



Faith in Action

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Historic Church Celebrates 250
Years

Celebrating Life – Old and New

Letter Sent to Bishop Strobel from
Pastor Coutinho, Bridge of Peace
Church

Bridge of Peace Receives Gifts
from St. Peter, Easton

Good Friday Reflections

Diaconal Ministry: A Life of
Service



By Pastor Roxi Kringle, St. John, Farmersville

Wearing T-shirts that proudly proclaimed, "DON'T GO TO CHURCH (BE the church)," 57 people gathered during the normal 9 a.m. worship time on November 4, 2007, at St. John Lutheran Church, Farmersville, to receive their assignments, then left the building.

"Canceling worship on All Saints Sunday for a day of community service was bold, outrageous, and over-the-top" says Pr. Roxi Kringle, "but we did it anyway."

One of the first challenges that the planning team faced was what type of mission project would involve the entire congregation for the day. With the wide variety of ages and skill levels among congregation members, the team decided on three projects: raking leaves for the elderly and disabled, collecting and sorting children's winter coats, and making no-sew fleece scarves.

By the end of the day, six yards had been raked, 100 coats sorted, and 93 scarves made. The larger coats and scarves were then taken to Donegan and Marvine Elementary Schools in Bethlehem. Ten toddler-sized coats and 40 knit scarves were donated to St. Luke's Clinic in South Bethlehem.

The day of service was not a stand-alone event. The members of St. John's also took part in a four-week program of small group meetings, personal devotions, and sermon series. The theme of each week set the tone to look at the world the way God sees it – a world of hurt where the smallest act is multiplied.

Those who attended the small groups found themselves becoming more aware of the needs of the community and looked



forward to putting feet to their faith, first with the rest of the congregation on the day of the project, then later with each other on a need they discovered.

In addition to the congregation's participation, Girl Scout Troop 8334 from Wilson Borough took on the challenge of collecting coats for children in need. Announcements in other congregations in the Bethlehem-Easton Mission District brought 100 knit scarves from one member of Holy Trinity, Bethlehem, who spent last winter knitting while confined at home. "I'm so glad they will be used," she told Pr. Kringle.

A grant from the Witness and Service Ministry Team provided the funding for a direct mail postcard sent to 5,000 households announcing the event to the neighborhood. "We had several people show up to help make a difference. They were amazed that we had cancelled worship and thrilled to be a part of the project," said Pastor Kringle.

At the end of the day about half of the volunteers came back to the church for a Celebration Dinner to share their stories and view a slide show of the day's work. Over and over they shared stories of gratitude. Because the leaves were very late in turning and falling, three of the leaf-raking teams told the homeowners they would be back when the rest of the leaves fell to finish the job.

For more information about the project, contact Pr. Roxi Kringle at revrkringle@verizon.net.



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By Heidi Butler

Long before the advent of global positioning systems, the tall white steeple of Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Old Zionsville served as a landmark for travelers journeying to and from Philadelphia on the old stage coach route now known as King's Highway.

When the spire came into view, they knew they were approaching the southern border of Lehigh County.

The picturesque silhouette has graced the landscape since 1876 when the church that still stands replaced the Union church constructed before the Civil War.

The roots of the congregation date back even further. On May 20, 1757, almost 20 years before the start of the Revolutionary War, a German immigrant named Peter Hittel donated an acre of land at the crest of a rural hillside to a group of his fellow Lutherans, who built a log church and a cemetery there. For many years parishioners worshipped entirely in German. It wasn't until 1895 that English was heard during Sunday services, and then only once a month. Some services continued to be conducted in German until 1945.

This year members of Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church are celebrating 250 years of continuous worship on the site with special activities almost every month. All are open to the public.

The festivities begin on February 3, when the Reverend David R. Strobel, the bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, will lead the regular worship service at 10:30 a.m.



In the months that follow that service, the congregation will have such special activities as the flute choir from Millersville University, the Singing Boys of Pennsylvania, Zion's own vocal and bell choirs in a program of sacred and contemporary music, a concert by The Teen Challenge Choir at 4 p.m., and a Pennsylvania German program by the 5 Miller Brothers from the Blandon area.

During the summer, weather permitting, several worship services will be held outside. The site of outdoor services overlooks the church cemetery where the oldest known grave is that of Johann Jacob Agster, born on August 13, 1768.

For more information about the anniversary celebration, including dates of special activities, church history and/or Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church's ministries, visit the congregation's Web site at <http://oldzions.com/anniversary.aspx>, or contact the church office at 610-966-3834 or zions@ptd.net.





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At 3:00 p.m. on November 18, 2007, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Easton, celebrated its final service as a congregation. Nearly 200 people filled the sanctuary.

In September, the congregation voted 23 to 4 to join with St. John Lutheran Church in downtown Easton and sell their 131-year-old church building.

The 200 at worship on November 18 was far more than the 30 or so that gathered on recent Sunday mornings. Membership at St. Peter's had declined to under 50.

"Closing a church is a difficult decision," said the Rev. Virginia Goodwin, pastor of the congregation for the past three years. "It's an unusual situation," but it could become more common as the number of church-goers dwindle.

Two other churches in the synod have closed since 1996, in Raubsville and in Mahanoy City. Unlike St. Peter's, however, they did not merge with another church. They simply closed.

"That's one of the remarkable things about this," said the Rev. Catherine Ziel, executive associate of the bishop. "This church decided to become proactive about it. They have demonstrated a way to do this with dignity and grace."

When the church building is sold, 70 percent of the proceeds will be donated to St. John Lutheran Church and the rest will be distributed to nine other charities.

The church's contents, except for liturgical items, were given to Bridge of Peace Community Lutheran Church in Camden, N.J., which serves 700 meals per month to the poor. (See the letters



from the church to Bishop Strobel and to Pastor Goodwin in this issue of *Partners in the Spirit*.)

On December 2, those members of St. Peter who joined St. John ceremoniously knocked on the door at St. John. The doors opened, the people of St. John's welcomed them. St. Peter members who had carried liturgical items out of the old church on November 18 now carried them into their new home. Each member of St. Peter was met by a member of St. John, who helped them put the Bible, cross, and candles in place.

It was truly a celebration of new life!



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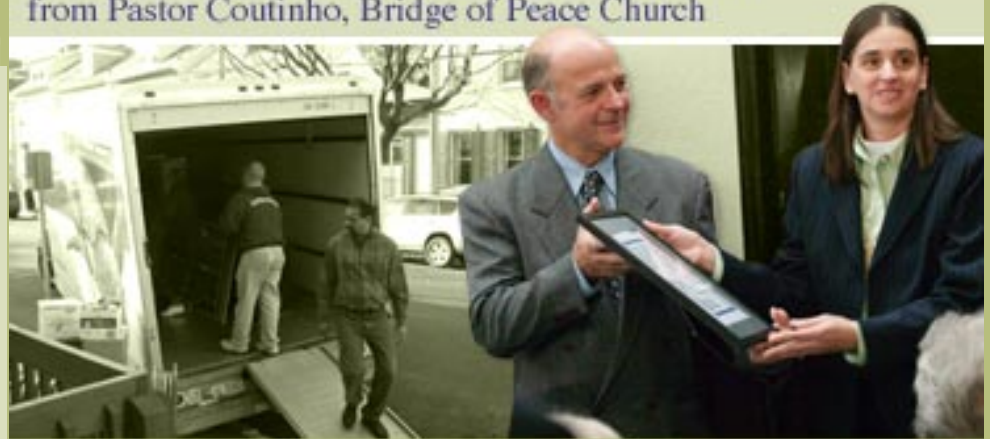
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October 2007

Dear Bishop Strobel,

I wanted to take a few minutes to commend the outstanding ministry of the Rev. Ginny Goodwin as she works with St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Easton, Pa., through this time of transition.

I also want to share with you the story about the generosity and witness of these faithful people in Easton.

I have had the pleasure of working with Pastor Goodwin and St. Peter's in the past few months as I serve as pastor at **Bridge of Peace Community Church, ELCA**, in Camden, N.J. We are a newly organized church of the N.J. Synod, which recently came out of mission status and which serves in the second poorest and fifth most violent city in the country. We will benefit from the generosity and care of St. Peter's as they merge with St. John's.

In my weekly newsletter, which is sent around the world to 413 prayer partners and friends on four continents, I will share the following:

On Monday, Vicar Peggy Hayes and Pastor Giselle Coutinho traveled to St. Peter Lutheran Church in Easton, Pa. Pastor Ginny Goodwin is leading a faithful group of believers as they merge with St. John Lutheran Church, Easton. We also met with Pastor Susan Ruggles from St. John.

Through this time of prayerful discernment and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Bridge of Peace will be gifted



with many things from St. Peter — everything from a computer, Sunday school curriculum and materials, children's tables and chairs, many shelving units for our education building, kitchen pots and some pans, dishes, silverware, chairs, tables, sofas, a pool table for our youth and men's ministry room, a one-year-old refrigerator that we can purchase with our Thrivent funds, nontoxic plastic Fisher Price toys for our new play room in church, and so much more. Tom, their sexton, even offered to drive the truck if necessary.

Now all we need is the truck itself to go pick up all these items.

The generosity of the people of St. Peter's was moving and all gathered felt that we were thankful for each other. All the churches are blessed beyond words with this partnership for the sake of the gospel and we hope the people of St. Peter's believe that their ministry is vital in Easton today and beyond to the wider world. We ask you all to keep this faithful part of the communion of saints in your prayers in the coming weeks, Pastors Goodwin and Ruggles through this time of transition, and all the people during their final service at St. Peters on November 18, 2007, at 3:00 p.m. Thank you!

In the course of our ministries, I believe it is essential that we take the time to share good news stories about those people who have exemplified the good news and who have born witness to it in word and deed. Thank you for leading these wonderful children of God. We hope that we will continue to develop binding and loving relationships in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the coming days, never forgetting that all new beginnings are possible through him. My children in church say, "Jesus is the Light of the World! There is no darkness even when we are scared and frightened by the sound of guns or new things. Jesus stands with us. We are never alone."

Em Cristo,

The Rev. Giselle C. Coutinho

Giselle C. Coutinho
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A letter from Pastor Giselle C. Coutinho to Pastor Virginia Goodwin

Dear Ginny,

Yes, God is good all the time. You should have seen the faces. Miss Gerry, overjoyed with pots and pans, supplies and things for the kitchen ... teachers just so excited it was Christmas in October. The children tonight used the pencils and yarn and materials with such glee...

The all-time favorite was the car puppet. They laughed, they were so silly, and I danced with the puppet and Jamelia, who turned 16 today and chose to come to church on her 16th birthday. Pretty cool! She loved being the center of attention and left saying it's the birthday she will never forget.

We were all silly and joyous in the word and song and dance. You should have seen them when we added the few instruments we had and told them we planned to make instruments with the toilet paper rolls and other materials next week. Oh, you would think it was Christmas around here.

Please tell everyone what a difference it has already made. When I told the people that the toys for the playroom were coming, one of my five year olds said, "Well, Pastor, you prayed for us to have new toys Saturday and I have been praying too and see – God always listens and answers prayers. Sometimes in one day and sometimes not like we want, but it's always how God thinks it's best because God loves us."

At that point we had a 15-minute discussion about prayer and types of prayer, we sang, we praised. And I realized that even with a small number this evening, it's amazing what faithful



people do to make such a difference in each other's lives.

Your Sister in Christ,
Giselle

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By Charles M. Beaver, Bern Lutheran Church, Leesport

I grew up in the '50s, when the only things open on Sundays in addition to churches were restaurants and movies. I was an active member of a Lutheran church, going to Sunday school, singing in two choirs, and participating in Luther League (a youth group).

The church held three services on Sundays: Matins at 8:00, The Service at 10:30, and Vespers in the evening. We often had a movie during the Vespers service. Choir rehearsals were held on Wednesday and Friday evenings. As you can see, I spent a lot of time at the church.

When Lent began, an additional service was added midweek. And when Holy Week began, my mother would say, "Why don't you just move your bed to the church?" My parents were not active members. They worshiped only on Christmas Eve and Easter Sunday. In fact, my dad worked on Sundays, so he didn't even attend Easter worship.

I loved the Lenten season. I still do today, as I am moved by the beauty of the Lenten hymns, the choir music in its minor keys leading up to Good Friday, then climaxed by the Alleluias of Easter morning with full organ and brass.

When I entered the work force following my high school graduation, Good Friday was not a paid holiday for me. I worked within one block of Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Reading, so I would leave work at noon to attend the three-hour service there. When the service ended, I would eat downtown, go home, shower, and take a bus to Hope Lutheran Church for another Good Friday Service.



Later in life, when I changed jobs, Good Friday was a paid holiday for me. I still kept up the same routine, and my wife joined me. I would get very annoyed when fellow employees would anticipate the coming Good Friday holiday. The women would say, "I'm going to take down curtains, wash them, and clean the house." The men would talk about golf outings or make plans to clean the garage. I was happy when it rained on Good Friday!

On Easter Monday I would ask my fellow employees what they did over the weekend. The Catholics said they did attend church. If I asked others about attending church, some would say they didn't have time. Even though they had 72 hours off, they could not find an hour or two to attend a worship service. They, and so many others, paid no attention to the procession of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, his praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Last Supper, Christ's suffering as he carried his cross, and his painful death as he was nailed to the cross on Good Friday.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." - John 3:16

I still feel that the church should be just as full on Good Friday as it is on Easter. He died for us. What can we do? Worship him!



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By Kelly Howard and Linda Zawaski

Did you know that two people from the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod were consecrated recently as diaconal ministers?

Kelly Howard and Linda Zawaski share the journey as diaconal ministers in this synod. Both graduated from Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, with affiliation to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg.

But each of their calls, while being diaconal, has unique characteristics.

Just what is diaconal ministry? Diaconal ministers began biblically with the first disciples. Their ministry continues to be rooted today in the ministry demonstrated by Jesus in John 13:1-20, the washing of the disciples' feet.

The section on diaconal ministry on the ELCA Web site (<http://www.elca.org/diaconalministry/>), tells us that diaconal ministers are consecrated for service in ministries at the intersection of church and world. Diaconal ministers work to seek wholeness in the world and to help the people of God to live out the Gospel. They are committed to alerting the church to the needs of the world.

Diaconal ministers seek to exemplify a life of Christ-like service, to seek out places of need in the world. They are ministers of the Word, committed to Christ, and called to be spokespersons for the Gospel.

Diaconal ministry develops in response to emerging needs and,



therefore, must be flexible enough to enable diaconal ministers to move into areas of service where the needs of persons and society are pressing the church for leadership and response.

The roles that diaconal ministers can and do offer are diverse. They serve pulpit supply and congregational functions when needed, much as ordained ministers can provide service to the world outside of the pulpit. In addition, diaconal ministers work in social service agencies, hospitals, and many other positions where the doorways exist between the church and society.

Linda's call in a congregation is developing into a collection of multiple part-time calls. Her roles cover Christian education, outreach ministries, and family ministries. Flexibility and diversity are a constant.

Serving is a companion to equipping others to serve. The time spent on equipping others with the skills to serve varies with the needs of the church or community. Any given week she can be a ministry facilitator, spiritual guide, pastoral visitor, teacher, local ministerium colleague and ministry planner, congregational worship leader, mission outreach networker, and coordinator with the congregational mission or ministry team.

So what is diaconal for Linda in all of this? It is the focus on ministry: In its every aspect, Linda's call is centered on a companion journey between congregation and community, identifying and serving those places about which our community and world might more easily forget. This ministry grows from Word and Sacrament and continues what is begun in the pulpit and at the altar, living out the communion at the altar in the sacredness of servant relationships in the community.

Kelly's role as a diaconal minister is a bit different. For Kelly, whose primary call is as a chaplain at the Good Shepherd Home, the call focuses on serving through ministering to patients and residents by meeting them where they are – in a hospital room or in their homes at Good Shepherd. Her call to word and service includes preaching on Sundays. Other duties include representing Good Shepherd within the community.

In her office at Good Shepherd is her basin and towel that she received at her consecration, a traditional gift as reflected by John 13. It is a constant reminder of her call to serve God and the people of Good Shepherd. Her guiding principle is "Jesus washed the feet of a few, so that I may wash the feet of many."

In addition to her ministry at Good Shepherd, Kelly works as a pastoral counselor at Concern and as a chaplain at Lehigh Valley Hospital. She lives out her life call in several locations, all with the same focus: a call to word and service. Whether she's knocking on a patient's hospital door or a client comes to see

her, she feels blessed in her call and continues to seek out those places where she can be a witness to God's love.

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