

CORNERSTONE

“THERE IS A PLACE FOR YOU AT ST. PAUL’S”

September 2019

St. Paul’s Lutheran Church

Volume 25, Issue 8

WE ARE CHURCH

“We Are Church!” That was the theme of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Churchwide Assembly, August 5-11, 2019. Over 900 voting delegates plus guests, resource persons



and staff attended the assembly held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod group consisted of 22 members. I had the honor of being one of the voting delegates from our synod to attend. In addition, I attended the Biannual Assembly of the African Descent Lutheran Association (ADLA) that was held in Milwaukee a few days before the Churchwide Assembly. The theme for that assembly was “Lift Every Voice.” As a first time attendee at both of these events, I was in awe of the faithful, power-filled servants of our Triune God

who came together to fellowship and make decisions that would guide us as a body of witnesses reflecting God’s abiding grace in this world. Wonderful and hard work was done as delegates debated issues facing our congregations and our communities. Our Synod prepared a wonderful summary of the highlights of the Churchwide Assembly which is included as a separate handout. Therefore, I would like to use this time to share some of my own reflections.

“We Are Church,” is part of four principles used to describe how we express our Christian identity as Lutherans in the ELCA. The other three are: “We are Lutheran,” “We are Church Together” and “We are Church for the sake of the World.”¹ Throughout Churchwide, we saw reminders of what it means to be Church. I saw it most vividly reflected in worship that included diverse languages (i.e. Spanish, Arabic, French, and Senegalese), music and liturgy. I saw worship that included the use of crosses depicting different cultures, use of creative displays of creation through dove-like props that floated down the aisles as part of processions. I sat among fellow worshippers as we listened to prophetic preaching on unity, diversity, and gender inclusion as ways to care for our neighbors. All were beautiful and powerful. I longed for and was completely filled by these diverse multicultural ways to praise and be in fellowship with each other.

The experiences that left the greatest impression on me were the visible struggle that the ELCA has gone through, and still has yet to go through, to be a true reflection of being church. I saw this in three ways. The first was the service celebrating the kick-off of the 50th anniversary of ordained women, the 40th

¹ More details about these four principles can be found on the ELCA website, elca.org, under the About tab.

anniversary of women of color and the 10th anniversary of the decision to ordain people of same-gendered relationships. As I stood waiting and watching the procession of ordained women, I humbly reflected that I too would be a part of this body of servant leaders in a few months. The joy of the women was tangible as they danced down the aisles. That procession reflected the journey through tears, rejections, and disappointments. It was the living story of women and others who were told that they could not be used by God to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments. I saw the third ordained woman of color, Gwen King, leave her motorized scooter and joyfully dance down the aisle with her cane. This was followed that evening with a banquet in which the first ordained woman, Elizabeth Platt from Carrick, told her story. She shared that the decision to change our constitutional language from ordained man to ordained person suddenly made her a person. Her God-given gifts and talents were now made visible and available for the work of the church. The second was the reading of the ELCA Declaration of Apology to People of African Descent. I was struck by the language that spoke to previous words without the action behind it to support true change. We are church means both an acknowledgement of harmful actions through confessions and repentance, as well as engaging in the effort needed to heal through reconciliation. The response by the Rev. Lamont Wells, president of ADLA, challenged us as a body to move beyond words to action. His statement *if we are ready to change* left me wondering *are we ready to change?* Can we as a body here in North America, which is predominantly white, mature in our willingness to acknowledge the truth of our institutional biases? Can we through the power and guidance of the Triune God grow into what it means to be church? Are we ready to shift our thinking, our comfort zone of how we have worshipped to include the other? As I watched Lutheran leaders from other countries such as Brazil and Nigeria reflect a diversity that is so slow to be included in our own congregations, I wondered are we ready to change?

Finally, the vote by the body to become a sanctuary denomination filled me with hope. Yes, there is much work to be done by each congregation and synod to determine how to live this mission out in our individual communities. However, the stance that the ELCA will be a living witness of what it means to care for our neighbors fills me with joy. Rather than the political understanding that we see bantered around in the news of sanctuary, I understand sanctuary to be a place of refuge and rest for all. As we witness injustices and harm to our neighbors, whether they look like us, speak like us or think like us, we have been commanded to love our neighbors. As a denomination we have declared that to be standing in the gap to provide refuge and rest.

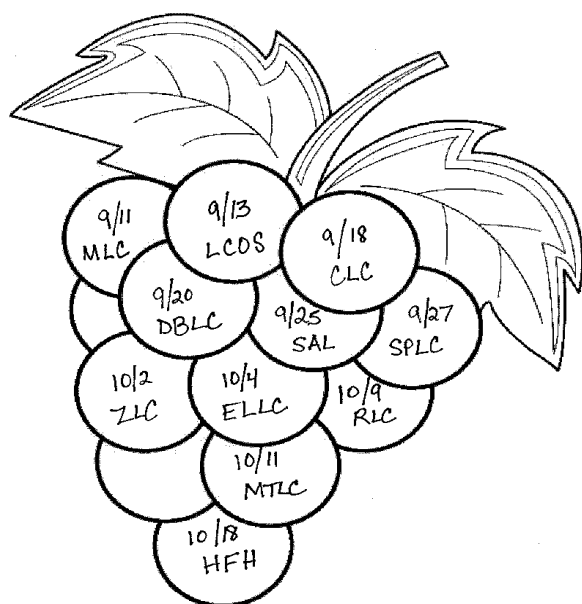


ADLA Assembly Rostered Women Gathering

Are we ready to be church? To continue the necessary changes that lead to the celebration of the gifts and talents of the entire body? To tackle the difficult and uncomfortable conversations that lead to reconciliation for all members of the body? My sisters and brothers, this is the opportunity before us as we through the grace of God live out this vibrant faith in the ever-changing context of our neighborhoods.

Blessings,
Vicar Brenda

Join Vicar Mandy at 7:00 p.m.
on Wednesday and Friday nights,
The Vine Speaks,
Adult Bible Study
focusing on John 15
September 11 — October 18, 2019



St. Paul's Hosting Friday, September 27



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7

For the second year in a row, PLUM will be working with the faith-based organization “**Rise Against Hunger**” to host a **meal packaging event**. This year, our neighbors in faith from St. John's Lutheran Church in North Versailles will be joining us. We will coordinate an assembly-line packaging of highly nutritious dehydrated meals comprised of rice, soy, vegetables and 23 essential vitamins and minerals. Together we will package 15,000 meals that will be sent to school will package 15,000 meals that will be sent to school feeding programs around

the world, medical clinics, child growth and development centers, elder care and crisis and disaster centers.

This project has two parts:

- First, it costs 34 cents to package each meal. Our goal is set at 15,000 meals (\$5,141), an increase over last year's commitment. Given a financial commitment from St. John's Lutheran in North Versailles and some PLUM funds from last year, bottom line is that PLUM congregations need to raise about \$3,146 by August 30th. So we are asking each PLUM congregation to contribute \$315.
- Second, we need at least 40-50 people to help package the meals. We need a group of able-bodied people at Christ Lutheran at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 7th to help unload the truck and set up our fellowship hall for the event. The actual meal packaging will take place 10:30 am sharp - Noon the same day.

Please make the commitment to help with the event on Saturday, September 7!



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15 PLUM JOINT HEALING SERVICE

Trinity Lutheran Church (Mt. Oliver) (601 Brownsville Road, Pittsburgh PA 15210) at 3:00 pm. This will be a service of healing and will offer a Litany for the Healing of the Nations, Holy Communion and Anointing for Healing. Please let the people in your congregation know if you can provide rides or if you will need a ride.



September Assistants and Sponsors

Assisting Minister

- September 1 – Carol Ferens
- September 8 – Carol Ferens
- September 15 – Ann Morrocco
- September 22 – Jill A. Shook
- September 29 – Ann Morrocco

Eternal Candle

- Anna Mae Kostelich

Fellowship

- September 22

Flowers

- September 1
- September 8 – Ann Morrocco
- September 15 – Anna Mae Kostelich
- September 22 – John Straka
- September 29 – Carol Jean Straka

Lectors

- September 1 – Mark Pollo
- September 8 – John Straka
- September 15
- September 22 – Ann Morrocco
- September 29

If you are interested in serving as an assistant or sponsoring the eternal candle or flowers, please contact the church office (724-745-5962) or email: stpaulscbg@verizon.net.

Worship Schedule



September 1	Rev. Martin Rafanan
September 8	Rev. Martin Rafanan
September 15	Vicar Brenda Henry
September 22	Vicar Mandy Gilberti
September 29	Rev. Liz Mayforth

Pastor's schedule is subject to change without notice.



Keep in your prayers: Ev, Matthew, Anna Mae, Nancy, Pat, Alex, Mark, Albert, Patty, Pam, Virginia, Betty Jane, Rich, Rachel, Pat, Donna, Cooper, Edward, Anna Mae, Eddie, Randy, Steve, Barbara, Charlotte, John, Lyndsay, Christine, Tondi, Pastor Wayne, Kelly, Mike, Colin, Tom, Jeff, the Miller, Paulick, Galano, Burchesky, Grove, O'Donnell, Richmond families. If anyone should be added or removed, please contact the church office (724-745-5962) or email: stpaulscbg@verizon.net.



Carol Cramer	September 14
Josh Porter, Jr.	September 27