

SYNOD NEWS

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Mission Trip to Puerto Rico



Imagine riding in one of two fifteen-passenger vans, both navigating a narrow two-lane road that twisted and turned up into the tropical mountains of central Puerto Rico. The views were spectacular. Palms, giant philodendron, and the fiery flowers of the Flamboyant Royal Poinciana tree grace the roadsides and green mountain walls. Small, compact, and humble homes supported by what looks like toothpick legs hug the steep slopes. A morning journey brought the volunteers to the town of Comerío, where the streets have yielded to the mountain’s natural topography, reminiscent of the hilly streets of San Francisco.

On June 30, 2019, under the guiding eye of Lutheran Disaster Response working through Lutheran Social Services of Puerto Rico, 25 Lutheran volunteers from 5 Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod churches traveled to Puerto Rico to repair homes damaged by Hurricane Maria.

The volunteers divided into four teams. One team repaired a house needing to have the roof power washed and sealed, as well as its interior ceiling and walls scraped and painted. This house had stood empty for the past two years and was unlivable in its current state. The family who had lived there pre-Maria were hoping to return to their home as soon as possible.

Thanks to God and the excellent guidance and organization of Lutheran Social Services of Puerto Rico, the team was able to power wash their roof and seal it. They scraped ceilings and painted the interior of their home. Much of their nearly new furniture, now moldy and warped, still awaited removal. All their kitchen appliances had been destroyed.

And yet, because of the hard work of the team, and a generous grant from The Witness and Service Ministry Team supported through Mission Support giving to the Synod, the work was accomplished. Donations of various gift cards from a number of congregations enabled the team to purchase a new refrigerator for the family. What a joy to see faces of hope as these homeowners came so much closer to reclaiming their home. Truly the team used its hands to do God’s work!



Don’t Be Fooled by Email Phishing Scams

There have been several phishing attempts recently that appear to be emails from Bishop Zeiser asking for “help.” Two were phony Gmail addresses (bishopnepsynod@gmail.com and rzeiserbishopr@gmail.com). Neither the bishop nor any of the synod staff will ever email you directly asking for “help.” This is a scam. Please don’t reply; even better, just delete the email without even opening it.

Parish Secretaries' Christmas Luncheon



On December 10 the fourth annual Parish Secretaries' Christmas Luncheon was hosted by the Synod's Support Staff at The Lutheran Center in Schoenersville. This year the luncheon was opened to all lay workers in the congregations of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. There were 45 people in attendance. After greetings from Bishop Zeiser, a hot, catered lunch was served, introductions were made, and there was time for some get-to-know-you games and plenty of fellowship.

The luncheon always has some return guests and some first-time attendees. This year there was a parish secretary who

was in her sixth week of church work, and one who has been serving in the church for 50 years. Pastor Laura Csellak went above and beyond by driving two secretaries from Ashland in Schuylkill County to The Lutheran Center so they could be a part of the festivities. The cost of the luncheon was subsidized with Thrivent Action Team grants.

About 45% of the staff members who attended were treated by their congregations and/or pastors. Let's try to increase that percentage next year and encourage congregation workers to take advantage of a fun, relaxing afternoon in the middle of the Advent season. It's a wonderful opportunity to build partnerships with other church workers and the synod. Look for a keep-the-date card with next year's date at the synod assembly.



New Director of Youth, Young Adults, and Faith Formation



Sammy Kelly (she/her/hers) is a 2019 graduate of United Lutheran Seminary at Philadelphia where she earned a Master of Arts in Ministerial Leadership. She continues to be on staff at New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Tripoli, where she has served for the past five years. Her husband, Billy Miller, was just hired as Youth Director at Lenape Valley Church in Doylestown and is pursuing the Crossroads Lay Leadership program at Moravian Theological Seminary. They are both excited to enter into a new year of life and ministry in 2020!

In this newly formed position, Sammy will provide leadership and support to both the Youth, Young Adult, and Family and the Faith Formation Ministry Teams of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. She looks forward to dreaming with and working alongside the many church leaders who love our youth, young adults, and Jesus. She is a 7 on the enneagram, always open to swapping dog stories, and would love if you were to email her at sammy@nepssynod.org to introduce yourself and/or set up a time for conversation.

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