The Messenger

A monthly publication from our Spirit filled church.

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Messiah Lutheran Church
2850 Guilderland Avenue
Schenectady, New York 12306
www.messiahschenectady.org

Email:
office@messiahschenectady.org

Phone:
518.355.2311

Facebook:
www.facebook.com/MessiahLC

We are a Spirit filled church following Jesus Christ.

Community Events

Volunteering at the Regional Food Bank
Saturday, May 4th at 1:00pm
965 Albany Shaker Rd, Latham, NY 12110

May 4th is the next day we will be sorting food at the Regional Food Bank, from 1-3pm. Please meet at the Regional Food Bank at 12:45pm. For more information, please speak with Pete Jones.

Star Wars Day at Messiah
Sunday, May 5th at 9:00am

In recognition of Star Wars Day (May the fourth be with you!!!), this Sunday in Children's Sunday School we'll be pulling out all the stops to make sure our kids have an awesome faith formation experience set in a galaxy far, far away! We'll be outside making lightsabers, playing awesome games and more! If you have any questions, please speak with Sunday School Superintendent Cheryl Borski!

An Earth Day Service of Holy Communion
Sunday, May 5th at 10:15am

From a Lutheran perspective, our relationship with God, our relationship with others and our relationship with creation is all intertwined. Being good stewards of the planet God has given us does mean talking about big issues like climate change, endangered species and the millions of folks suffering from dirty air and water, but it also means feeding hungry people, nurturing relationships, cultivating our soil for the benefit of our neighborhood and simply taking time to appreciate the marvel of creation all around us. That's why this year we decided to schedule our annual Earth Day Service of Holy Communion immediately before our annual participation in the Schenectady CROP Walk, an event that's all about getting out to enjoy creation into order to raise awareness and funds to end hunger, a problem that's greatly exacerbated by the poor treatment of God's good

creation. The service will feature special decorations, hymns, and very special sermon from Pastor Dustin. If you have any questions, please speak with Pastor Dustin or Creation Care Chair Kären Telfeyan.

CROP Walk
Sunday, May 5th at 1:00pm
Emmanuel Friedens Church
218 Nott Terrace,
Schenectady, New York

Together, we can help end hunger in our community and around the world! CROP Hunger Walks are community-wide events sponsored by Church World Service and organized by religious groups, businesses, schools and others to raise funds to end hunger in the U.S. and around the world. Schenectady Community Ministries is the local organizer of the CROP Walk and every year Messiah fields both a strong group of walkers and raises funds for the CROP Walk! Last year we raised $556 for the cause and we're hoping to raise $750.00 this year! If you're interested in signing up or donating, be sure to speak with Randi Dunda-Martin in the Narthex!

Lutheran Youth Laser Tag Trip
Sunday, May 5th at 5:00pm

Join other local Lutheran youth from Good Shepherd and Our Redeemer Lutheran churches for an awesome night of laser tag at Spare Time in Clifton Park. Cost will be $10 per participant and the event is open to all middle and high school age youth and their families. This is meant to be an initial opportunity for youth to connect before starting to plan our next ELCA Youth Gathering trip! Please sign up on the narthex bulletin board or speak with Pastor Dustin if you have any questions.

Pastor Dustin's Coffee Club II: Manna & Mercy
Continuing Monday, May 6th at 10:00am at the Parish House

This spring's installment of Pastor Dustin's Coffee Club will give you just that opportunity! Almost every week we'll set an hour of our busy lives aside to enjoy some wonderful coffee together in the Parish House, read a few pages from Daniel Erlander's classic *Manna & Mercy* and learn about how the whole point of the Bible is to tell the story of God's unfolding promise to mend the entire universe!!! Even if you can only make it once in a while, this will be a great way to get to know other folks in our congregation and get grounded in the story of our collective faith!

- Monday, May 6th at 10:00am: By the Waters of Babylon
- Tuesday, May 14th at 10:00am: Home Again
- Tuesday, May 21st at 10:00am: God's Surprise
- Wednesday, May 29th at 10:00am: Manna & Mercy for All
- Tuesday, June 4th at 10:00am: Jerusalem
- Wednesday, June 12th at 10:00am: A Risen Christ, A Risen People
- Tuesday, June 18th at 10:00am: The Danger of Pharaohs' Egypt Way
- Tuesday, June 25th at 10:00am: God's Dream (a special grand finale picnic)

The Future of Schenectady Community Ministries, Part Two
Tuesday, May 7th at 7:00pm
SiCM Food Pantry
839 Albany Street,
Schenectady, New York

So we don't always put SiCM's monthly assemblies in the newsletter, but gosh, this one is super important. Messiah will be formally submitting a proposal for Schenectady Community Ministries to become an interfaith organization! We'll need all the help we can get to encourage our fellow congregations to begin working with our Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu and Buddhist neighbors. Even if you've never attended a SICM assembly before, please join us and be part of Messiah showing leadership amongst our fellow local communities of faith!

Mother's Day at Messiah
Sunday, May 12th at 10:15am

Mother's Day is always a very special Sunday at Messiah, and this year, we're kicking it up a notch! In a service led almost entirely by our young people, the Children's Sunday School will lead the

congregation in a special song and we'll have a bunch of other ways of recognizing all the amazing women in our lives! Looking for a special gift for a very special lady? We'll also hold our Second Annual Mother's Day Craft Sale to help our kids head to Camp Calumet this summer! Before and after worship our Calumet kids will be selling all sorts of awesome crafts to give as gifts this year!

Men's Group Movie Night: "Called and Chosen"
Monday, May 13th at 7:00pm

Join the Mighty Men of Messiah for a pizza dinner and an opportunity to watch the film "Called and Chosen," the incredible story of how Father Vincent Capodanno, a chaplain during the Vietnam war, received the Congressional Medal of Honor with conversation to follow. All are invited to Parish House for this awesome event and please sign up on the narthex bulletin board.

A Lutheran Perspective on the Environment
Tuesday, May 14th at 6:30pm

Due to awesome feedback we have received after our Women & Justice Presentation a few of months back, Deacon Rianne Johnson will be hosting another presentation/ discussion on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's social statement Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice which was adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 1993. This statement offers a vision of God's intention for creation and for humanity as creation's caregivers; acknowledges humanity's separation from God and from the rest of creation as the central cause of the environmental crisis; recognizes the severity of the crisis; and expresses hope and heeds the call to justice and commitment. Please join us, it will be an enlightening discussion!

A People's History of Christianity
Continuing Tuesday, May 7th at 11:00am

According to Saint Luke, Jesus' first act of public ministry was to preach the following words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Incredible words, that's for sure, but unfortunately the exact opposite sort of ideas are what many associate with Jesus' followers today. Ask your average young adult especially and many would associate Christianity more with crusades and inquisitions, clergy sexual abuse, judging the LGBT community, not treating women equally and the decimation of indigenous populations than a gospel of liberating love. Given Jesus' gospel filled words, teachings and example, how did we get here? What Good News can be found in our collective Christian story? How can we learn from the best of our tradition to proclaim the true gospel in a time of great fear and change?

Through "A People's History of the Christianity," a five-part community discussion series led by Rev. Dustin G. Wright and based around the 2009 book of the same name by Diana Butler Bass, we'll begin answering these questions grounded in Scripture and prayer. Folks of all faith backgrounds, and especially our siblings in Christ from other local Schenectady congregations are more than invited to attend as we learn, discern and dream together. What follows is a monthly discussion schedule:

- Tuesday, May 7th at 11:00am: The Word, Reformation Christianity (1450 - 1650 CE)
- Tuesday, May 28th at 11:00am: The Quest, Modern Christianity (1650 CE - 1945 CE)
- Tuesday, June 11th at 11:00am: The River, Contemporary Christianity (1945 - Present)

While a few copies of the book will be available, all are invited to bring their own copy and a Bible to the discussions. Even if you can't read the book itself, please join us for wonderful conversations about the stories of our faith! If you have any questions, please email Pastor Dustin for more information!

Over 55 Gang Movie & Lunch
Thursday, May 16th at 12:30pm
After a very well attended planning meeting last week, those wily "spring chickens" are at it again launching Messiah's newest fellowship group, the "Over 55 Gang!" Their May event will be a lunch and watching the classic film *Mamma Mia*. Paul and Allison Bode will be our hosts. If you have any questions, please speak with Barb Hallett.

Young Adult Group Dinner
Thursday, May 16th at 6:00pm
Our next Young Adult dinner will be held Thursday, May 16th at 6:00pm at the Parish House. Please bring a dish to share (preferably wheat and dairy-free due to allergies) and a game to play! Please RSVP on our Facebook event – if you don't have Facebook, please let Pastor Dustin or Rianne know you plan on coming.

Spring Cleanup and Planting Day
Sunday, May 19th at 11:30am
Inspired by the story of our Pastor Emeritus Richard Rieger's efforts to build a community garden in his home congregation of Saint Andrews in Glens Falls, during this year's spring cleanup day in addition to the usual activities we'll also be planting a small raised bed and "edible landscaping" to provide our Bread of Life Food Pantry with fresh fruits and vegetables. Jan Rieger will be joining us for this very exciting Sunday! All are invited to bring a simple dish to share for a light picnic once we've completed our work. Please sign up on the narthex bulletin board.

Congregation Council Meeting
Monday, May 20th at 7:00pm
Figuring out our Strategic Plan, making a recommendation regarding mechanical improvements this summer, evaluating and supporting our many ministries... Council has just a few things on the agenda this upcoming meeting, but if you'd like something added please speak with President Jackie DeTeso or Vice President Pete Jones.

Calumet Paint & Snack
Friday, May 31st at 7:00pm
The Olochnowicz Estate
Back by popular demand, we'll once again hold another awesome opportunity to support our young people attending Calumet this summer at the Olochnowicz's Garage Mahal! Be sure to join us for a fun night of painting, "potent potables" and hanging out together! Please sign up on the narthex bulletin board and speak with Cheryl Borski if you have any questions.

#SundayFunDay Summer Sunday School
Every Sunday this summer beginning June 2nd at 9:00am
Stay tuned for more deets but this summer we'll be bringing back the really successful program we launched two summers ago where our young people (and young people at heart) can learn about Bible stories through fun, often outdoors activities. This year

Just some good ol' Lutherans hanging out taking group selfies after church! Pictured: Jill Becker, Rachel Mathis, Ibrahim Pedriñán, & Kristen Olochnowicz.

we'll be working through the most well known stories of Jesus' ministry chronologically. Which means of course, we'll kick off #SundayFunDay with a Christmas Party!!! Come learn and celebrate the summer with us!

Annual Thank You Brunch
Sunday, June 2nd at 12:00pm
Hey all! Please join us for our annual Thank You Brunch, the time ever year where our Council treats everyone to a tasty brunch as a thank you for supporting so ministries throughout the program year. We'll have extra to celebrate this year as it'll be taking place immediately after a very important Special Meeting of the Congregation. Please RSVP on the narthex bulletin board

and place a "thank you" slip in the box below the bulletin board if you'd like to thank someone for their service at Messiah over the past year... all comments we receive will be included on our special placemats during the event!

Schenectady Pride
Sunday, June 2nd at 2:00pm

As part of Messiah's ongoing commitment to welcome, affirm and celebrate our LGBTQIA siblings, this year we'll participate in Schenectady's annual Pride Festival and March along with fellow like-minded congregations of Schenectady Clergy Against Hate! The festival itself begins at 2:00pm but be sure to join us and our fellow congregations to participate in the short march at 4:00pm, which will begin on Jay Street and end at Gateway Park (across from SUNYSCCC). If you have any questions, please speak with Pastor Dustin.

Calumet Community Coffeehouse
Sunday, June 9th at 7:00pm

Join Mr. Doug, Kristen Olochnowicz and all our awesome Calumet kids for a wonderful night of show tunes and Calumet songs! This has truly become a cherished annual tradition! The event is free of charge but all proceeds will go to benefit our Calumet Campership Fund.

Annual Ice Cream Social
Wednesday, June 12th, 2017 at 7:00pm

Mark your calendars and join us for our Annual Ice Cream Social featuring the Esperance Town Band. We will gather on the church lawn, (weather permitting) so bring your lawn chairs and your friends for a wonderful evening filled with fantastic music, great friends and delicious ice cream! We are looking for people to bake and help with set-up/cleanup – a sign-up sheet will be on the bulletin board in the narthex shortly. Please contact Joyce Gresham for more information, and don't forget your bug spray!

Father's Day at Messiah
Sunday, June 16th at 10:15am

This year at Messiah we'll be honoring our fathers, grand-fathers and other men who make our lives so special in a number of different ways. We'll kick-off our summer with a casual outdoor service with coffee and the best after church reception of all time, something we're tentatively calling "Bill Olochnowicz Deep Fries Everything!" Mr. Doug will also be leading a very special performance from our "Pickup Choir" (show up at 9:00am if you'd like to join in) and our children will once again lead an awesome Children's Sermon about all they learn from all the important men in their lives.

Enjoying a creation appreciation walk on a nice day! Pictured: Denise Larrabee, Nancy Stellrecht, Betsy Ryan, & Linda Buehler.

The Sophie Mathis Experience: A Benefit Recital
Sunday, June 23rd at 6:00pm

Join us for a beautiful midsummer evening as we welcome noted local mezzo-soprano singer and soon to be famous daughter of Rotterdam, the one and only Sophie P. Mathis, in her debut recital! Accompanied by one of the Greater Capital Region's foremost pianists Michael Clement, Sophie will treat us to a variety of art songs, arias, and other beautiful and classic pieces. A free will offering will be taken to benefit Messiah's Calumet Campership Fund, which is helping subsidize eleven of our young people have a life changing experience Camp Calumet Lutheran this summer! Our Calumet kids will treat us to a

tasty reception following the event as well.

Blessing of the Graduates
Sunday, June 30th at 10:15am

Gosh, a bunch of our young people are graduating from high school this year (including some of the gals in Pastor Dustin's first confirmation class), and it's time to honor them! Hanna, Sophie, Jacob, Kiersten and Kendra will participate in a very special graduation rite during worship and we'll have a pretty rad reception for them afterwards as well. Pastor Dustin will probably cry a lot. It'll be great. Join us!

Vacation Bible School 2019: God's Good Creation
Monday, August 12th - Friday, August 16th from 7:45am - 12:30pm

For the first summer in many years Messiah will be hosting an awesome half day Vacation Bible School for Messiah children and kids from our local neighborhood alike! Messiah VBS is open to kids entering kindergarten through entering sixth grade with opportunities for older youth to assist through a leadership development program. The week will be centered around the theme of God's Good Creation, based on a curriculum from ELCA World Hunger that helps kids learn about how faith connects with caring for the environment and their neighbors. Cost per child will be $10 with snacks and lunch provided. Early drop-off at 7:30am is also possible with prior notice. To sign up, please email our Parish Administrator Rianne Johnson at office@messiahschenectady.org or sign up in person on Sunday morning!

Showing off their Sunday's finest on Easter Sunday in front of our beloved bell. Pictured: Atticus, Anthony, Grace, Grace, Sarah, David, Sophie, & Jesse.

Ministry Team Meetings

Worship & Music Ministry Team Meeting
Monday, May 6th at 7:00pm

Join our Worship & Music Ministry Team as we evaluate Holy Week and Easter and plan for awesome spring and summer of incredible worship experiences! We'll also be discussing the possibility of a more frequent early Sunday morning service based off our successful Easter Matins experience this year! If you have any questions, please speak with Pastor Dustin.

Creation Care Team Meeting
Wednesday, May 8th at 6:00pm

Please join us on Wednesday, May 8th at 6:00pm for our next Creation Care Meeting! For more information, please speak with committee chair Karen Telfeyan.

Property Ministry Team Meeting
Wednesday, May 8th at 7:00pm

Join Messiah's illustrious Property Ministry Team for a REALLY important conversation! Way back in February our Property folks were asked at our Annual Meeting of the Congregation to evaluate whether it made sense to made significant mechanical improvements as the first step of our wider Messiah in Your Lifetime Capital Campaign. And well, with

many thanks to Steve Friebel, Charlie Zitzmann, Sarah DeTeso and others we'll be evaluating options at this meeting in order to make a formal recommendation to Council and in turn to our Special Meeting of the Congregation scheduled for June 2nd. Proposed improvements include replacing our sanctuary furnaces and upgrading our electrical service. We'll also discuss a proposed Edible and Native Plants Landscaping Plan drawn up for us by a good friend of Pastor Dustin. If you have any questions, please speak with Property Co-Chairs Charlie Zitzmann and Rich Stigberg.

VBS Planning Session
Wednesday, May 15th at 7:00pm

Calling all kids and volunteers at Messiah! By our next meeting we're really hoping to know which kids in of our congregation want to join us for Vacation Bible School, scheduled for August 12th - August 16th. If you'd like to volunteer or have your child attend, please sign up on the narthex bulletin board by that date.

Faith Formation Summit for All Ages
Wednesday, May 22nd at 7:00pm

This is a big one! Our number of faith formation opportunities for adults and youth have absolutely exploded in recent months! Plus, we'll have a whole new bunch of confirmation students starting next fall and we need to figure out the best way to work it. We're also planning to launch a new Sunday morning ministry for high school youth. All parents and adult faith formation participants are encouraged to take part in this essential conversation around how we'll better structure our many Faith Formation ministries at Messiah! Childcare will be available at the meeting if requested and we'll even have pizza!

News You Can Use!

Prayer List Overhaul

In an effort to help us pray for each other a little better, we will soon be changing our prayer list process. Effective June 1st, our prayer list will be restarted and names will be removed unless information is submitted to the office containing the person's name and reason for being on the prayer list. In order to keep the list a little smaller, last names may be shortened.

Card Ministry

Five cards were sent out in April.

Creation Appreciation

If you are interested in receiving emails announcing Creation Appreciation hikes please sign up on the narthex bulletin board. Thanks!

Care & Concern News

The committee continues to visit Dave and Lore Ellis at Glendale and administer communion, monthly. In June the plan is for boat ride and luncheon in lake George - the hosts will be Bill Ellis and Barb Hallett. More information will be posted next month. The next meeting of care and concern committee will be Tuesday June 16th at 2pm. We will discuss plans for potluck at Glendale.

New Parking Options at Messiah

As we've continued to rapidly grow in attendance on Sunday mornings (by over 20% so far this year!), we've heard loud and clear that folks are having greater difficulty parking for Sunday worship. With many thanks to Karen Kreischer, we've made some short term arrangements that will ease this issue until a permanent solution can be developed. As always, primary parking is located in our main lot on Guilderland Avenue and along Oak Street near our main entrance. Additional handicap spots will soon be added along Oak Street.

Overflow parking on Sunday mornings can now be found in the unpaved portion of the parking area behind our wonderful neighbor John Fitzner Canvas and Auto on the corner of Curry Road and Floral Avenue. Affectionately known as "The Boat Place" to many in our congregation, they have recently agreed to allow us to use this space only on Sunday mornings and at your own risk. Please respect their generosity!

Our kitchen committee gathered either before or after our Easter Breakfast craziness – thank you all so much! Pictured: Rich Becker, Bill Ellis, Dick Stigberg, Neal Fisher, & Kyle.

Ready for Easter Sunday! Pictured: Abriel, Hannah, Hanna, Sarah, & Ella.

Remember that one time we had John Gray visit us? It was a pretty awesome talk! Many thanks to Rich Becker for getting him to come see us!

Nancy Stellrecht showing off her elusive bingo prize: a good ol' Lutheran Insta Potluck!

Spring 2019 Time & Talent Stewardship Campaign: God's Purpose for Messiah Throughout the Season of Easter

About a month ago you might remember that we had over ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY folks in Sunday worship. Just a few weeks back, at our Spring 2019 New Member Luncheon, not only did we have a bunch of new members, but we also realized that every new member's sponsor had also joined Messiah in the last five years. Parking on most Sunday mornings isn't easy, nor is keeping up with all of the amazing ministries and activities here. Over the last five years God has transformed our small but loving congregation into a rapidly growing and leading force in our local community. As Joyce Gresham joyfully exclaimed recently, "We're an entire different church than we used to be!" For sure, we've experienced a great deal of profoundly good change in recent years as a congregation, but even the best changes bring about stress. One way to work through such congregational stress is taking some time to sit down together to talk, think and pray about how we can live out life together on the Way of Christ. Sure, we have annual priorities for our congregation that have proved helpful in recent years, a cherished welcome statement we carefully developed and of course our mission statement, "to be Spirit filled church following Jesus Christ." But in a long-term sort of way, what is God doing in our community? What are our core values? And given God's vision and our values, what is our purpose as a congregation? During the Season of Easter, we'll be figuring just that out, and here's how:

Everyone at Messiah, no matter their age, is invited to take part in three short, one hour conversations listed below:

Monday, May 6th at 6:00pm: God's Vision for Our Neighborhood, will include questions like:

- What are key problems in the life of our local community, our nation and our world God is calling us to solve?
- If you were to leave Rotterdam and come back in ten years, what would you want it to look like? How about our nation and our world?

Wednesday, May 15th at 7:00pm: Our Core Values at Messiah, will include questions like:

- When you think of three words to describe Messiah Lutheran Church, what would they be?
- What are the main reasons you've come to Messiah or have stayed at Messiah?

Monday, May 20th at 6:00pm: God's Purpose for Messiah, will include questions like:

- Given our values, describe who we are at Messiah in one sentence.
- Given our values, what are the three top things we can do at Messiah to help realize God's vision?
- Who, if anyone, will we work with on an ongoing basis to realize these things?

Based on these conversations, our Stewardship Team and Congregation Council will develop a draft long-term strategic plan for Messiah that we will in turn discuss and adopt at a **Special Meeting of the Congregation scheduled for Sunday, June 2th immediately following worship**. We'll then ask everyone to volunteer their time and talents to the work of this long term plan during our ministry fair following a festive worship service on Pentecost Sunday, June 9th. Our Congregation Council and our various Ministry Teams will then use this document to further develop specific long term goals and objectives that we'll talk about further in the fall. If you have any questions, please speak with Pastor Dustin.

Ministers of the Month: Christine DeMento & Jody Fleming

Congratulations to our Ministers of the Month, Christine and Jody! These two ladies have quite a track record at Messiah and have been involved in NUMEROUS ministries.

Jody's interests include decorating, antiques and family. Her hobbies include painting and flower gardening. She had a feature article in Country Squire magazine with photos of her house and its decorations. She was a past Sunday School head at Messiah. Jody has decorated the church for many special occasions, hosts the annual WELCA Christmas Party, and serves on the Mutual Ministry Team.

Christine DeMento is a lifetime member of Messiah with two children, Rocco and Amelia, and her husband Joe. Christine has served as Vice President, President and Treasurer of Council as well as head of Christian Ed., Personnel, and Mutual Ministry. Christine has been a Sunday School teacher for several years and is presently on our newly established Grant Writing Team. Christine's fondest memories of have been youth group, the Gong Show, her Wedding performed by Pastor Rohs and her children's milestones within the church - Mostly the relationships with the people she has bonded with in the church.

Ministry of the Month: Stewardship Team

To the purpose of our Stewardship Team is to explain how the congregation functions and provide opportunities for members to discern how they can support God's mission for the congregation through money, time, and talents.

The responsibility of this group is planning the Fall and Spring Stewardship Campaigns. The Spring Campaign focuses on helping the congregation realize the Time & Talents they may have that would help Messiah grow both physically and spiritually. They try to build support for the many committees within Messiah by planning Temple Talks, activities and hosting a Committee Fair. For the Fall Campaign, the committee plans events to help members understand the financial piece of running Messiah. The committee is currently helping to organize the Capital Campaign that will allow Messiah to expand the structure of our building. Handicap accessibility is a high priority. They are also involved with helping to create a 5-year Strategic Plan for our church.

Pastor's Letter:
Rev. Dustin G. Wright

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." - Saint John 20: 27

Dear siblings in Christ,

I'm gonna make this quick b/c I'm trying to get some last minute things done before heading back into the Great Smokies on vacation (Bryson City, North Carolina is LOVELY this time of year by the way).

In short, immediately before leaving Wednesday morning, I could not have been happier to submit our letter urging Schenectady Community Ministries to move in an interfaith direction to the SiCM Steering Committee. Most on the committee agreed with our sentiments and all were very thankful for us to push this issue forward. I suspect it may take an extra meeting, but it's my prayerful hope that we'll be able to take meaningful action before folks head out for the summer.

As I presented that letter, I looked at the signatures and saw folks from a variety of perspectives, political positions and ways of reading the Bible come together to make a meaningful difference in our local community. I cried a bit, and could not have been more proud. Thank you for your witness this Easter.

May God's peace be with you,

Dustin G. Wright

Pastor Dustin

Presiding Bishop's Letter: Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

The good people at Lenoir-Rhyne University's Living Well Center for Vocation and Purpose invited me to address the school on the topic "Lives Worth Living." Yikes! This is one of The Questions in life—right up there with "What is the meaning of life?" and "What is true, beautiful and good?" and "Where do socks go after you put them in the dryer?"

For me, this turned out to be a good, if slightly disturbing, time of reflection. Our lives can be consumed with busyness—all the stuff that we do or need to get done to make it through the day, week, year, life. A lot of this is necessary, some not so much. Even those called to public ministry get swept up in the endless round of meetings, reports and events. And some in this world don't have the luxury of carving out time for contemplation as they struggle to keep their families fed, clothed and safe from harm.

As I write this it is Lent, a time of reflection and examination. I do have the privilege of time and, with the added incentive of a deadline, here are some thoughts. We are inundated with messages of salvation, or at least better lives, through things. Ads for products as diverse as cars, toothpaste, brokerage firms, weed killers and more are carefully crafted to cast an aspirational vision of the good life. Sometimes this vision of the good life is presented in such a beguiling way that one forgets what product is being advertised. It's possible to get lost if you go down this road. There will always be a new thing, the promise of a more beautiful you. It's there—just beyond reach.

Jesus warns us about this in the parable of the rich man, who believed he had attained the good life. "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" (Luke 12:19-20). So, what's the point? If materialism doesn't bring meaning, why not just give up? In Ecclesiastes we hear: "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Nihilism, oddly enough, can provide a frame for meaning. "Who cares?" can quickly become "Don't care." Protected from disappointment by withdrawing from this world of care is as tempting as a frenzied life in pursuit of self-made happiness.

I believe there is another way, a different way, of shaping our lives. The cruciform life is the life worth living. The cruciform life delivers us from our constant striving to make our lives have meaning through our own efforts. It saves us from the exhausting pursuit of self-justification and worth, from the loss of our true selves in all of our posturing. Jesus, crucified and risen for the sake of the world, breaks through all of that. He breaks down all pretense on our part and all claims of salvation that the world offers. God comes to us, cherishes us, bids us to come to God's life and peace. Augustine, an early Christian theologian, knew this when he wrote: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you."

The cruciform life also breaks through nihilism. Free from the necessity of saving ourselves, and from the numbness of the pointlessness of all that, the cross breaks us open to others, to the world. The rush of feeling back into a self that has cut itself off from circulation is painful. But it is also a sign of life. We can feel, we can touch and be touched by others. The cross sets us free to serve the neighbor. Here is the life worth living that God gives us.