who provides seagulls to nourish us, sustain us, and uplift us. A God who journeys through it all with us. 💧