



Trinity Together

Trinity Lutheran Church

357 West Main Street
Kutztown, Pennsylvania 19530

April 2024

Vicar Seth Noggle, Lead Minister	570-529-2325	vicar@trinitykutztown.com
The Rev. Dr. Dennis Ritter, Visitation Pastor	484-529-7801	visitationpastor@trinitykutztown.com
Vacant – TBD, Director of Youth & Family Ministry		
Bruce Rohrbach, Director of Music	610-360-8968	music@trinitykutztown.com
Brandon Wood, Tech & Media Specialist	484-629-9332	technology@trinitykutztown.com
Mike Sailsbery, Financial Secretary	412-849-5255	finsectrinity@hotmail.com
Lisa Finke, Giving Bookkeeper	610-349-2325	lmfinke@msn.com
Diane Spohn, Administrative Assistant	610-683-3450	office@trinitykutztown.com
Julia Morton, BSW Intern	484-374-0031	jmort196@live.kutztown.edu

Mission Statement:

“The mission of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church is to equip God’s people to do God’s work and bring good news to hungry people.”

Church Office Hours:

Tuesday through Friday 8:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Phone: 610-683-3450

Website: www.trinitykutztown.com

Sunday Worship Service at 9:30 AM

Adult Sunday School at 8:00 AM

Good News Club and Journey to Adulthood/Confirmation after worship

2024 Church Council Members

Jeff Collier

Molly Dubbs

Randy Heffner

Joseph Jedwab

Karise Mace

Jessica Miller

Ed Rakowiecki

Ann Towne

Alicia Wood

Property

Worship Life

Endowment

Learning

Stewardship

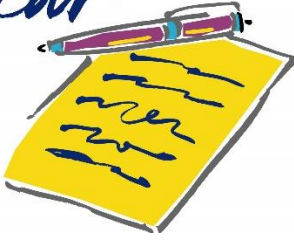
Treasurer, Finance

Vice President, Personnel

Secretary, Mission/Service

President, Fellowship

From the Vicar



Hello Trinity Members!

He is risen! He is risen indeed! We are so blessed that we get to share and experience the joy of resurrection. I hope all of you had an Easter that was life giving and allowed you to spend time with your family and friends. Easter is the most holy day in the life of the Church and it's one of the things I most look forward to at Trinity. I don't know about you, but after celebrations I tend to get the blues. It can be a big comedown after having something we anticipated for so long. After the decorations are down, break is over, the family goes home and we're left to clean up, it can be a bit dreary.

Yet, the good news of Easter is something we are called to experience every day and every second of our lives. Easter is the day that we celebrate Jesus' victory over death, his deep unending love for us, and the fact that resurrection is a gift we all get to partake in. And those are all promises that we get to live into every day onward. In fact, every Sunday at worship we remember those same promises. Sunday worship in the Church has always been considered a "mini Easter" where we take time to celebrate and remember that God loves us and forgives us.

The joy of Easter is always with us. It didn't end on March 31st. So, try to remember that in the coming months as you go about your day. Jesus died so that we can now have eternal life. Jesus died so that we can be forgiven and loved to the fullest. May we live life to the fullest because we have the knowledge that we are loved to the fullest.

Peace,

Vicar Seth Noggle

Schedule & Volunteers



ASSISTING MINISTERS:

April 7	9:30 AM	OPEN*
April 14	9:30 AM	OPEN*
April 21	9:30 AM	OPEN*
April 28	9:30 AM	Dan Raudenbush

LAY READERS:

April 7	9:30 AM	OPEN*
April 14	9:30 AM	OPEN*
April 21	9:30 AM	OPEN*
April 28	9:30 AM	Dan Raudenbush

ACOLYTES:

April 7	9:30 AM	Liam Miller
April 14	9:30 AM	Isaac Jedwab
April 21	9:30 AM	Elijah Miller
April 28	9:30 AM	Liam Miller

USHERS/GREETERS:

April 7	9:30 AM	Rita and Alan Robertson
April 14	9:30 AM	Nargiza and Joseph Jedwab
April 21	9:30 AM	Donna Keglovits and Denise Scheidt
April 28	9:30 AM	The Jeremy Miller Family

***Please call the church office if you can fill any of these openings or sign up at:**

<https://bit.ly/TrinityWorshipLeaderSchedule>

MONEY COUNTERS: Steve Fink, Melanie Wessner

FLOWER CHAIRPERSON: Darlene Dietrich

ALTAR COMMITTEE: Melanie Wessner, Nancy Plushanski

Committee Meeting Dates...

Worship Life	Tuesday, April 2, at 7 p.m.
Church Council	Tuesday, April 9, at 7 p.m.
Finance	Tuesday, April 16, at 7 p.m.
Personnel	Monday, April 29, at 7 p.m.

Christian Education...

Adult Sunday School

The Adult Sunday School Class welcomes you to join us in enjoying “Examining Our Faith”, a series of readings that invites us to remember God’s unfaltering presence and invites us to turn the challenges of life into opportunities for nurturing a vibrant faith. But what does it mean to nurture a vibrant faith? We find the answer in the book of Jude where he appeals to us to stand strong for the faith that was once entrusted to the saints. First Peter offers comfort amid struggle, and urges us to defend our faith with humility, gentleness, and reverence. Each lesson offers us the opportunity to examine our faith in God with examples we can relate to our daily lives in inspiring ways. We will follow Rev, Amy Linderman Allen, ELCA pastor, and author of *For Theirs is the Kingdom: Inclusion and Participation of Children in the Gospel according to Luke*. Rev. Allen will help us embrace our call to examine our faith. Please join us Sundays at 8:00 AM in the parlor for discussion, coffee, and fellowship.

Good News Club/Journey to Adulthood

The Good News Club for grades Pre-K thru 5th grade and Journey to Adulthood/Confirmation Class starting in 6th grade meet after Church from 10:45-11:45AM.

Bible Study

Bible Study is on Thursdays at 10 AM. **They are led by either Vicar Seth Noggle or Pr. Ritter and are based on the upcoming Sunday’s scripture reading(s).** You can join the Bible study group in-person or on Zoom. Here’s the Zoom link to click:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84530518506> To dial in by phone, call 1 301-715-8592 and use Meeting ID number: 845 3051 8506. No other password is needed.

Upcoming Worship Opportunities...

Rejoicing Spirits Worship Service

The next Rejoicing Spirits worship service will be on Sunday, April 7th, at 3:00 PM at St. Paul's UCC. The theme is: "Is Believing Seeing?" There will be a craft and snack during fellowship time. "Rejoicing Spirits" is held monthly on the first Sunday of the month and is a worship and fellowship gathering for intellectually and developmentally disabled individuals held at St. Paul UCC (47 S. Whiteoak St.). Anyone is invited to attend. If you know of someone who is intellectually and developmentally disabled, let them know about this special, no shushing worship and fellowship opportunity to freely express their joy and love of God. For more information, please contact: Charlene Fisher (charf1sh@verizon.net, 610-223-9822) or Erin Webb (emwebb05@aol.com, 610-894-9949).

From the Finance Committee...

Approved 2024 Budget -- \$312,710

Unrestricted income through Feb.	\$38,044
Expenditures through Feb.	\$46,873
Balance through Feb.	\$ (8,829)
Average monthly offering	\$ 18,536

New Staff Email Addressed...

Please note these new email addresses to use for staff members:

Vicar Seth Noggle: vicar@trinitykutztown.com
Pr. Dennis Ritter: visitation@trinitykutztown.com
Bruce Rohrbach: music@trinitykutztown.com
Brandon Wood: technology@trinitykutztown.com

How You Can Help...

Attic Outlet

The Attic Outlet sale is coming up on Friday, April 5th, 6-8:00 p.m.; Saturday, April 6th, 9 a.m.-12 Noon; Friday, April 12th, 6-8:00 p.m.; and Saturday, April 13th, 9 a.m.-12 Noon. Set-up dates are April 1st through 4th beginning at 9 a.m. and volunteers are welcome to help set up! For any questions, please call the church during office hours or Darlene Dietrich at 610-683-7975.



Altar Committee Members Needed

The Worship Life Team wants to thank all the volunteers who have served on Altar Committee and those who continue to serve. We are still looking for at least one volunteer for January, July and September. With a team of two people assigned to each month, it makes it easier to accommodate everyone's schedules. Training will be provided and someone is available at the last minute if you cannot attend church for some reason. Please contact Debbie Ziegler or Diane in the church office if you have questions or would like to volunteer. Thank you.

Do You Have a Student at College?

Trinity and the Mission Committee wish to provide outreach/care packages to our Trinity college students as they study for Spring Semester finals. If you have a college student and would like them to receive a care package, please fill out a College Student Form located on the table in the back of the church or call the church office (610-683-3450) with the student's name, address, college, and when they have finals or call Rita Robertson (610-737-7039). Thank you!

And...If You Would Like to Help With the Care Packages

We will be sending college students and military personnel a Gift Card to a local eatery near them. If you would like to contribute to this Gift Card Project, you can talk to Rita Robertson or call her at 610-737-7039 or put your donation in the offering and mark it Mission Committee College Student Care Packages. Thank you.

Student Food Pantry at KU

Thank you to everyone who has contributed time, groceries, and cash donations to this ministry. If you would like to contribute food items, here is a list of suggested items:

Peanut Butter	Juice
Miscellaneous Snacks	Crackers
Knorr Side Dish Packets	Cereal
Instant Potato Packets	Breakfast Bars
Toiletries	Mac 'n Cheese
Soup	Tuna
Canned Fruits & Veggies	Pasta

There is a box outside of the Parlor for the items you are donating. If you have any questions about this program, please contact the church office.

The Christmas Shoppe

Louise DeVall will be organizing The Christmas Shoppe this year and invites anyone with new items appropriate for Christmas gifts to drop them off at the church any time throughout the year. Please mark items for The Christmas Shoppe.

Interested in Joining Trinity...

If you or someone you know is interested in becoming a member of Trinity, please contact Vicar Seth Noggle or Pr. Dennis Ritter. No date has been set for the reception of new members until an individual(s) indicate a desire to join our congregation.

If you know of someone who is looking for a church home that is Gospel centered, ministry oriented and friendly,

Upcoming Events...

Hoagie Sale Fundraiser

The youth going to New Orleans are having a hoagie sale fundraiser. There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Orders are due by April 10th, with pick-up on Saturday, April 20th between 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. Cost is \$6 each.

Rent-A-Hand

Need some help around the house? Yardwork? Putting away decorations? Painting? Trinity, St. John's, and Grace Lutheran Macungie Youth Groups are here to help! For \$50 you could have 2 helpers for a maximum of 3 hours of work. Each additional helper would be \$10. The proceeds go to the youth group trip to New Orleans this summer. Contact Alicia Wood (610-334-0733) to schedule.

Background Checks & Clearances Info

On April 14th after worship, there will be information and assistance on completing background checks and clearances to be a volunteer or for other purposes. Please plan to stay and get more information!

Coffee and Conversation

On April 21st after worship, the RIC Committee invites everyone to stay for refreshments as we reflect on the last 2 years of being an RIC congregation and get feedback on what the focus of the RIC Committee should be moving forward. Anyone who can't attend that event but would like to share their input can reach out to Lee Shannon at leeshannon1138@gmail.com. Anyone who is interested in serving on the RIC Committee can email Lee at any time!

Ping Pong Club

A ping pong club for all ages is meeting downstairs on Friday afternoons at 4:30 p.m. Please talk to Isaac Jedwab if you are interested or have any questions.

Youth Brunch Fundraiser

On Sunday, April 28th, the youth attending the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans in July are having a free-will offering breakfast/brunch fundraiser immediately after the service at 11:00 am on Sunday, April 28th in the downstairs fellowship hall. The congregation is invited to come to support our youth as they continue to raise funds for this amazing opportunity.

Kutztown Kitchen

The next Kutztown Kitchen community meal will be on Sunday, April 28th, from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. Kutztown Strong will be providing a meal of stuffed shells, spaghetti, salad, bread, and desserts. For questions or to request delivery, please call Ann Towne at 484-239-5314 or the church office.

Thank You Notes...

Trinity Mission Team,

Thank you so much for the very nice Valentine's Day goody bags. This put a smile on my face and I enjoyed all the treats.

Many thanks,

Ruth Evans

Dear Trinity,

Thank you for the wonderful celebration on Sunday, 2/4, honoring my 3 years of service as transitional pastor for our congregation. While my service in that role was longer than most of us anticipated, it was a labor of love for me, and your partnership made it so. With some assistance along the way, I am learning how to use the iPad Pro I received as a gift. It was all such a surprise. Thank you so much!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Ritter

Flag Retirement Box...

Trinity is a designated collection point for ready to be retired flags, sponsored by the Scouts of Kutztown. If you have a flag to be retired, please place it in the labeled wooden box across from the office.

Online Giving Provider...

EFT Corporation is now the provider of Trinity's online giving services. If you were giving through Vanco, please be sure to transfer your online giving to EFT. If you haven't used online giving in the past, give it a try! If you have any questions or would like to talk with someone about online giving or help to set up an account, you can call the church office at 610-683-3450 during regular hours.

Youth Group Schedule...

My E-mail is seth.noggle@gmail.com if you would like to E-mail me and ask to be on the youth group list. That's the best way to be updated on Youth Group activities.

Sunday, April 7th: No Scheduled Youth Group

**Thursday, April 11th: Trinity
Dungeons and Dragons Night**

Who: All Ages

Time: 6:00-8:00 PM

Sunday, April 14th: Trinity (Movie Night)

Primary Youth Group (Grades 2nd-7th)

Time: 4:00-6:00 PM

Secondary Youth Group (8th-12th)

Time: 6:00-8:00 PM

Sunday, April 21st: St. John's

Primary Youth Group (Grades 2nd-7th)

Time: 4:30-6:00 PM

Secondary Youth Group (8th-12th)

Time: 6:00-8:00 PM

**Tuesday, April 23rd: Trinity
Dungeons and Dragons Night**

Who: All Ages

Time: 6:00-8:30 PM

Saturday, April 27th: ELCA Youth Gathering Pre-Event

Who: H.S. students attending the Youth Gathering

Time: 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

Sunday, April 28th: Trinity (Kutztown Kitchen)

KUTZTOWN KITCHEN (FREE MEAL IN TRINITY'S BASEMENT)

TIME: 4:30-6:00PM

Primary youth group will all eat at Kutztown Kitchen at the beginning of youth group

Community Events/Volunteer Opportunities...

Berks Encore

Berks Encore is in need of volunteers. The organization has expressed a need for folks to deliver Meals On Wheels, but you can also volunteer to help at the Fleetwood Center, be part of a Friendly Visitor Program, help with Grocery Shopping for folks who need assistance, or help with Medical counseling. If any of this may be a fit for you, check the link: <https://berksencore.org/get-involved> to get explanations and see a volunteer video. To help more specifically with Meals On Wheels, call (610)374-3185, ext. 225 to speak with Michelle Goodheart about the program and how to volunteer.

Free Senior Luncheon

St. Barnabas Center at 234 East Main Street, Kutztown hosts a free senior luncheon on the first Friday of the month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Better With Age

The Kutztown Community Library hosts Better With Age the third Friday of each month at 10 a.m. at the library, located at 70 Bieber Alley, Kutztown. Please call 610-683-5820 for more information.

Theology With a Twist

The next Theology With a Twist will be on Tuesday, **April 2nd**, at 7:00 p.m. at the Kutztown Tavern. The topic will be "Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest." Join Rev. Kevin McLemore, the Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call in the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, for a deep dive into the book, "Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest" by Dr. David R. Blumenthal. We'll learn more about Blumenthal's post-

Holocaust theology and his argument that God is certainly merciful and kind, loving and fair, but God is also capable of acts so unjust that they can be considered abusive. This is a unique opportunity to learn the main ideas found in this book, as well as some of the challenges that understanding an unjust God poses to us as people of faith.

Kutztown Folk Music Society

The next concert in the 2023-2024 Kutztown Folk Music Society series will be on Friday, **April 12th**, featuring the Berks Fiddle Champs. Concerts are held at St. Paul's UCC, Kutztown, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m. There is a \$9 donation for the concert; \$7 for seniors, military and students; free for children 12 and under. Please see the full schedule of concerts posted on the church bulletin board.

“The 28 Large” Reunion Concert

A 50-year reunion concert of “The 28 Large,” the Kutztown High School Pop Group under the direction of Lucinda B. Knauer, will take place on Sunday, **April 14th**, at 2 p.m. at St. John's UCC, 257 W. Walnut Street, Kutztown. A free will offering will be taken for the Sally Breidegam Miksiewicz Memorial Fund at Moravian College.

Friend, Inc. Benefit Auction

Come join Friend, Inc. Community Services on Saturday, **April 27, 2024** for our 34th annual Benefit Auction at Beltzner Hall, in the Kutztown Fairgrounds, at 5:00 PM. All proceeds directly support Friend's food pantry and social support programs. Tickets include catered dinner, drinks, and a chance to bid on our famous desserts! If you can't make it in person, you can bid online! To purchase a ticket

or bid online visit: www.friendinc.org/benefit-auction. For any questions, please contact Sara Snyder at sarasnyder10@gmail.com or 484-866-0393.

St. Luke's Grief Support

St. Luke's offers 90-minute virtual Good Grief Workshops to provide a better understanding of what grief is, how it may affect a person emotionally, physically, spiritually and psychologically, coping strategies and ways to reconcile the loss. For more information and to receive an invitation to join the meeting, call 484-526-2499.

- Wednesday, **4/10/2024**, from 6-7:30 PM
- Thursday, **4/25/2024**, 1-2:30 PM

Living With Loss Support Group

Beginning **April 16th**, a 6-week series, “Living With Loss,” will begin on Tuesday evenings from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. at Ludwick Funeral Homes and Cremation Care, Inc. located at 333 Greenwich Street, Kutztown. It will be facilitated by MaryAnn Hamm, Bereavement and Grief Counselor. To register, please contact Amy at 610-683-6080.

Kutztown Community Choir Spring Choral Concert

The Kutztown Community Choir will present their annual Spring concert on Sunday, **May 19**, at 7:00 PM, at Trinity. “Hope springs eternal...” so the poets attest. Spring offers the hope of renewal and starting fresh, a season that reminds us that change and new growth are possible! The pieces to be performed in our spring concert echo that longing and hope. Please join us as we welcome the return of spring and summer with an evening of fellowship, fun, and fine music!



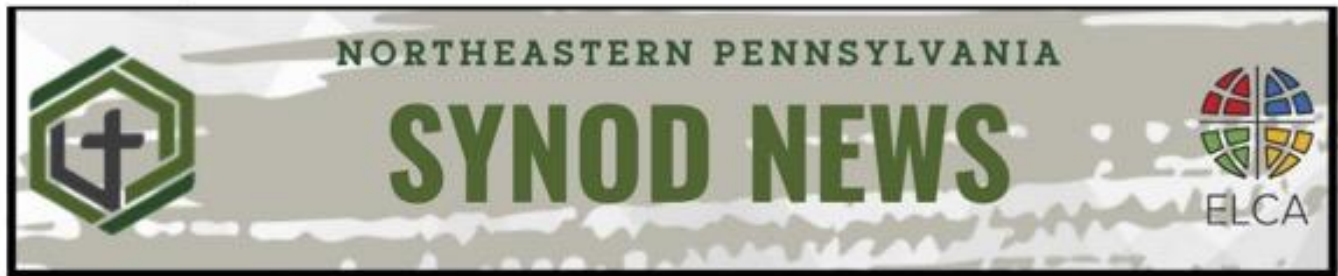
2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Office Closed 9:00am Attic Outlet Set-Up Begins 7:30pm Kutztown Community Choir	2 9:00am Attic Outlet Set-Up 7:00pm Worship Life Team Meeting	3 9:00am Attic Outlet Set-Up 2:00pm Faith, Growth and Support-Rita Lieb 7:00pm Handbell Choir Rehearsal	4 9:00am Attic Outlet Set-Up 10:00am Bible Study 7:00pm AA Meeting 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	5 6:00pm Attic Outlet Sale 7:00pm AA Meeting	6 9:00am Attic Outlet Sale
7 8:00am Adult Sunday School 9:30am Worship: Holy Communion (In-person & Zoom) 10:45am Good News Club and Journey to Adulthood/Confirmation 7:00pm SA Meeting	8 Office Closed 7:30pm Kutztown Community Choir	9 7:00pm Council Meeting	10 Hoagie and Ham Sandwich orders due! 2:00pm Faith, Growth and Support-Rita Lieb 7:00pm Handbell Choir Rehearsal	11 10:00am Bible Study 6:00pm All Ages Youth Group - Dungeons & Dragons at Trinity 7:00pm AA Meeting 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	12 6:00pm Attic Outlet Sale 7:00pm AA Meeting	13 9:00am Attic Outlet Sale
14 8:00am Adult Sunday School 9:30am Worship: Holy Communion (In-person & Zoom) 10:45am Background Checks and Clearances Information 10:45am Good News Club and Journey to Adulthood/Confirmation 4:00pm Primary Youth Group at Trinity - Movie Night 6:00pm Secondary Youth Group at Trinity - Movie Night 7:00pm SA Meeting	15 Office Closed 7:30pm Kutztown Community Choir	16 7:00pm Finance Committee Meeting	17 2:00pm Faith, Growth and Support-Rita Lieb 7:00pm Handbell Choir Rehearsal	18 10:00am Bible Study 7:00pm AA Meeting 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	19 4:30pm Ping Pong Club 7:00pm AA Meeting	20 9:30am Hoagie and Ham Sandwich Pick-Up at Trinity
21 8:00am Adult Sunday School 9:30am Worship: Holy Communion (In-person & Zoom) 10:45am Coffee and Conversation with RIC Committee 10:45am Good News Club and Journey to Adulthood/Confirmation 4:30pm Primary Youth Group at St. John's 6:00pm Secondary Youth Group at St. John's 7:00pm SA Meeting	22 Office Closed 7:30pm Kutztown Community Choir	23 6:00pm All Ages Youth Group - Dungeons & Dragons at Trinity	24 2:00pm Faith, Growth and Support-Rita Lieb 7:00pm Handbell Choir Rehearsal	25 10:00am Bible Study 7:00pm AA Meeting 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	26 4:30pm Ping Pong Club 7:00pm AA Meeting	27 9:00am ELCA Youth Gathering Pre-Event at Emmanuel Lutheran, Bath
28 8:00am Adult Sunday School 9:30am Worship: Holy Communion (In-person & Zoom) 10:45am Good News Club and Journey to Adulthood/Confirmation 11:00am Breakfast/Brunch: Youth Fundraiser for ELCA Youth Gathering 4:30pm Kutztown Kitchen Community Meal 4:30pm Primary Youth Group at Trinity (Kutztown Kitchen meal first) 7:00pm SA Meeting	29 Office Closed 7:00pm Personnel Committee 7:30pm Kutztown Community Choir	30	1 2:00pm Faith, Growth and Support-Rita Lieb 7:00pm Handbell Choir Rehearsal	2 10:00am Bible Study 7:00pm AA Meeting 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal	3 4:30pm Ping Pong Club 7:00pm AA Meeting	4



2 APRIL Birthdays 2024

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 Amanda Zehl Susan Angelisanti	3 Kimberly Kern Miriam Ligammari	4 Stephen Hobaugh Owen Kulp Nirvana Werst	5 Bud Kelchner	6 Trevor Shurr Ryan Horvath Neil Robertson Ken Kunkel Hannah DeVall Joseph Jedwab
7 Leslie Schlegel	8	9 Pauline Rohrbach Ed Keglovits	10 Kathy Gottlund Ryan Tuerk Aidan Pape	11 Joe Wessner Jimmy Ligammari	12 Peter Gottlund	13
14 Jason Garcia	15	16 Kellen Cunningham Scarlett Kelchner	17	18 Stephen Demchyk, Jr.	19	20 Mike Berg Meredith Mace
21	22 Louise Fick Shannon Bowerman	23	24 Richard Zehl	25 Christine Kyle	26	27 Ruth Fegley Jeff Collier Emma Kyle Jordan Noecker Lisa Lutz Tina Billig
28 Sarah Angelisanti Jonathan Weinrich	29 Erma Bond	30 Stephen Demchyk, Sr. Nargiza Jedwab				



Just Being There: Our Alaska Experience as Sitka Lutheran Church Volunteers

By: Gail Colahan

Sitka is located on the west coast of Baranof Island in the Alaska panhandle. Most of the island lies within the limits of the Tongass National Forest, a temperate rainforest, rich with wildlife and scenic vistas. Inhabited by Tlingit for over 10,000 years, ruled by Russia starting in 1799, then transferred from Russia to the US in 1867, this island community of 8,400 people continues to reflect characteristics of these varied cultures. For over 30 years the abundance of nature, scenery and cultural heritage has attracted cruise ships to Sitka. For most of that time Sitka Lutheran Church (SLC) has supported a summer volunteer program to assist the church in being a welcoming presence amidst a burgeoning tourist presence, which numbered nearly 600,000 in 2023 when we participated as volunteers.

Flash back to June 2019 when we first visited Sitka, not as cruise passengers but as plane travelers on a self-guided tour throughout Southeast Alaska. It just so happened we were in Sitka on Sunday morning so we decided to go to worship after finding an ELCA church within walking distance of our hotel. Entering the church, we read from hallway signage that in 1840 while Sitka was a Russian colony, Finns founded SLC making it the oldest Protestant congregation on the US West Coast. Included with other historical signage hung a poster declaring "Volunteers Wanted". The sign combined with our fascination with the church's origins, its geographic location, and the history and culture of this place prompted us to make further inquiries. We learned about SLC's program inviting volunteers to come to Sitka for a month to welcome summer cruise ship visitors to SLC, with the SLC faith family providing housing and the use of a car during the volunteers' stay. Our intrigue with the idea of such an opportunity prompted us to complete an interest form despite knowing we weren't in a position at the time to make such a commitment.

Four years later we found ourselves in Sitka. Driving into town to open the church, we marveled at vistas of Sitka Sound and surrounding forest-covered land while passing marinas filled with fishing vessels. On days when large cruise ships were in port, Greg greeted visitors outside SLC's front door, enticing them with the smell of freshly popped popcorn and the query, "Did you know that Sitka Lutheran is the oldest Protestant congregation on the west coast?". Gail provided a brief overview of the church's history and pointed out historical objects from the original 1843 church for the curious who ventured inside, and at times drifted into conversations about faith and the church. All visitors received a warm welcome whether they choose to hear the church's history, find solitude in the sanctuary, take a much-needed rest break, or buy some popcorn.

While Greg often felt frustrated when people just walked by with their heads down (probably in part due to the modern façade of SLC's 3rd church building as compared to the original features of the nearby Russian Orthodox Cathedral), he did experience some gratifying encounters - a conversation with a gentleman from China who was interested in talking about the history of Sitka and well-wishers who knew about SLC's volunteer program and just wanted to say hi. On the day we transitioned with the previous volunteers, Greg stood alongside Kurt out in front of the church. A family walking by stopped and

requested a prayer for their child who had a health affliction. Kurt, an ordained pastor, knelt down close to the child in the stroller and proceeded to offer a prayer. Afterwards, the family departed in peace and Greg and Kurt shared their thankfulness in being able to honor the family's request.

On another day with few visitors in town, two seasonal shuttle bus drivers walked into the church. After Gail guided them to the sanctuary to share the church's story, the gentleman asked for time to pray. Sensing the gravity of his request, Gail invited him to stay as long as necessary and indicated she would request visitors quietly respect his being there until he was ready to leave. It was at least a half hour before he and his friend emerged from the sanctuary and shared that his sister was dying and he couldn't be with her and that his time spent in prayer in the church had been the best way for him to face the crisis. Thanks be to God.

In addition to our encounters with visitors, the people of Sitka Lutheran Church blessed us with the warmest of welcomes. Pastor Rudd shared personal and church background and introduced us to Alaska Synod's Bishop Shelly during a SLC hosted Southeast Cluster Meeting. Heather, the secretary who grew up in Sitka, assisted with everything from the latest cruise schedule updates to lending intriguing details and answers to questions about Sitka's more recent history. Sue provided a tour around town to familiarize us with the schools, hospitals, and businesses that are part of the daily life of this area and took us to a refuge for orphaned bear cubs. Paula, another parishioner, gifted us with sweet treats and invited us to her house for a grilled salmon dinner. Wayne guided us through the Alaska wilderness on a glorious hike past cascades and waterfalls to Bear Lake. Harvey and Kathleen, managers of the SLC volunteer program, provided not only a place to stay but enjoyable storytelling over meals and desserts. Even the neighbors extended their welcome with soup and muffins. We were truly humbled by the kindness, generosity, hospitality, and support we received.

Just being there was such a wonderful experience on so many levels – experiencing what it's like to be strangers welcomed into a community, serving as volunteers at SLC, living for 5 weeks on an island in a different environment, exploring the beauty and wonder of the Tongass rainforest and its wildlife, learning about the history and cultures that influenced and characterize Sitka, meeting and talking with people from around the world, and getting to know and become friends with the SLC faith family. We will never know the impact of our being there for most tourists who visited the church. However, SLC parishioners were abundantly grateful and thanked us profusely for assisting in their being a welcoming presence. We also know that the experience had a profound impact on us. Just being there we experienced so many wonderful God moments and blessings – lives touched, joy witnessed, beauty revealed, friendships made. We are so much richer for having had the opportunity to live in a different place and serve as volunteers for Sitka Lutheran Church.



Keynote Speaker: Marie Anne serves as the Senior Director for Building Resilient Communities (BRC) at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Ms. Sliwinski has 20 years of experience working in the non-profit sector, 14 of which are dedicated in international humanitarian and development programs. Ms. Sliwinski oversees BRC, which draws together the ministries of ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, AMMPARO and the ELCA's Social Ministry Organization to share knowledge, collaborate effectively, invest in new ideas and foster new opportunities for the ELCA, partners, companions and neighbors to strive together "for justice and peace in all the earth." Marie Anne holds a master's degree in international relations from the University of Chicago, and currently resides in the Chicago suburb with her husband and two children. **Register today at nepasynod.org/assembly2024/**