

PARTNERS IN
the spirit
APRIL 2006



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Coming Soon to a Church Near You –
Evangelical Lutheran Worship!

A Prayer Answered

A church appeal brings a kidney donor
for man in need

Miracle Man

Addictions Drama Wins
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October 2006 is the release date for the new resource, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (ELW). The “previews” will begin in April with an informational mailing to congregations about ELW. To help congregations become familiar with the new resources, each congregation will receive an Evangelical Lutheran Worship Preview Kit.

Augsburg Fortress has indicated that the Preview Kit will include the following materials:

- an Evangelical Lutheran Worship Sampler Edition with 64 pages of liturgies and hymns to review;
- an audio CD with recorded portions of the common liturgies contained in the sampler;
- a CD-ROM with introductory resources including newsletter articles, bulletin paragraphs, temple talks, congregational letters, graphics, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Worship logo, and more;
- samples of the new Evangelical Lutheran Worship bookplates and offering envelopes to help congregations encourage special gifts.

A “mock up” of the new Pew Edition of Evangelical Lutheran Worship will be on display at the Augsburg Fortress display at our synod assembly March 19-20.

Special pricing and financing options will be available to congregations. If congregations order the Pew Edition, they may purchase it for \$17.50 through October 2. After that, the



cost will be \$20.

Twelve-month financing is also available for congregations to help purchase Pew Editions. Augsburg Fortress is providing twelve-month financing for interested congregations with no interest or financing charges.

Learn more about this resource by checking out the [Augsburg Fortress Web site](#). The ELCA's Renewing Worship Web site at www.renewingworship.org provides a preview selected content.





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Photo credits: Randy Monceaux Photography & Amico Studios.

[This article is reprinted by permission from the January-February 2006 issue of Good Shepherd's donor publication, Sweet Charity]

Elizabeth McDonald, Development Writer, Good Shepherd

On a warm sunny day last August, John Scolastico woke up, put on a bright blue shirt, said his goodbyes, and walked through the lobby of the Conrad W. Raker Center to go home.

Two months later, he walked his daughter down the aisle and danced with her at her wedding.

“I started crying,” John says, recalling the day. “She looked beautiful.”

For a man who two years earlier nearly died, this was no small accomplishment.

But John is, if nothing else, determined. And so, on August 2, 2005, after living at Good Shepherd for nearly 21 months, John made history as the first Raker Center resident to walk out on his own and go home.

“This is a miracle in my book,” says Scott McCall, a 21-year Good Shepherd resident.

Few would disagree – least of all John.



A Hard Road Home

One of the last things John Scolastico remembers is going into the operating room for quadruple bypass heart surgery. When he woke up from a medically induced coma, two and a half months had passed. During that time, a major infection had set in throughout his chest and stomach cavity, very nearly ending his life. Most of his major organs failed, he was on kidney dialysis for two weeks, he had a feeding tube inserted in his stomach and he was breathing with the help of a tube inserted in his throat.

At one point, John's blood pressure dropped so low, his wife Sandy was advised to "get the undertaker."

But as John tells it, "God wasn't ready for me yet." And God wasn't. But it was just the beginning of what would be a very long, slow journey.

John had been hospitalized for nearly a year before he was released to Good Shepherd on November 12, 2003. The then 55-year-old Reading resident's prolonged confinement to bed coupled with multiple critical care issues — at one point John had 11 open wounds from various surgeries — weakened his nerves and muscles rendering him virtually helpless.

"I was told by the doctors at the hospital that I'd never walk again," John says. "I just couldn't believe I was that sick."

Lisa Fake, R.N., resident care coordinator at the Raker Center, remembered what John was like when he arrived. "He was immobile," she says. "The only thing he could do independently was feed himself."

John required such a high-skill level of care, going home from the hospital wasn't an option. Already his wife was caring for John's 53-year-old mentally-challenged brother. Nursing homes refused to accept John because they would be unable to care for him adequately.

But then John and his wife heard about Good Shepherd. "It was the best thing that could have happened to me," John says.

Still, life had dealt him a cruel blow and John was depressed and disheartened. "I cried a lot when I came here and saw some of the residents with their hands and legs all twisted,"

John says. "I wondered why God did this to me. But then I made a lot of friends here and I learned there's a lot of courageous people here who don't feel like they're disabled and keep pushing on."

One Step at a Time

Perhaps it was the residents' spirit of perseverance or maybe it was the tough love John found in physical therapy. Whatever it was, he slowly began emerging from a sense of hopelessness to a belief in all things being possible.

Of his physical therapist, Shirl Erb, John says, "She was a best friend to me. She worked me pretty hard but if it weren't for her, I wouldn't be walking."

John's therapy began right after he was admitted. Shirl wasn't about to accept defeat and believed John could walk again. "We all just pushed John from the beginning," she says. "Getting him to roll over was the first thing. When that happened, we saw he was not truly confined and we all had hope. It was a real motivator."

But there was yet another big hurdle to getting John on his feet and it would require surgery to ease the tension that had developed in John's ankles during his illness.

With Shirl's encouragement, John agreed to the surgery. Sure enough, he gradually began to walk. It was a monumental achievement that gave John the first glimmer of hope that he might one day walk out on his own and go home.

"We're all like one big family here at the Raker Center and everyone was pulling for him," Shirl says. "Every time he got up to walk, there was always a crowd of residents around cheering him on."

With his sense of humor and spirit, John so endeared himself to residents and staff he was nicknamed "The Mayor." The day he left Good Shepherd, they threw a farewell party and lined the hallway to see him off.

"We've discharged many residents to the community, but most were dependent on technology," Shirl says. "Not John."

"It was a learning experience for us and for him," Lisa reflects. "John got excellent quality of care here and we really encouraged his independence. We love John and we

miss him dearly, but we're all so proud of him. We're glad he's back in the community."

John is slowly getting back to life as he knew it – Friday night outings with Sandy and keeping up with his beloved Reading Phillies. He misses his friends at Good Shepherd, but believes his life is richer for having known them. "There are a lot of people worse off than I am," he says. "I can talk and do things for myself. Some of the residents can't. I respect life more."

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It's not just another boring synod assembly banquet!

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By Ben Larson, program director, Bear Creek Camp

Enjoy a great camp cookout under the big top and an opportunity to explore the amazing resources available at Bear Creek Camp!

This year's assembly features *A Taste of Bear Creek Camp*, an evening of food and camp festivities on Friday evening, May 19.

Feast on pork barbeque, baked chicken, fresh grilled hamburgers or veggie burgers, and all the trimmings. We're betting you will find plenty of great food, but if you want to really get in touch with that kid inside you, listen to this camper: "I ate some new foods at camp which I thought were pretty good."

Even if you can't figure out what GORP stands for or how Bug Juice got its name, you can still enjoy these tasty camp treats or roast a hotdog over the fire and pretend you are with this group of campers: "We cooked hotdogs in the fire. It was cool!"

What would camp be without S'mores? We'll have all the fixings, so roast a marshmallow and eat up! Just remember what this camper learned last summer: "Don't put your marshmallow in the flames, you might burn yourself." And, at camp, there is always peanut butter and jelly as a back-up.



While you're here you can explore all Bear Creek Camp has to offer on a wagon ride or walking tour of the camp. Okay, maybe you won't be able to see all 3,000 acres or hike all 20 miles of trails, but we'll get you to some of the hottest spots at camp, like the ropes course, the lake, and the retreat center, or take you on a short hike along a meandering trout stream.

For those with an adventurous spirit, go to the ropes course and take the Leap of Faith or fly through the air on the Giant Swing, as this camper did: "I did the Giant Swing. It was scary saying '3, 2, 1...' and then letting go, but it was a lot of fun."

Whether you're leaping, flying, or even watching, you might hear yourself sounding a lot like this camper: "The Giant Swing was so awesome..."

If you're not up for a walk, or just need some time to relax, you can explore the nature center or enjoy the beauty of God's creation and some great conversation with friends.

Every camp experience should include a bonfire and worship so we'll gather around the fire in camp fashion for a great time of singing, worship, and communion. With campers, counselors, and friends, we'll have a great evening and we hope that you will be there for *A Taste of Bear Creek Camp*.

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By Catherine Arne, programming coordinator, Family Life Services

On December 4, 2005, Family Life Services, in partnership with the Kutztown University Theatre Department, New Life Lutheran Church in New Tripoli, and Union Evangelical Lutheran Church in Schnecksville, unveiled a “dramatically” different offering from their standard programming fare: an unscripted, interactive performance on addiction.

The program was the brainchild of Terry Lieb, Director of Family Life Services, who believed an interactive drama could be a powerful vehicle for educating youth and their parents about the dangers of addictions in a way the traditional lecture format couldn't. “There's a world of difference in hearing about something and seeing it firsthand,” echoed FLS Counselor Kathi Eichman, who spearheaded the project along with Sal Tuccio, FLS's Drug and Alcohol Coordinator. “And having the chance to interact expands the experience even further.”

Last spring, FLS approached Roxane Rix, Assistant Professor of Theatre at KU, with the idea and she was immediately intrigued with the creative challenges it presented. “I had some experience with unscripted projects, so I felt prepared to take it on,” she says. She invited the intermediate and advanced acting students in her fall Acting Studio class to create characters and scenarios exploring various addictions. Having the students develop their own material instead of performing someone else's words



instantly set the project apart and gave the students an immediate personal investment in it.

In order to create realistic dialogue and behavior, their first step was to research addictions. The learning curve was steep. "The most surprising thing to me and everyone else was that addictions are not just drugs and alcohol," says Anthony Dalton, a sophomore theatre minor who wound up playing a workaholic father. "We tend to forget about addictions to things like work or video games or image, which aren't as visible, but are just as damaging."

Despite the large number of addictions and their surface diversity, though, the group discovered that addictions actually shared a common denominator. "I think we found in all of the addictions an avoidance of intimacy, ultimately leading to the destruction of any kind of intimacy," Roxane explains. "The addiction becomes a substitute for genuine human interaction."

Anthony witnessed this breakdown of intimacy personally when his character-development research took him beyond books and the Internet. "I realized some of my friends' fathers are workaholics and I began to study them. When I was having dinner at one friends' house, his father had two cell phones at the table and then, after one call, he left in the middle of the meal to go back to work. So when my character does that in the play, it's no exaggeration. It's straight from reality." It was sobering for Anthony to think of the father-son bonding experiences his friend had missed out on, and he admits it also made him reexamine what kind of father he wants to be in the future.

Roxane saw this kind of growth in all her students. "They learned addiction from the inside out," she says. "Not only were their skills and confidence as performers enhanced, but they also became more sensitive as people." In particular, they became more empathetic toward their own addicted characters during the process. "At first they were very critical of their characters, but over time, they grew into them," Roxane explains. Anthony admits he began to sympathize with his workaholic character after he found himself obsessively doing homework for hours straight before realizing he was still in character. "It was exhausting," he recalls. "I can't imagine living like that."

Once the vignettes, one of a family and the other of a college dorm, took shape, the class began trying them out

on audiences. After each vignette, the actors would take questions from the audience, first in character, then out of character. "The Q&A at the end really challenged me as an actor," Anthony says. "That's where I stopped acting and became the character." That's also when the actors started getting feedback on their work. "The students were tremendously moved that while their characters' behavior sometimes seemed extreme or overdramatic to them, the audience recognized and related to the characters," says Roxane.

Two observers of the early performances were Rev. Jami Possinger of Union Lutheran Church and Rev. Scott Lingenfelter of New Life Lutheran Church. "We were just blown away," says Jami. "We looked at each other and said, we need to do this in our congregations. After all, there is a piece of all of us in the dramas. Whether or not we are alcoholics or 'serious' addicts, we all have obsessions and addictions. Our kids are living with it and seeing it. This gives us a forum to talk about it, particularly the dysfunctions that aren't as obvious."

The pastors worked with FLS and the KU players to present the vignettes in a format that was both appropriate and emotionally safe for the viewers. It was determined that the KU players would present each vignette and Q&A to senior high students and their parents separately, so that each group would feel comfortable, and, in addition to the pastors, FLS counselors would be on hand for anyone who needed support.

On the evening of the event, Jami and Scott opened with prayer, bringing a spiritual bent to the material. "We wanted to reinforce that the church is here to help, not to judge," says Jami. "We want to be part of the solution and let them know that God is in the middle of whatever problem they are dealing with, including addiction."

The response was phenomenal. The exchanges in the Q&A sessions were lively and the questions thoughtful. Even students who thankfully had no significant exposure to addictions up to this point realized that they would likely brush up against it when they went to college. "I think the dramas will have long-term ramifications," Jami says. "When they do have that experience, this will be a frame of reference for them, and a way to talk to their parents about it." For others, the drama hit closer to home. Several parents and teens saw themselves or someone close to them in the

characters, and the experience served as a needed wake-up call.

One such mother and daughter was Linda and Lindsay Reiter. "We went in knowing we had a problem," Linda explains. "But seeing it played out hit me very hard." Sixteen-year-old Lindsay had been battling anorexia and bulimia for over a year and, unable to find an eating disorder specialist in the area, they weren't making any progress against the disease. "Lindsay's counselor was just keeping her head above water," Linda recalls. "It was touch and go. Lindsay's weight was so low we had to check in every week with the doctor. We didn't know where to turn."

Both Linda and Lindsay were overwhelmed by what they saw on stage. "I saw myself so much in the obsessive exercising and the anger," says Lindsay. "I could relate to that." After the performance, Linda and Lindsay separately sought the FLS counselors, who were able to connect the Reiters with an expert with 30 years experience in food abuse issues. Soon Lindsay was in care and at her most recent visit with her physician, she was told she was doing so well that she didn't need to come in again for six weeks.

"The problem isn't solved, but we're headed in the right direction now. I think everything happens for a reason and we were put next to someone who could make a referral to someone who knows what they are dealing with," says Linda. "I consider it divine intervention."



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By Christine Weiser

On Saturday, March 11, the sixth annual Farm Family Celebration was held at the Hamburg Field House. The event was another rousing success. Over 800 guests came from five counties to show their appreciation to farm families who devote themselves to this challenging life.

“This event is not a fundraiser,” says Pastor Mary Gade of Ziegels Lutheran Church, Breinigsville. “It’s simply an opportunity for farm families and supporters of farm families to come together and have fun. There are no politics, just good, old-fashioned family fun.”

Indeed, fun was had by all. Flowers decorated the room in a beautiful spring theme, and the Hoe-Down music of local band Lynn Eckert and The Outlaws got everyone dancing. As in previous years, the delicious food was catered by “Big John,” whose staff managed the amazing feat of serving over 800 people in less than forty-five minutes.

A giant map of the five counties was hung in the room, and guests were asked to mark their home locations on this map and the kind of farm they operated (e.g., dairy, Christmas tree, cattle, crops). This was a great way to help guests visualize the broad reach of the Farm Family Celebration. Families enjoyed getting to know their neighbors and sharing stories of the proud tradition of farming, where farm families have been supporting each other for generations.



“Farm families are such a tight community and rely on each other to help all the time,” says Pastor Gade. “When we went through the recent droughts, we asked how we could help the farmers, but they all said ‘we’re okay.’ We concluded that the best thing we can offer the families is to show them our appreciation.”

Sponsors of the Farm Family Celebration included Diakon, several area banks, many of the local granges, and both the Berks and Lehigh/Northampton Penn State Extension offices. Through the great efforts of these sponsors and dedicated volunteers, the Farm Family Celebration promises to become an area tradition. Next year’s event is already planned for March 24, 2007.

Celebrations like these remind us of the importance of local farming. The next time you stop at a farm stand for freshly picked asparagus, or ripe ear of corn, don’t forget to say, “Thank you.”

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By the Rev. Gary Langensiepen, pastor, St. John Windish Lutheran Church, Bethlehem

See [below](#) for Information about the picture, above.

Many Lutherans in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod know that we have close relationships with Lutherans in other countries through what is known as the “Companion Synod” program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

In fact, those who have been voting members to synod assemblies have even heard and seen representatives from these various companion synods throughout the years and have been moved by the message of our unity in Christ’s Church which they have presented.

Thus, through the outreach of the church, we have become aware of places like Saxony, located in Germany, Argentina and Uruguay, located in South America, and Tanzania, located on the continent of Africa. But the location of the fourth companion synod of our Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod – Slovenia – has remained somewhat elusive!

Often confused with Slovakia, Slovenia is one of the most beautiful countries – as well as one of the best kept secrets – in all of Europe.

Once part of Yugoslavia, Slovenia was the first province to secede from that country and form a free and democratic



nation of its own. Bordered by the Adriatic Sea and Italy on the west, Austria on the north, Croatia on the south, and Hungary on the east, Slovenia is now a member of both the European Union and NATO.

Breeding place of the famous Lipizanner stallions (in the town of Lipica, Slovenia) and setting for Ernest Hemingway's famous novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (the battle takes place at the Vrsic Pass in Slovenia), Slovenia is also the ancestral home of those known throughout northeastern Pennsylvania as "the Windish." The capital city of Slovenia is Ljubljana, which is now a popular gathering place for young men and women from all over Europe

In 2006 and 2007, young people from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod will have the opportunity to learn a great deal more about Slovenia and the people who inhabit this beautiful land where storks still nest on utility poles and rooftops and colorful flower boxes adorn window sills.

Through the efforts of the Slovenia Companion Synod Committee and Pastor Kurt Garbe of the bishop's staff, a student exchange program between our synod and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia will commence this summer.

The committee is now seeking Lutheran families with teenagers on the territory of our synod to host teenagers from the Lutheran church in Slovenia for a three-week visit in August 2006. Then, during the summer of 2007, the American teenagers from the host families will, in turn, travel to Slovenia and spend three weeks in that country hosted by families from the Lutheran church in Slovenia.

Most teens in Slovenia have begun to learn English – and our brothers and sisters in Slovenia hope that this interaction with American Lutheran families will strengthen their grasp of this very important subject! Who knows, perhaps some American teens will even pick up a little of the Slovenian language along the way!

If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact Pastor Kurt Garbe at the Hazleton synod office at 570-788-2686 at your earliest convenience.

The baptismal font shown above was the gift of St. John Windish, Bethlehem, to the Lutheran church in Puconci. Pictured are Deaconess Deborah Graf, Trinity Lutheran Church, Reading; the Rev. Eugene Balazic, pastor of the church in Puconci, and the Rev.

Kurt Garbe, associate of the bishop, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

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By Bruce R. Posten, Reading Eagle

(Used by permission. This article appeared in the January 8, 2006, issue of the Reading Eagle.)

Last summer, Arthur and Gail Dawson White of Wyomissing were hoping and praying that Arthur would receive a gift. Before Thanksgiving, Dawn Baxter, 49, of Brecknock Township gave him one – a kidney.

Dawn said she was moved to help the Whites after a letter from Gail – a plea for a kidney donor – crossed her desk as an office administrator for West Berks Mission District, a coalition of 47 Lutheran churches in Berks County. The Whites are members of Atonement Lutheran Church, Wyomissing.

In August, Dawn read an article about the Whites' situation in the Reading Eagle. The successful organ transplant on Nov. 11, at Pinnacle Health Transplant Center in Harrisburg, is expected to last 61-year-old Arthur the rest of his life – 15 to 25 years perhaps.

Since the operation, Arthur has been thriving, traveling with friends, visiting his wife's Philadelphia elementary school, doing chores around the house and serving on an assessment board.

It is the second life-saving kidney transplant for Arthur, who inherited the gene for polycystic kidney disease from his mother. The disease killed three of her siblings near the age



of 50.

Polycystic kidney disease involves the growth of cysts on each kidney.

Arthur's first operation, in 1994 at Hershey Medical Center, used a donated kidney from his wife. That gift lasted nearly 11 years before facing chronic rejection last spring, forcing Arthur to return to dialysis three days a week.

The Whites believe persistence and perseverance on Gail's part, and patience and positivism on Arthur's, miraculously led them to the kindness of a stranger, Dawn.

Dawn respects what the Whites believe.

Describing herself as a faithful Lutheran, Dawn also is a wife; mother of two adult children; a part-time parish secretary at St. John Lutheran Church, Mohnton; and a member of Allegheny Lutheran Church, Knauers.

She looks at life this way: "I don't ask people to do things I wouldn't want to do myself – or haven't done myself."

With a diabetic husband and mother, Dawn considered the possibility that one day she might have to be an organ donor for a member of her own family.

"I always thought about being an organ donor, but, honestly, I thought I'd be dead before I did it." she said, with a chuckle.

Nevertheless, live transplant donations have a strong success rate.

Dawn learned this and much more when she called Gail to glean details about the Whites' situation to pass along to the local Lutheran church community.

Subsequently, she talked to Geri Goldman, transplant coordinator at PinnacleHealth, and gathered even more information that increased her resolve to undertake the preliminary tests to become a kidney donor.

"I found out my blood type didn't match my husband's, and my mother told me she wouldn't want to go through it (an operation)," Dawn said.

Dawn's blood type did match Arthur's.

At that point, she pondered deeply. She seemed motivated

by one important thought.

“I took into consideration that I would want somebody to step up and do for my husband what I did for somebody else.” Dawn said.

“It is so hard just to say one thing about Dawn,” said Gail, who played the role of vocal medical advocate for her more taciturn husband.

“Dawn gave us our lives back, and she asked for nothing,” Gail said. “We don’t know how to thank her enough.”

“It was Dawn’s kindness and Gail’s perseverance that made this possible,” said Arthur, who underwent the transplant on a Friday and was up walking into Dawn’s room on Saturday to make sure she was OK.

And, indeed, Dawn was. She left the hospital on Sunday afternoon. Arthur was home by Tuesday.

“I really didn’t have any problems,” said Dawn.

On Christmas Eve, Gail and Arthur attended worship services at Dawn’s church, where they took poinsettias and flowers in her honor. They also reacquainted themselves with members of Dawn’s family: her husband, William, an underwriting manager for an insurance company; and sons, Jason, 27, a chemical engineer; and Andrew, 22, enrolled in a mathematics doctoral program at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

“I don’t know, but there was some electricity – an instant connection – I felt with Dawn when I first talked with her on the phone before I knew she would be a donor, when she was just gathering more information to relay to church members,” Gail said.

The Whites had crossed paths with Dawn earlier last summer when she was working at a city Habitat for Humanity project that Arthur was supervising. They weren’t formally introduced at that time.

When Dawn finally called the Whites in late August to tell them her blood type matched Arthur’s, Gail sensed there was a miracle afoot. However, there were more tissue tests to be done.

“They went to the test on Monday,” Gail said, “and by

Wednesday there was a florist's truck at our door with a delivery of one red rose and note addressed to Art that I promptly opened. The flower and note were from Dawn. It read, "Time to celebrate, we are compatible." The florist must have thought it was a computer dating thing."

In this new year, the dried rose with its note and ribbon remain in the White's home on a hutch.

Gail keeps it as a symbol of what is possible when someone reaches out to a community with nothing more than hope.

For Dawn's part, she wishes her act may allay fears and inspire others to do what she did, even though she appreciates that not everyone may be capable of bestowing such a gift.

Gail said when she and Arthur attended Dawn's church on Christmas Eve, the minister told the story of the surgeon who, before the operation, routinely asked Dawn a series of questions about her organ donation: "Are you giving for a family member? Are you giving for a close friend?" Dawn's answers to both questions were "No."

What followed was a pause...

And then Dawn said, "I'm giving to someone who needs it."

It was an answer simple enough and miraculous enough, too.