

NEPA Synod Green Team

e-newsletter #10, Summer/Fall 2025



ELCA Logo in sassafras leaves.

Created by Pastor Inge Williams at Friedens Lutheran Church, Shartlesville on October 13, 2021

Welcome to our newsletter!

We present to you this collection of prayers, tips and ideas on caring for God's creation, book reviews, news about notable places within the synod, advocacy opportunities, and inspirational stories of good work being done on our territory.

Any questions or comments on this newsletter would be appreciated – please send them to the editor, Pastor Paul Metzloff, at pwmetzloff@gmail.com.

Please feel free to share this with anyone who would be interested!

Request: Got a Garden?

The Green Team is trying to see how many congregations throughout the synod have some sort of garden. If you do, please fill out the following (very brief!) form – thank you!

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSciQYkArI2skIM3BbfhuVfmWsXpIXbK1JlgF2ptSMTG3gqX-w/viewform?usp=header>

Upcoming Event: Nuclear Prayer Day



The graphic features a visual equation: a green nuclear bomb with a red prohibition sign over it, followed by a purple plus sign, a pair of hands in prayer with a yellow cross above them, followed by a purple equals sign, and finally a white dove holding an olive branch. Below this visual equation, the text 'NUCLEAR PRAYER DAY' is written in large blue capital letters, followed by 'AUGUST 5TH' in light blue capital letters. At the bottom, in smaller blue capital letters, it says '6PM-MUSIC • 7PM-LIVESTREAM' and 'CHRIST LUTHERAN • 69 MAIN ST. HELLERTOWN'.

NUCLEAR PRAYER DAY
AUGUST 5TH
6PM-MUSIC • 7PM-LIVESTREAM
CHRIST LUTHERAN • 69 MAIN ST. HELLERTOWN

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The magnitude of death and destruction of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 spurred faith communities around the world to insist: nuclear weapons must never be used again.

The nonprofit *Voices for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons* was created to continue this insistence, and to encourage all individuals of goodwill and all organizations of concern to draw strength from their collective convictions and longings for a better tomorrow on Nuclear Prayer Day.

This year, Christ Lutheran Hellertown (69 Main Street, Hellertown, PA 18018) is hosting a local Nuclear Prayer Day on August 5th to join with communities around the world for an evening of prayer, commemoration, and hope for the future. The evening will begin with a 6 PM peace song sing-along. Dave's Deli and Carl's Corner, both of Bethlehem, are sponsoring appetizers from around the globe to accompany the sing-along.

At 7 PM, the local meeting will join a livestream with international faith leaders organized by May Peace Prevail on Earth International, the creators of the peace poles seen around the Lehigh Valley and the world.

After a moment of silence in remembrance of the bombing of Hiroshima, the evening concludes with a prayer vigil live from the Hiroshima Peace Dome, where all participants will join in praying for peace to prevail in each and every country on earth.

As the youth and family minister of Christ Lutheran, I invite any-and-everyone who wishes for a more peaceful tomorrow to join us in prayer, song and love for our blessed garden planet. We hope to see you there!

The ELCA's Social Message on Earth's Climate Crisis: What Is Its Message for Us?

In April 2023 the ELCA's Church Council unanimously adopted a social message on "Earth's Climate Crisis." This social message builds in part on the social statement the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted in 1993, *"Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice."* ("Social Messages" are adopted by the ELCA Church Council to give religious advice to ELCA members; "Social Statements" are adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to give advice to ELCA members and to guide actions and advocacy by churchwide agencies.) In this review I want to summarize this social message and what actions it encourages us to take.

How are Christians called to care for creation? Naturally the social message refers to the Genesis creation accounts. In Genesis 1 humans are created in the image of God, giving us our calling to participate in God's creative process and to respect and promote the flourishing of creation. The message warns against interpretations of "have dominion" and "subdue" that support exploitation and subjugation of earth's resources and supports a stewardship of creation modeled on the care and compassion Jesus showed in his ministry. Genesis 2, of course, supports the notion of our keeping and

caring for creation as demonstrated by gardeners seeking the garden to flourish.

We may be called to care for creation but clearly we are falling short in that responsibility. The social message describes various factors that contribute to climate change and global warming, including the “greenhouse effect” – the increased percentage of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide retained in the atmosphere. One sign of hope is the decreased percentage of refrigerant gases in the atmosphere. The social message includes a helpful amount of scientific data about these aspects of climate change from NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), and the IPCC (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). The scientific evidence that supports the reality of climate change is substantial.

In response to the IPCC’s report in 2021, reporting such critical data, U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres called the report a “code-red for humanity” and wrote: “The alarm bells are deafening, and the evidence is irrefutable: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning and deforestation are choking our planet and putting billions of people at immediate risk.” From a standpoint of faith, says the social message, the climate crisis is a *kairos* moment – not ordinary time (*chronos*) but a critical time of extraordinary and decisive importance.

How should Christians respond to this *kairos* moment? The social message encourages Christians to recognize a variety of climate change issues: increasingly devastating natural disasters scientists say are caused by global warming and climate change (wildfires, tornadoes and hurricanes, flooding, rising coastal waters); heat stress affecting farm workers and livestock; workers dependent on jobs in fossil fuel extraction alongside those affected by the pollution generated from this industry.

A Christian response to this *kairos* moment, says the message, begins with confession and repentance. We are called to confess our failure to consider the interests of future generations, our disregard for the victims of environmental injustice, our lack of concern for other species facing extinction, our own complicity through high-carbon lifestyles, and our dismissive disdain for those with whom we disagree. What we are called to confess, however, is not just our personal failings; sin is also collective or communal. “Structural sin” can be expressed through the social and political practices and institutions we have developed. “Colonialism” and “industrialization” are two examples the message mentions.

What insights from ELCA social teaching are helpful for our response to Earth’s climate crisis? The message mentions several. Of course, Law and Gospel and the appropriate role of government are important factors for Lutherans. Also, there are three different dimensions of environmental

justice: *intragenerational* justice (how should the burdens of adaptation and mitigation be distributed among our current generation), *intergenerational* justice (how should we respect and defend the interests of future generations), and *intersectional* justice (how do we deal with historical injustices related to race, class, and gender).

The social message highlights four moral principles. The principle of *participation* stresses that all forms of life are important. The principle of *solidarity* stresses the kinship and interdependence of all forms of life. The principle of *sufficiency* emphasizes meeting the basic needs of all humanity and all creation. Finally, the principle of *sustainability* values the capacity of natural and social systems to survive and thrive together. In addition the message holds up the biblical emphasis on prioritizing the poor and vulnerable. It also adds “the precautionary principle,” which encourages avoiding actions that may harm the environment even if their effects are not known definitely.

The social message encourages Christians to address climate change issues through participating in the affairs of government – with courage and humility, patience and fortitude. The message includes a long “laundry list” of suggestions for individuals and organizations. It lists a number of goals and policies that it recommends as well as those that it questions or rejects. Perhaps more important for this newsletter the message lists a number of challenges for all expressions of the church, including (but not limited to):

- Promoting creation care through preaching, worship and education;
- Consider adopting congregational commitments to creation care, for example, by becoming a Creation Care Covenant Congregation via Lutherans Restoring Creation;
- Providing pastoral care to those struggling with “climate anxiety”;
- Witnessing publicly to the climate crisis, for example, by investing in energy efficiency or developing community gardens;
- Engaging in legislative advocacy at all levels of government, individually and collectively.

Yes, the social message sees this as a time of crisis for the earth’s climate, but it encourages us to find hope and power for facing climate change. Where? In our faith affirmation that God intends creation to flourish and invites us to join God’s action to heal the earth.

Find this and all ELCA social statements and messages online at www.ELCA.org/socialstatements

Rev. Roger E. Timm

The Climate Podcast

by Rev. Inge Williams



After the 2024 Presidential election, I came across this quote by Christiana Figueres, the pioneering climate negotiator: "I encourage you- especially if you are a leader in your community, company, or city- to pause right now. Many of us are in disbelief, scared, and in deep mourning. Let us honor those feelings for what they are: alert signals. We are in pain because of what we love: humanity, nature, our planet. There is nothing wrong with feeling pain for what we love. It deserves its space."

Knowing that I would need to be hearing a voice like hers in the days, months, and years to come, I subscribed to the podcast she co-hosts with Tom Rivett-Carnac and Paul Dickinson "Outrage + Optimism." It has not disappointed.

For their March 6 episode, Outrage + Optimism celebrated International Women's Day with an interview with Canadian climate scientist and evangelical Christian Dr. Katherine Hayhoe. You may be familiar with her book *Saving Us: A Climate Scientist's Case for Healing and Hope in a Divided World*. In this episode, Dr. Hayhoe gave a sobering assessment of the relationship between Christianity and perspectives on climate change in the United States. I have edited their conversation for clarity and brevity:

Christiana Figueres: Now that we have Trump in the White House, my sense is that that arc between evangelical Christian practice and science, specifically climate change, has become even more difficult, has it?

Katherine Hayhoe: It's really important to understand that, first of all, there is no conflict between what the Bible says and our concern to care for or be good stewards of this planet, to love our sisters and our brothers around the world, to work for their benefit and to address issues like climate change that

affect their food, their water, their safety, their health. In fact, I truly believe that if we take the Bible seriously, we'd be out at the front of the line demanding climate action.

So, what's happening in the US? Because in other places around the world, you have, so for example, when you were the Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, one of the official delegates from the Philippines was Bishop Ephraim Tendero, who was the head of the World Evangelical Alliance at that time. Around the world, there are Christians who are advocating and calling for change.

In the US, over the last 50 to 60 years, there's been a concerted investment in aligning ultra-conservative ideology and politics with religion (laid out in the book The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind), until now we find ourselves in the position today where 40% of people who call themselves evangelical in the US don't go to church. So where are they learning anything? They're not learning it at church. They're learning it from the news, from social media, from studies have shown, from the thought leaders they follow, most of whom are either political or highly partisan news figures.

CF: So let me understand: they don't go to church, but they firmly believe that their religious practice is at odds with climate change?

KH: They do. But their statement of faith is written first by their political ideology and only a distant second by the actual Bible. And if the two come into conflict, and we see increasing examples of the two come into conflict where people literally quote Jesus and somebody says, oh, well, that's not what we believe. I mean, it's one thing to say you don't believe the Pope if you're Catholic. It's another thing to say you don't believe Jesus if you're a Christian. And so we're seeing that literally people's statement of faith is written by their politics.

And so today, American Christianity is a separate religion that in many cases has nothing in common with Christianity itself.

From Outrage + Optimism: The Climate Podcast: Why ignoring women endangers the climate | International Women's Day 2025, Mar 6, 2025.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/outrage-optimism-the-climate-podcast/id1459416461?i=1000698030809&r=1573>

They go on to discuss how spirituality is a force for personal resilience in the fight for planetary resilience. And Katherine explains the connection between her Christian ethics and her decision to become a climate scientist. This episode helped me feel less alone as a faith leader ministering against the tide of religious extremism, partisan propaganda, and climate denial.

As a non-scientist, I appreciate this climate podcast for approaching the most existential issue facing humanity in a wholistic way. Outrage + Optimism also has an excellent Instagram channel with a balance of outrage-worthy and optimistic climate news every week.

In my understanding of the prophetic tradition, it is only by seeing reality for what it is that God's people find hope. ("They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace." *Jeremiah 6:14*) These climate leaders are facing reality while finding a hopeful way forward for the people and places we love.

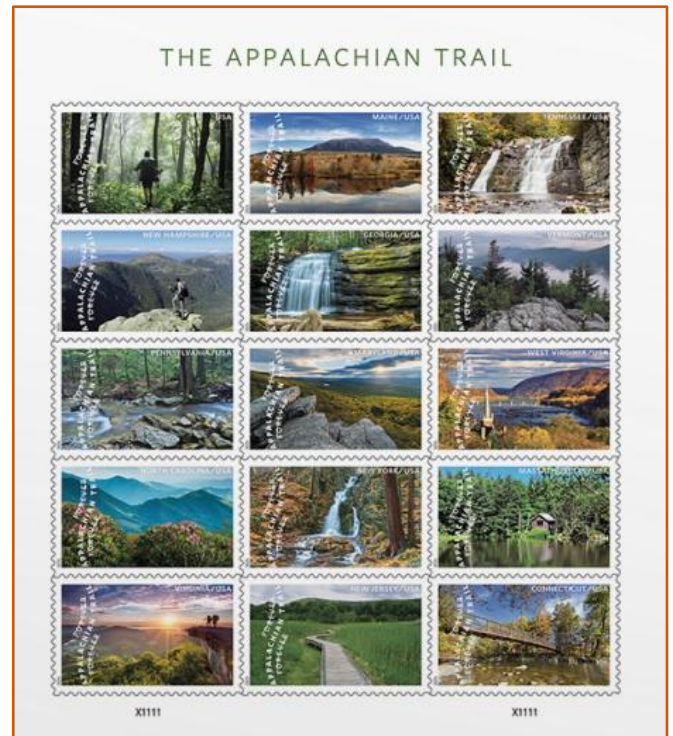
I hope these companions challenge you to find a healthy balance of outrage and optimism!



Appalachian Trail Stamp . . . Clarification

by Carl D. Shankweiler

The headline is impressive: "U.S. Honors County: Rausch Creek featured in Pa. stamp issued for 100th anniversary." The article pictures the entire sheet of special U.S. stamps marking the Appalachian Trail, with the third stamp in the first column from the left showing a small creek in Pennsylvania. The article's text identifies the creek as "Rausch Creek, near Valley View in western Schuylkill County." Nevertheless, this Schuylkill Living article of March 2, 2025, has it all wrong. The Rausch Creek shown on the stamp is a different Rausch Creek, farther south and more directly related to the Appalachian Trail. What a disappointment!



Because of the March 2 article pointing to Schuylkill County's Rausch Creek, several folks from the west end of the county sought these Forever stamps at local post offices. As a life-long stamp collector, I certainly did. The demand exceeded the initial supply. For stamp collectors and other people interested in Rausch Creek's sudden rise to fame, this was an amazing development. That our very own Rausch Creek was now nationally famous was incredible. How many dozens, or even hundreds, of other creeks like this one could there be in our commonwealth? And yet according to Schuylkill Living, which is now included in the Republican Herald, here was our relatively small local creek on a U.S. postage stamp.

Along with the sheet of fifteen stamps--which show different views of the trail and the fourteen states through which the trail passes--the post office produced several related items. One of these special items is a set of large postcards showing the same pictures as on the stamps. The caption for the Pennsylvania stamp reads as follows: "RAUSCH CREEK. The town of Rausch Gap has been virtually deserted since 1900, but hikers passing through this creekside area will find vestiges of the once-thriving 19th-century coal mining community. All that remains today are stone building foundations, a small

cemetery, and a shelter for overnight campers, giving hikers ample space to ramble through mostly unspoiled nature."

On reading that description, it became clear that the photo on the stamp has nothing to do with the Rausch Creek within a mile of my house in Valley View. There is no cemetery near our creek. There is no shelter for overnight campers, especially since our creek is too far from the Appalachian Trail to make any sense as a stopping-off place to rest. There was no town of Rausch Gap here in Hegins Township. Obviously, someone at the Republican Herald had confused our Rausch Creek with the other creek by the same name in northern Lebanon County.

That Lebanon County creek is a tributary of Stony Creek, which eventually flows through Dauphin County and into the Susquehanna River. Just as Schuylkill County's Rausch Creek witnessed nearby coal mining, so did the Rausch Creek of Lebanon County. Just like our Rausch Creek has a history of water purification efforts to counteract the effects of mine drainage, so has the Rausch Creek in Lebanon County. Although the creeks are in different places, they do have similarities.

One of the major--and in this case confusing--similarities has to do with the name, Rausch. Who was Mr. Rausch that two streams were named after him? My guess--and please note that it is only a guess--is that the name goes back to the German word *rausch*. This word can mean "move with a rustle, swish." Perhaps the sound made by the water led to the name. If you have better knowledge about the name, please tell me.

In looking for an explanation of the name, I found these two references to early non-indigenous life along Schuylkill County's Rausch Creek. Munsell's 1881 history of Schuylkill County says that "a small colliery known as Rausch Gap is located about two miles south of Valley View." Zerbey's history from the 1930s reports even earlier activity: "At the close of the eighteenth century a grist mill was built at Rausch Gap. . . ." Back in the 1950s and 1960s Fred Shadle and Ambrose Starr showed me foundations and other locations along the creek that may have been related to that work; they also mentioned a powder mill. We'll probably never know for certain what kinds of milling were done and exactly where.

Well, our little creek is not going to be famous after all. But we can still admire its "swish" and remember its history in milling, mining, and water purification. At least the idea that Schuylkill County's Rausch Creek would

be featured on a stamp was a source of local excitement for a few weeks and now becomes part of our history.

For more on the stamps, or to order a set, please go to:

<https://about.usps.com/newsroom/national-releases/2025/0228-new-forever-stamps-capture-the-beauty-of-the-appalachian-trail.htm>

Book Review: *Here Comes the Sun* by Bill McKibben

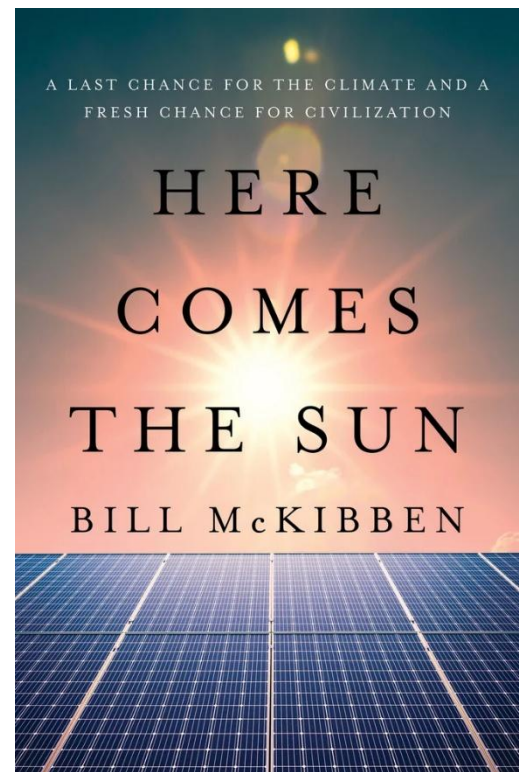
by Paul Metzloff

A confession – this isn't really a book review, as Bill McKibben's latest book isn't quite out yet – it's due to be released in mid-August.

However, I can say that I've never been disappointed by one of his books, and I've read most of them, from his first offering on climate change way back in 1989, *The End of Nature*, to his most recent *The Flag, the Cross, and the Station Wagon: A Graying American Looks Back at His Suburban Boyhood and Wonders What the Hell Happened* (what a title!).

McKibben's works are many things: readable, informative, inspiring, challenging. They can be profoundly saddening as well as deeply hopeful.

And this latest volume, I'm guessing, based on what I've read about it so far, is going to be both of those last two things. Saddening because of all the chances we've missed to really address the only issue that really matters, climate change (and, under Trump, are busily moving backwards). But also hopeful, because the rest of the world is moving forward. The huge leap forward in getting the power the world needs is happening – in China, Pakistan, and a host of other places around the world (and, occasionally, even in the U.S.), and this solar (and wind) revolution is one of the best hopes that we have for actually caring for this creation that God has entrusted us with.



A better summary can be found in the article McKibben himself wrote for the New Yorker, and it can be found here:

https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-a-warming-planet/46-billion-years-on-the-sun-is-having-a-moment?link_id=6&can_id=eb15a7028c57ac36548f0c451c53e8a9&source=email-what-if-we-were-on-the-brink-of-something-historic&email_referrer=email_2815558_subject_3311714&email_subject=what-if-we-were-on-the-brink-of-something-historic&&

And, finally, if you'd like to order your own copy of *Here Comes the Sun*, I highly recommend that you give Amazon a skip and get it from Bookshop.org, which not only avoids giving billionaires more, but helps local bookstores – you can even pick the one you want to benefit (my choice is in Kutztown)!

<https://bookshop.org/p/books/here-comes-the-sun-a-last-chance-for-the-climate-and-a-fresh-chance-for-civilization/98e6cf6374247153?ean=9781324106234&next=t>

Inspiration: Our Church Garden

by Angela Drake of Christ Lutheran, Hellertown

Our church garden grew out of a few adult Sunday School discussions on setting an example in our community. We felt that our church could make a difference by setting a strong example in treating our environment better. I loved the idea. I have been a gardener since age 7 and so it is sort of a passion for me. I asked our council president if we could start a church garden. I wanted it to be organic and he was enthusiastic about the project, even helped me measure out the lot corners and put stakes in. I found some locally milled thick oak planks and gathered a small crew of 5. We built it in one day, during March of 2013. It had 4 beds each 12' x 3'. After a couple of years, we added 3 more beds salvaged from a library garden and then 3 more new beds the next year.



But the location seemed problematic to some; too prominent for a vegetable bed so it was moved to the rear of the property and what we got was a much more functional garden, triple the size; we also have a 6x8 foot shed for storage and an L shaped counter for harvest packing. There is an 8-foot deer fence and a water faucet inside the garden all said improvements made the garden much better in a practical sense.

We were now up to 18 beds. I numbered them all, and half were charity beds as we had begun donating some produce to the local food bank. The beds are mostly 12x3 feet and are built out of aluminum siding and 2x4s, screws and plastic wood corner triangles to cover sharp edges at corners. We filled them with a mixture of garden soil, compost, and a soil blend. Every year we add supplements like mushroom soil, composted manure, compost, and sometimes peat moss.

I recruited more gardeners; we had about 11 people the first year in the new garden, and it varies each season. Folks get a half or whole bed for personal use, and are required to weed an assigned charity bed as well as the pathways around their bed and that charity bed. Lately we have put down durable plastic over paths and try to cover it with straw to soak up rain. In the fall, when beds are empty, we put the straw on the beds for helping deflect winter wind.



We plant things for giving in personalized CSA bags to local seniors in apartments. We give tomatoes/lettuce/cukes to the folks in the senior high rise here in town; they tend not to cook much so that limits what we give. We give to the local food bank; it is open 2 Saturday mornings a month. Sometimes we give to New Bethany Ministries when we have an overflow of veggies at peak harvest season.

Gardeners are required to weed and to help harvest several times besides the weeding. This is how we get help to harvest! And they do not pay anything for bed space like a traditional community garden does.



We have added 3 more beds since the start of this new garden location. We also caged in the blueberries and they are harvested for our community nurse, Enid, to share with seniors and homebound folks she visits. And we use 3 older raised beds nearby; they only have a 3 ft chain link fence, so we grow garlic in them as the deer would eat everything else.

I consider the church garden as the flagship of our produce donation program. We also solicit monetary donations, and when they do not reach the necessary level our church council bumps it up so we can give 3 shopping carts of purchased produce to the food bank, twice a month. We shop the morning before the food bank is open and set it up but put lettuce in the big refrigerator for the night. They went from no produce table, 13 years ago, to 3 long ones now. I am proud of my church's stepping up to provide fresh produce for the needy as it is generally a luxury item and gets dropped when funds are tight. We have a robust food collection program too for dry/canned foods as well as paper goods and cleaning products and we deliver day old bread from the local grocery store. We have a blessings box at the church driveway which is refilled often with canned/dry food products.

The big food bank distribution center sometimes sends produce but it is very limited in variety and can be of substandard quality. We do not ever buy anything that is old or poor quality. The standard is it must be good enough for us to eat before we buy it for others to enjoy. We want families to have the blessings of fresh produce including fruit like oranges, apples, tangerines, grapes, berries, and lemons/limes. Fresh produce is full of vitamins and minerals; it also has less sugar than canned produce. We hope that parents can then teach their children good eating habits by enjoying our fresh produce.



We have encouraged other local churches to start a garden, hopefully an organic one. It is a highly visible way to teach people the value of fresh produce. Our program has expanded greatly since I first dropped off a bag of carrots and of potatoes in that first growing season. The example we set has caused other churches to put in gardens and had encouraged local farmers to share excess produce like potatoes, lettuce, and green beans. Someone now brings a huge box of bananas for each food bank date. The school district now gives dozens of extra bags of baby carrots to the food bank.

This produce program has functioned as I dreamed it would and I am so proud to be part of a church that practices organic gardening to show it is possible to avoid chemicals. I am proud of our increased donations over these 13 years, 4 times as much money is spent each month as we first did. What a blessing to the needy in our local community and to us as we become better givers and better gardeners!

Closing View: a couple of shots of a recent hive inspection at Reformation Lutheran Church in Reiffton, PA (just outside of Reading). Our congregation began keeping bees this summer as a part of our creation care ministry. The hive is on the property of one of our members, but several folks from the congregation are involved.



Thanks for reading! If you're interested in being a part of the synod's Green Team, please see our page on the synod website at www.nepasynod.org/green-team. Questions or comments can be sent to Pastor Paul Metzloff, editor, at pwmetzloff@gmail.com.