

Dear Saints of Bethany —

Evidently you are stuck with me as interim pastor until the Lord sends the right person to serve you under call, which should convince everybody to pray diligently.

I have been here quite a few times over the past 50 years or so (no, that isn't a misprint), and love Bethany and the whole West Branch Valley. A few tidbits of introduction:

I grew up as a member of Zion Lutheran in Sunbury, and graduated in the last class of Sunbury High School (I am not a Shikellamy Brave, I am an Owl!). I graduated from Susquehanna University (I am a Crusader, not a River Rat or whatever they call themselves now). I have degrees from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (MDiv) and the former Gettysburg Seminary (STM). All my parish calls have been in Pennsylvania, including Watsontown and the Lock Haven area.

In 1985 I ran off with the secretary of the Parish Life Committee of the former Central Pennsylvania Synod (well, actually we got married after meeting through the committee but this version sounds more exciting). Linda and I are the parents of two ostensibly-adult children, one living in Virginia and the other near Hanover PA. We are also occasional caretakers of one granddog.

I had been involved through the years in many attempts "to save the ELCA from itself," as a friend put it, but obviously failed. That included serving as secretary of Lutheran CORE (Coalition for Renewal) and then as director. I was given retired status from the Upper Susquehanna Synod so I could accept the position. As situations changed, I re-retired in 2015 and began serving as a chaplain with SpiriTrust Lutheran LIFE. I still hold that position although our LIFE Center has been closed since March 2020.

When I agreed to serve as interim pastor for St. Timothy NALC in Camp Hill, the ELCA used that as the excuse to show me the door, for which I am eternally grateful. I am currently dean of the Western Mission District of the Atlantic Mission Region (the importance of which is in inverse proportion to the length of the title) and am told I am the only nominee to serve as dean of the Region after October.

The good news is that I am a local call away from most of you, since I still use my South Williamsport cell phone number. The bad news is that I am a bit more than 100 miles away. So I plan to come up two long weekends each month and as needed. We will definitely rely on local pastors for some pastoral care and supply preaching.

This article is long enough. In the future I will try to discuss why an interim time can be an exciting time of growth and renewal for a congregation.

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