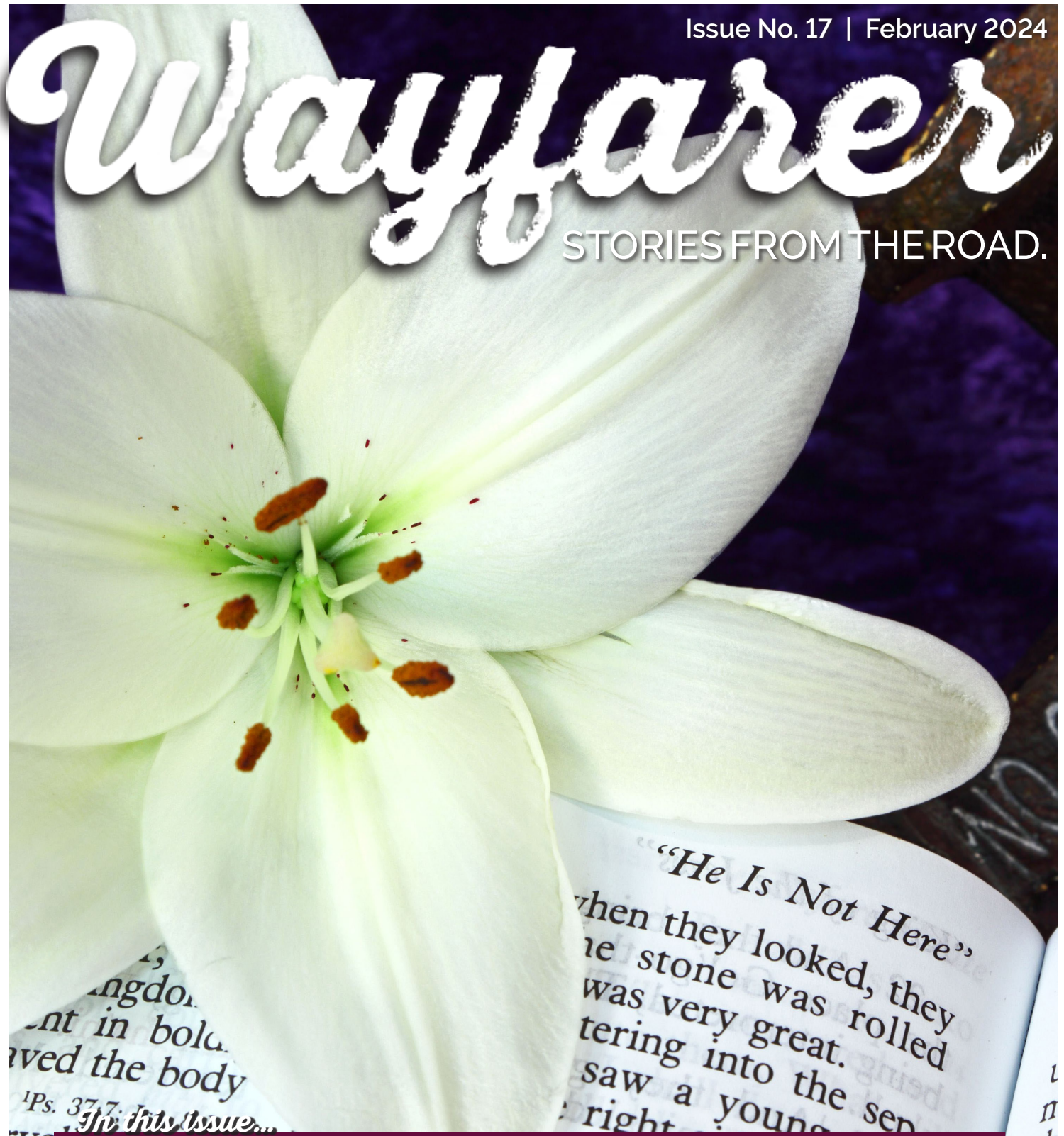


# Wayfarer

STORIES FROM THE ROAD.



ngdor.  
nt in bold  
ved the body  
Ps. 37:7. *It is his issue...*  
ve

“He Is Not Here”  
When they looked, they  
the stone was rolled  
was very great.  
tering into the  
saw a young  
right

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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



“He has been raised; he is  
not here. Look, there is the  
place they laid him.”

Mark 16:6

Cover Image via Canva

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## HARRIET TUBMAN & SOJOURNER TRUTH



**Bishop Kurt F. Kusserow**

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**O**ur church's commemoration of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth falls on a Sunday this year, March 10. What a gift this is to our congregations and their preachers and musicians! Why is this a gift? Because an occasion like this can help us overcome the vast distance that lies between us and the people we read about in Holy Scripture. **Worship leaders who plan to commemorate Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth on the Fourth Sunday in Lent this year can draw the congregations they serve into a deeper understanding of the faith we share with our biblical ancestors through the connections we have with these two American women.**

Here's what I mean: There is a certain isolation that accompanies our weekly reading of biblical texts in our services of worship. While the words of Holy Scripture become very familiar to us over time, the actual lives of the people we know in this way are largely hidden from us. For the most part we encounter the heroes of the Bible only through the moments they appear in the biblical narrative, and so we tend to think of them as characters in a story and find few points of connection between their lives and ours.

By way of example, how tall was Moses? We don't know. But we do know that Sojourner Truth was nearly six feet tall. What was the name of the mother of James and John, the Sons of Zebedee? We don't know. But we do know that Harriet Tubman, named Araminta Ross at her birth, took her mother's first name

for her own just after she was married to John Tubman in 1844. Since there is a wealth of personal information available to us about these two heroic women commemorated by our church as renewers of society, their lives can help us better understand the people we know only as biblical figures.

The most obvious connection with the texts appointed for March 10, of course, is the experience of living in and escaping from slavery. That experience joins Moses and the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9) with Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. In fact, Harriet Tubman was nicknamed Moses because she freed so many people from slavery in Maryland, bringing them to Pennsylvania, and then on to southern Ontario.

It was The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that

required Harriet Tubman's wards to make that second journey farther north. Since we can learn about the effect that sudden change in legal status had on Harriet Tubman and the people she had already led to freedom, we might better understand the personal implications of similar political events mentioned in the Bible, such as that reflected in Exodus 1:8: "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph." Suddenly, the legal status of the Hebrew people in Egypt was changed, and what a change that meant for their lives!

Sojourner Truth lived in New York, where state legislation adopted in 1799 freed in advance any children born to enslaved people. But as she was born in 1797, the status of enslavement that Sojourner Truth was born into remained in effect for her. Pursuing a plan for gradual abolition, the New York state legislature in 1817 set a date ten years into the future on which all enslaved people in the state would be set free – July 4, 1827. But the year before, in 1826, Sojourner Truth took her infant child, Sophia, with her, left the rest of her family, and made her way to the home of abolitionists Isaac and Maria Van Wagener,

who arranged for her freedom by purchasing her services for the year that remained before state emancipation took effect. There is in this story a window of understanding into the deep personal longing for freedom that the stories of Holy Scripture bear witness to, and the joy of finding a place of refuge that we read about in the biblical account as well.

The lives of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, which are remarkably accessible to us by a simple internet search, include bracing examples of personal human suffering that grieve our hearts anew. These women suffered physical and emotional abuse and separation from their family members within a social and political context that accommodated deliberate cruelty and disrespect. But they also found joy and inspiration in the faith of the Christian church. Both women linked their efforts to provide freedom to others to the life of Jesus Christ, who suffered, died, and rose again for the sake of the world's salvation. We can share to some degree in their sorrow and in their joy on March 10 by singing *I Want Jesus to Walk With Me* (ELW 325). The tune for this hymn was named for Sojourner Truth. 💧

## I Want Jesus to Walk with Me

SOJOURNER B.B.B.9

1 I want Je - sus to walk with me. I want Je - sus  
 2 In my tri - als, Lord, walk with me. In my tri - als,  
 3 When I'm in trou - ble, Lord, walk with me. When I'm in trou - ble,

to walk with me. All a - long my pil - grim  
 Lord, walk with me. When my heart is al - most  
 Lord, walk with me. When my head is bowed in

jour - ney, Lord, I want Je - sus to walk with me.  
 break - ing, Lord, I want Je - sus to walk with me.  
 sor - row, Lord, I want Je - sus to walk with me.



# THE JOY & CHALLENGE OF PERICOPE



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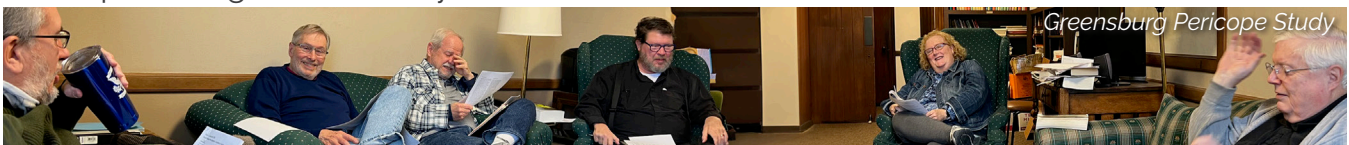
**W**hen a new pastor starts at a congregation in the SWPA Synod, one of the first bits of information the synod staff tries to get to that pastor is when and where other Lutheran pastors gather for “pericope study.” You may have heard your pastor say, as they dash out on Tuesday morning, or run back in Wednesday afternoon that they were headed to or just left “pericope study.” But what is this, and why is it so important?

Starting in the early middle ages, both Jewish and Christian worshipping communities in Europe and the Middle East began using organized sets of scripture readings, a “lectionary.” There are a couple of key reasons: First, using a lectionary helps us remember how reading the Gospel, the New Testament letters, and the Old Testament and Psalms **together** help us understand **all** of them better. Second, using a lectionary helps unite the Church: the revised common lectionary most Lutheran churches use is used as well by many Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, and even Roman Catholics (although their lectionary varies a little bit from ours). Third, lectionaries help religious leaders (pastors, deacons, and lay preachers) to study and pray together in preparation for weekly worship.

And that’s what happens at pericope study. Local pastors gather, usually at a church,

and read and talk about the readings for the coming Sunday. Often at pericope study at least one pastor will have their laptop open to check out the Greek or Hebrew that lies behind the English translations we’re used to using. Pastors will talk about the prayer of the day, and the hymns that we might sing. We will argue about how to understand a particular passage in light of the Small Catechism and Martin Luther, and with the help of contemporary writers like Henri Nouwen or Phyllis Trible or Nelson Rivera.

But pericope study often moves beyond the issues of textual criticism and biblical interpretation to being a place where pastors share what’s going on in their own families and in their congregations, praying for each other and supporting each other. So, please when Pastor dashes out to go to pericope study, cheer them on! 💧





## PASTOR MENDIS: 50 YEARS OF MINISTRY



### Elizabeth Scales Rheinfrank

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Caroline Mendis never expected to spend the Christmas season receiving care at a rehabilitation center for a leg injury. But that did not stop her from planning a Christmas Eve service for her fellow residents. "I thought, we're going to be stuck here on Christmas Eve, so let's do something!" she said with a smile. While I was doing my internship at First Lutheran Church in downtown Pittsburgh last year, I was fortunate to have Pastor Mendis serving on my Internship Committee, and I was not at all surprised to find her doing what comes so naturally to her: serving others. This year our synod celebrates the 50th anniversary of Pastor Mendis' ordination, making her our synod's longest-serving ordained female pastor. "I love liturgy," she said, "and creating a worship experience for people. But it's also the sense of community that I love!" A gifted preacher and teacher, Pastor Mendis enjoys being with people, hearing their stories, and helping them feel connected with the Church.

Pastor Caroline Mendis grew up in Swissvale, and, as a child, she attended Bethany Lutheran Church in Braddock, where her grandfather served as a pastor before she was born. Early on, she found a strong female role model in her maternal grandmother, who frequently traveled to Lutheran congregations in the region, educating them about the work of the Women's Missionary Society. She remembers her grandmother as "poised and confident, as she stood up in front of people and talked about the work of the Church."

**When Pastor Mendis graduated from Thiel College and entered Gettysburg Seminary in 1970, she did not necessarily expect to be ordained. "Many of my family members had been involved in the life of the church in one way or another, and I wanted to be**

**a part of that and to see what came of it." There were no female pastors at any Lutheran churches in America when she enrolled in her first class, New Testament Greek.** While she was studying the difference between the *aorist imperative* and the *present imperative*, Elizabeth Platz was making history by becoming the first woman ordained by the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) on November 22, 1970. Exactly one month later, Barbara Andrews became the second Lutheran woman ordained and the first woman ordained in the American Lutheran Church (ALC). While in seminary, Pastor Mendis felt God calling her to the ministry of word and sacrament. "I started to have a greater appreciation for the eucharist, and I started to feel called into a world in which I would be able to serve communion to

people, especially people who are shut in at home or not connected with the community as much as they should be. Providing them with the eucharist became important to me."

But many of the greatest lessons in Pastor Mendis' ministry she had to learn on her own with the people of the congregations that she served. "I just ended up learning by doing," she said. Her internship site, St. John's Lutheran Church on East Swamp Road in Potter County, New York, "was in the middle of nowhere. I was completely alone there. I lived in a little house next door to the church, and there were cows across the road that came and went behind the parsonage. I did have a supervisor, but he was in Rochester, New York. It was an hour's drive to go up to Rochester once or twice a week for supervision. I was mostly unsupervised." Pastor Mendis returned to our synod to be ordained but could not find a call here. "They weren't ready for a female pastor." Fortunately, the bishop of the New York Synod recognized her gifts and encouraged her to pursue a call in that synod. She received her first call at St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Mayville, New York. "And again, they were my teachers," she said.

In 1989, Pastor Mendis and her husband Pastor George Mendis (dec. 2016) returned to our synod, as co-pastors of Christ Lutheran Church, Millvale, where they served until their retirement in 2014. "I think the partnership with my husband helped me to fight the isolation. We really worked together as a team, and we had a great 25 years there! I made some mistakes but, you know, that's how I learned how to do things, through making mistakes and learning from congregations that I served."

"My experience [in ministry] wasn't like yours," Pastor Mendis would often remind me during my internship year. "I never had a sense of being part of a community of women." When I asked if there are any biblical characters or images that have helped her to remain grounded through the ups and downs of ministry, her thoughts again turned to the Christmas Eve service. "I always wanted to

include the first few verses of St. John's Gospel [in the service] because of the wonderful language about the Word becoming flesh and the mystery of the Incarnation. It's a very powerful mystery, and it is the mystery of it that keeps me interested in it; it keeps me looking at the Bible stories in different ways and looking for the Christ in each person that I've come to know and meet, that interconnectedness that is beyond the natural and the mundane."

**One thing I learned from Pastor Mendis is that having a female pastor helps a lot of women and girls feel more connected to the life of the church.** During the meet-and-greet on the weekend of my call vote in early January, a young girl approached me. "She's really excited to meet you," I was told. "She's never met a female pastor." "Well, I'm glad I'm here!" "Me, too," she said. And we're glad you're here, Pastor Mendis! Your wisdom and perseverance have helped to pave the way for female faith leaders, like me, serving in our synod. Congratulations on 50 years of ordained ministry. And may God bless your continued work of encouraging and equipping new leaders for ministry! 💧



*Pastors George & Caroline Mendis*

*A 2023 graduate of United Lutheran Seminary, Elizabeth Scales Rheinfrank is called as pastor of St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Perrysville, and will be ordained on February 24, 2024.*



Langenheim Library, Thiel College

## TRI-SYNOD ARCHIVES



### Sandy DeLorenze

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**W**hen you think about archives, you might think about dusty files languishing forgotten in a basement or attic. But lately when I think of archives, I feel excitement and anticipation because after a time when the Tri-Synod Archives was in a dormant state, it finally has a new home and a new lease on life.

Archived records contain details about some of the most significant milestones in people's lives — baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and deaths. They are highly personal and meaningful.

The files and parish registers from closed congregations of the Southwestern Pennsylvania, Northwestern Pennsylvania, and West Virginia-Western Maryland Synods have been housed at Thiel College for many years and overseen by archivist, Sally Roth. The volume of items going to the archives was far outgrowing the amount of space available. This caused difficulty with organizing the materials and assisting family members and others who were searching for vital materials and information. Now, thanks to the hard work and perseverance of many parties, including the bishops of the three synods and Pastor Brian Riddle of Thiel College, the synods and Thiel have updated the Tri-Synod Archives agreement.

**The materials have been moved to Thiel's Langenheim Library, where they will be**

**accessible to the archivist in a climate-controlled, spacious, and safe location.**

With the Tri-Synod Archives in a new home, the synod's Archives and History Committee has an opportunity to enact a plan for receiving and organizing materials before they are taken to Thiel. For now, the established practice of bringing materials from closed congregations to the synod office before transport to Thiel will remain in place. For information about what should be transferred to synodical archives upon the closing of a congregation, please see the document *Dispose Records During Disbanding* available on the ELCA website at: [elca.org/Resources/Office-of-the-Secretary](https://www.elca.org/Resources/Office-of-the-Secretary) in the "Congregations" tab.

The archives are a work in progress. There is still much to be done to organize and process the materials that are stored and new items that are arriving. But with the recent strides made, we can look forward with hope and confidence that the next steps will soon be accomplished. 💧





Painting by Jan Matejko, 1885

## APOSTLES TO THE SLAVS

**Pastor Paul Payerchin**

*Retired, Slovak Zion Synod*

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**O**n February 14, (St. Valentine Day) Slovaks in central and eastern Europe, along with Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans celebrate the Feast Day of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, "Missionaries to the Slavs." Some of my favorite people are missionaries. Here on Passavant's campus, I could listen for hours to Reverend Ralph Kusserow as he relates his missionary stories of sharing God's word in Singapore and Africa.

When I served in the Slovak Zion Synod, ELCA, I was privileged to have as a linguist friend Reverend John Goldstein; uniquely a non-Slovak, called to minister to American Slovaks. I relished the faces of old Slovaks who heard God's word in their native tongue, from one of Jewish descent with an Australian accent. It was priceless!

I was asked to share with you the unique missionary efforts of two Greek brothers who took on the almost insurmountable task of bringing God's word to the Slavic nation in Central and Eastern Europe. Many of the Slavs had already rejected atheism, but lacked the Holy Scriptures and liturgical resources in a language of their own. In the ninth century A.D., Prince Rastislav of the Great Moravia Empire looked east and requested that Byzantine Emperor Michael III and Orthodox Patriarch Photius send missionaries to his Slavic subjects.

Michael III chose to select Constantine (826-869) and his older brother Michael (815-885)

from the city of Thessalonica (modern day Greece). Later in their lives, when becoming monks, their birth names were changed: Constantine to Cyril, just before his death in Rome, and Michael to Methodius. In 862, prior to their missionary work, they created an entirely new alphabet (Glagolitic), using the Greek alphabet, that had many similarities to the what the Slavic people were using. The brothers translated the New Testament, Psalms, and stories. Not all of their efforts were liturgical though. They created a *Slavic Civil Code* that was used in Great Moravia, for many years, to bring stability to the empire.

Because of those seeds that the brothers planted in central and eastern Europe, a strong foundation was laid upon which the Church of God flourished. And upon that foundation, the Slavic nation built a faith of which Christ predicted "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." I am proud to be a descendent of that faith and the efforts of two missionary brothers from Thessalonica.





## TWO CONGREGATIONS: ONE IN CHRIST



### Pastor Beth Wierman

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*"I did not know what love was until I encountered one that kept opening and opening and opening. And until I acknowledged that what that love was opening onto, and into, was God... In any true love... there is an excess energy that always wants to be in motion. Moreover, it seems to move not simply from one person to another but through them, toward something else... It wants to be more than it is; it cries out inside of us to make it more than it is. And what it is crying out for, finally, is its essence and origin: God."*

— Christian Wiman

**L**ove crosses boundaries we tend to think are closed, fixed, or simply too hard to traverse. We trust that this is true and that it is inherent in the work of the Holy Spirit and foundational to the mission of Jesus the Christ. However, it is astonishing when you witness and experience it.

About seven years ago, the United Presbyterian Church in Ambridge reached out to the neighboring Lutheran and Methodist churches to inquire about the possibility of exploring a collaboration. The congregation received no real interest. The large and beautiful sandstone building with a congregation of about 40 active members had found themselves overwhelmed by the upkeep and maintenance. When the congregation was queried as to whether they wanted to close or continue without the building, the vote was unanimous to continue as a worshipping community.

The building on Maplewood Avenue in Ambridge was sold to Trinity Seminary in 2019. (The building had been home to what

was Calvary Presbyterian until a merger with Grace Presbyterian saw the congregation become "United" in the 1970's.)

The United Presbyterian Church continued worshipping at the Maplewood building (at the kindness of Trinity Seminary) until the congregation of Zion's First Lutheran expressed interest in a combined ministry. Following numerous conversations, led by the leaders of both denominations, the Presbyterians joined the Lutherans for worship and ministry in their building at 798 Park Road in Ambridge in February 2021.

Zion's First Lutheran had been without a pastor since the fall of 2018, and while they were few in number, they felt called to

continue together. As uncertain as the future was they carried a hope for something new. Their building is located a mere block away from the former U.P. Maplewood Avenue property, and it is adjacent to the Center for Hope—a community nonprofit serving area residents with a food pantry and a wide variety of other assistance.

**One congregation had a pastor and the other a building but both were open to something new. From the beginning—the hope was for joint ministry rather than parallel efforts.** Worship, mission, study—would be done together with only the building and the finances kept separate. The initial period was one of experimentation and getting acquainted—just seeing how things went. It was never tense, but there was, of course, the give and take in learning the ways of the two congregations and finding a path forward.

The differences between Lutheran and Presbyterian polity has not been a stumbling block, and the theological and practical distinctions have been points of learning. The praxis of faith has accommodated the variations in denominations. It is possible to find common purpose in mission while holding concepts and understandings in tension and harmony. The goal is to acknowledge the unique aspects of each faith history while finding that we are all grounded in God's saving love. The congregation believes in the promise that God is doing a new thing in our midst. Surely what has been is passing away in many congregations, but the future holds fresh possibilities when Christians work together.

After a year, members began asking for a concrete commitment to shared ministry. Thus, the congregations agreed to become a federated congregation in early 2023. There were concrete reasons to become federated, but after more time passed, there were compelling reasons to move toward a union where all resources are held in common. Deliberately and cautiously choosing to not rush this process has made the undertaking more thorough and positive.

We have frequently been unsure what we were doing or how to do it. It has been a challenge to engage in a process in which the people involved have no experience and little knowledge. However, a diligent task force guided the efforts, with support from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod and Beaver-Butler Presbytery, and has led to a union congregation. All resources have or are being moved into one common account, and the physical facility has become the responsibility of all members. "Union" clearly and fully represents the intentions of the congregation to move forward as one body in Christ.

**The legal work for creating a new congregation is complete. The work of determining the time ahead and presence of the newly named One in Christ Congregation in the Ambridge community is just beginning.** We know how to be small and strong congregations. We know how to do what has been done before. (Both original congregations were founded in 1904 and celebrate a common anniversary this year.)

We are less versed in what can be and how we can share love—love that opens more and more. But we are well positioned to discover how to be more curious and innovative. Experimenting with mission efforts and worship opportunities along with building relationships in the community have given us good work to do. The dedicated leaders and a caring congregation are joyful as they face an unfamiliar but exciting time ahead.

"God's love does not move simply from one person to another but through them, toward something else..." There is energy in God's love which propels us forwards and also leads us deeper into the relationship we share with God. It wants to be more than it is; more than what is. In God's love the community of One in Christ is carried forward into a future God is preparing. 💧



# LUTHERLYN FOR ROSTERED RENEWAL



**Andrea Dunmyre**

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It feels like an ever-increasing number of people are expressing that they feel tired, burnt out, or overwhelmed. Those who are in leadership roles, professionally or personally, seem to be the most affected. In an effort to combat this paradigm for our church's leaders, Lutherlyn, in partnership with the Lutheran University Center, hosted two separate days of rest and renewal for rostered leaders. The first day was in April, and then another in October. **Both were funded by a grant provided by the SWPA Synod's Mission Endowment Fund. These days for rest and renewal were offered at no cost to attendees, and all rostered leaders from the SWPA and NWPA Synods were invited to attend.**

Each day had a schedule of events that included meals, guided nature activities, professional workshops, communion worship, hikes, and prayer opportunities, as well as space for play (board games, LEGOs, bouldering, and four-square), in addition to Lutherlyn's beautiful campus and natural woodlands. Approximately 70 rostered leaders attended between the two days and Lutherlyn received great feedback. While everyone certainly seemed to enjoy the schedule of events and guided activities provided by Lutherlyn and Lutheran University Center, it seemed to me that the real star of the show was the group of attendees and the sense of community and collegiality. Lively discussions took place all day as different people floated in and out of the rocking chairs on the dining hall porch. Throughout the day I heard laughter, shared challenges, and great discussions.

In a world with never-ceasing calls, emails, push notifications, personal calendars, and to-do lists that never seem to include "rest," Lutherlyn offers a place of respite where it is ok, even encouraged, to slow down and simply be present. I often tell parents of prospective campers how coming to camp is the kind of break young people need, and yet I myself forget that camp is here for us grown-ups, too! It was wonderful to see a bit of the stress and worry fall away from our partners in ministry as they explored and enjoyed Lutherlyn. If you, your professional associates, your family, or your congregation, are looking for a place to work, play, or rest, I hope you know that you are always welcome at Lutherlyn!

2024's *Days of Rest & Renewal for Rostered Leaders* are April 10 and October 30. Visit [lutherlyn.com/2024](https://lutherlyn.com/2024) for more information. 💧



## 1517 MEDIA & CHILDREN'S LITERACY



**Dawn Rundman, Ph.D.**

*Director of Congregational Development and Marketing, 1517 Media*

**W**hat do you think of when you hear the term *biblical literacy*? Memorizing the books of the Bible in order? Naming a the major characters in the Old and New Testaments? Citing Bible verses by heart?

At 1517 Media, our congregational and book imprints support and build children's biblical literacy in a more holistic way. We publish several illustrated story Bibles and NRSV Bibles to accompany our *Frolic*, *Spark*, and *Whirl* curricula. These Bibles help support biblical literacy because they are typically encountered in a Sunday school setting so that kids explore texts in a supportive pedagogical environment where they receive context and can ask questions. They interact with these biblical texts in all kinds of ways— younger children use illustrated story Bibles to point to pictures, trace the story's action, and make connections with their own lives of faith. In our best-selling *Spark* NRSV Bible, older kids can use the stickers in the back of the Bible to mark what they've read and note their questions.

**Here's the amazing bonus that happens when your congregation supports biblical literacy in kids—you are also supporting print literacy! And print literacy is one of the strongest predictors of educational achievement and a host of other markers of healthy development. Imagine that!**

Your church supporting biblical literacy— listening to and reading Bible stories, asking questions, remembering past stories, connecting events and themes to their own lives—is also supporting children's exploration of print, language, plot, character development, and more. What a powerful statement we make as the church when we convey how we are supporting holistic child development!

As the publisher of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we have been releasing Bibles for many years, but more recently we added a children's book imprint to our company—Beaming Books. This imprint publishes dozens of titles designed to help kids thrive. Many of their books support biblical literacy in additional ways by inviting kids into deeper exploration of Bible times (the four-book *Curious Kid* series for elementary-aged kids). Many titles also provide devotional content that is rooted in scripture, prayers for families, and stories rooted in the major events of the church year. Check out [beamingbooks.com](http://beamingbooks.com) for more titles, and keep reading to your kids! 💧



## A.I. & AMEN



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Is there anything that God can't use for good? I'm no theologian, but if there is, I've yet to see it. I include artificial intelligence (AI) in that notion. This article isn't about the global power of advanced AI that is dawning, it's about the beginner programs that might make your work just that bit easier. Baby-AI, if you will, doesn't have to be scary. And I have a few suggestions for how to put this technology to work for good in your congregation.

My best advice to work well with AI and mitigate risk is to treat it like a 20-year-old intern. All interns need supervisors. You would not publicize an intern's work without reviewing and approving it first. Interns need clear instructions for what you want done, and you ask for revisions if the results are not what you wanted. Do the same with AI.

### GRAPHICS

The image you want doesn't need to already exist anymore. If you can describe it, you can create it. I recently needed a photo of a strained glass window with bicycle imagery; welcome to the world! **Canva** has a great image generator and is free to nonprofits. Your children's ministry can generate custom coloring pages with **GenerAit**.

### SUMMARIES

Your congregation secretary might appreciate help taking minutes, let **Otter.AI** transcribe your meetings. Our Assembly minutes regularly rely on transcripts generated by Zoom's auto-captioning. Try pasting your sermon into **ChatGPT** and ask it to create

a summary to use as a video description or blog posts. You could also ask it to create study questions based on your sermon or Sunday school lesson.

### BRAINSTORMING

Asking ChatGPT to write your sermons might not be a faithful execution of Ministry of the Word, but you can toss around ideas with anyone... or anything. ChatGPT can help you overcome writer's block for any kind of content, like wording social media posts. ChatGPT wrote the title of this article. Heck, I've used it to draft menus and packing lists.

### EDITING

**Grammarly** is a popular proofreading software that will find written errors. **Hemingway** will not only find mistakes, but will offer suggestions to improve complex sentences, excessive adverbs, and passive voice. Hemingway told me that several of the sentences in this article were overly complex, and I have chosen to ignore its help. Because I am in charge of my own voice, and AI is just my intern. 💧

# 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:

### February-April 2024

20 Years: Pastor Michael Ryan

30 Years: Pastor Heather Lubold

40 Years: Deacon Phyllis Permar

50 Years: Pastor Arthur Ackerman

## New Calls:

Seminarian Elizabeth Rheinfrank,  
St. John's, Perrysville

## Installations:

Pastor Stephen Slepecki, Oak Grove, Zelienople

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

## Births:

Jackson James,  
grandchild of Carol Ruckert,  
born on November 24

## Retirement:

Pastor Allyn Itterly, January 1

## In Memoriam:

Pat McKenty,  
Lay Worship Leader;  
November 2, 2023

Susan Payerchin,  
wife of Pastor Paul Payerchin,  
December 11, 2023

Travis Dibble,  
son of Pastor Melba Dibble,  
January 3, 2024

Pastor Fred Heitzenroder,  
January 9, 2024

## Prayer Requests:

Pastor Andy Carlsson  
Tom Knepp  
Pastor Caroline Mendis  
Pastor Curtis Thompson  
View the most up-to-date list at:  
[swpasynod.org/prayer](http://swpasynod.org/prayer)



Installation of Pastor Jin Kyung Ko

# SYNOD STAFF PRESENCE | NOV '23 - JAN '24

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:**

Bethesda, Lower Burrell  
Brush Creek, Irwin  
Butler Area  
Lutheran Ministries  
Calvary, Arnold  
Camp Lutherlyn  
Christ, Millville  
Christ's, Murrysville  
Emmanuel Heilman,  
Ford City  
Faith, Aliquippa  
Faith, Laurel Gardens  
First, New Kensington  
Good Shepherd, Bower Hill  
Good Shepherd, Greensburg  
Good Shepherd, Mt. Pleasant  
Good Shepherd, New Castle

Grace, Manorville  
Grace, Monongahela  
Grace, South Park  
Hebron, Blairsville  
Hebron, Leechburg  
Holy Trinity, Irwin  
Hope, Cranberry  
Jacob's, Masontown  
Mt. Zion, Donegal  
New Hope, Freedom  
Oak Grove, Zelienople  
Our Redeemer, McMurray  
Passavant Retirement  
Community  
Prince of Peace, Latrobe  
Resurrection, Oakdale

St. Andrew, Shadyside  
St. John, Carnegie  
St. John, Perrysville  
St. John's, Connellsville  
St. Paul, Canonsburg  
St. Paul, Monessen  
St. Paul, Scottdale  
St. Paul, Washington,  
St. Peter's, Uniontown  
Trinity, Butler  
Trinity, Ellwood City  
Trinity, Gibsonia  
Trinity, Latrobe  
Trinity, Wexford  
Zion, Harmony  
Zion, Penn Hills

## 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](http://campagape.org)



# Calendar of Causes

SPOTLIGHT ON SOCIAL MINISTRY PARTNERS

*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](http://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](http://lutheranseniorlife.org)



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*Wayfarer*

Issue No. 17 STORIES FROM THE ROAD



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

## *Devotional*: EASTER BLOOMING



**Pastor Melissa L. Stoller**

*Director for Evangelical Mission & Assistant to the Bishop*  
[melissa.stoller@elca.org](mailto:melissa.stoller@elca.org) | 412-367-8222

“Now the green blade rises from the buried grain, wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain; love lives again, that with the dead has been: love is come again, like wheat arising green.” ~ JMC Crum (1872-1958), Noel Nouvelet, ELW 379

**F**irst published in the *Oxford Book of Carols* in 1928, *Now the Green Blade Rises*, sung to the 15th century French melody, is a striking contrast to our exuberant Easter hymns. Its haunting melody and synoptic story is almost a sermon unto itself. I often find myself singing the verses as I walk, for the rhythm and melody lend itself to a meditative pace.

In the northern hemisphere, we have the great joy of watching the earth come alive again as spring quite literally blossoms around us in the Easter season. We long for these seasonal changes, especially in late winter as the days lengthen. We trust that spring will come, that green blades from bulbs, seeds and wintered branches will grow and blossom, bringing forth life that nourishes our bodies and souls.

And it is the soul nourishing that transforms us. No matter the season, liturgical or ecological, the good news of the resurrection is that Jesus lives and because he lives, we shall also. The good news of Jesus Christ calls us to health, to wholeness, and to community. The good news calls us to life again. ♦