

NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 36, NUMBER 2

SUMMER 2025

Save the Date!

Annual Program and Meeting

What

Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic

Annual Program and Meeting!

“New from the Archives: Stories to Inspire a Public Witness”

A Two-Day Event!

When:

Friday, February 27, 2026
An Archives Workshop Day
(More details to come)

Saturday, February 28, 2026
9:30 AM – 2:30 PM

Where:

United Lutheran Seminary,
Gettysburg Campus

Who:

Saturday Sessions:

Victoria Larson,
“Lutheran Laywoman Maude McDaniel”

Daniel Smail
“William Passavant”

Victoria Jesswein,
“Digital Access to Archives”

Lunch in groups to local Gettysburg eateries!
Program is Free, No Registration!

Stay Tuned for More Details!

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Challenge to identify vacant congregation*
- *President Emeritus Herr to take on new role as synod bishop for six-year term*
- *Abdel Wentz Prize to be awarded this fall*
- *Membership renewal reminder*
- *Members encouraged to consider a Life Membership to LHSMA*
- *Victoria Jesswein to receive an Award of Commendation from the Concordia Historical Institute*

President's Corner - Summer 2025

This past Sunday afternoon (20 July 2025), I sat with congregational councilors following the last worship service of their retiring pastor. As I often find, the dominant



concern of the councilors centered on being in a state of pastoral vacancy. Many worried that the congregation will not do well without a pastor especially in a protracted vacancy. While a perfectly reasonable concern, it seemed incongruent with the congregation's history.

This congregation, organized December 26, 1852, did not call its first full-time pastor until January 1, 1924. During those seventy-one years, a parade of pastors provided services, none of them resident in the community. Indeed, some traveled quite far for those days. The first Lutheran Communion service recorded was conducted by a pastor from Wheeling, WV, in 1868. That's over ninety miles away. From 1871 to 1882, a pastor from the West Virginia German Mission of the Pittsburgh

Synod served the congregation in conjunction with other congregations along one hundred and thirty miles of the B&O Railroad. He visited only once a year, staying several days to conduct pastoral acts and lead worship. The next pastors traveled from Benwood, WV, and Martin's Ferry, Ohio, communities just outside of Wheeling. In 1897, a seminarian from Chicago was dispatched to the congregation for the summer, an adventure that included meeting his future wife. In 1903, Parkersburg, WV, became the source of visiting pastors, and in 1905, Clarksburg, WV, became the new pastoral seat until eclipsed by Fairmont, WV, before returning to Clarksburg.

It does not take much reading between the lines to see the disjointedness of the pastoral ministry to the congregation. Really grasping that, however, is another matter. How did the members work together to not only build this church but also govern it without much eccle-

siastical or clerical oversight? What did worship look like the many weeks no pastor was present? How were baptisms, weddings, and funerals handled? What did the cure of souls look like, and how were the sick cared for?

B. B. Maurer, the chronicler of West Virginia Lutheran history, wrote for the congregation's 132nd anniversary,

As today's church struggles to fill its pulpits while panicked voices cry, "We have to find new ways to do church,"

Throughout the seventy-two years

prior to the calling of the first full-time pastor, the Congregation had met regularly on an alternate Sunday basis with lay leaders conducting the services and reading the sermons from a book. Tradition has it that two books of sermons were worn out in this manner. The Catechism was taught in the Sunday School and homes. On the occasion of the annual or semiannual visit of pastors, several days of worship services would

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LHSMA 2025 - 2026 Board of Directors

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Matthew Riegel
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Secretary
Lee Knepp
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Victoria Jesswein
Archivist/Historian
Jon Diefenthaler
Maria Erling

Kevin Hepler
Stephen Herr
Kristi Keller
Louise Meledin

Mark Oldenburg
Jeffrey Pannebaker
Sean Titus

Board Emeriti

Stephen Herr
Susan Hill

President's Corner, cont.

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be held around the sacraments and rites of the Church: Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage.

I suspect—I have to do some digging to verify—that Pietism played no small part in sustaining this congregation through those many decades. I also suspect that this micro-history is a more common story than we typically repeat—also a hypothesis to be tested. As today's church struggles to fill its pulpits while panicked voices cry, "We have to find new

ways to do church," might the historian offer some old ways?

The Rt. Rev.

Matthew Lynn Riegel, S.T.M., President

Lutheran Historical

Society of the Mid-Atlantic

West Virginia Western Maryland Synod, ELCA

304-680-5388; riegel@wv-wmd.org

<http://WV-WMD.org>

P.S., I have not disclosed the name of the congregation nor provided footnotes. I have, however, provided clues. Can you identify the congregation? The first to do so and contact me (bishop@wv-wmd.org) will have their name lauded on our Facebook page.

President Emeritus Herr elected Bishop

Lower Susquehanna Synod News Release

On June 7, 2025, the Rev. Stephen Robert Herr was called to serve a six-year term as bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Bishop-elect Rev. Herr currently serves as pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Ordained on July 2, 1994, Pastor Herr has served in parish, campus, and synodical leadership for more than three decades.

His leadership within the ELCA includes service on the ELCA Church Council, Executive Committee, and Legal and Constitutional Review Committee (chair), as well as the Future Directions Task Force and Synod Councils in both the Lower Susquehanna and Southwestern Pennsylvania Synods. Locally, he has served as Dean and Secretary of the

Gettysburg Conference and continues to support outdoor ministry through the Lutheran Camping Corporation of Central Pennsylvania.



Pastor Herr is also deeply engaged in the Gettysburg community through ecumenical leadership, the arts, education, and historical preservation. He has served on the boards of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, Gettysburg Community Theatre, and the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic, where he is president emeritus. He has also coached youth basketball at both Blairsville and Gettysburg Area High Schools.

Please join us in giving thanks for Bishop-elect Herr and lifting him in prayer as he prepares to lead our synod.

THE LUTHERAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE MID-ATLANTIC



The 2025 Abdel Ross Wentz Prize in American Lutheran History

Abdel Ross Wentz (pictured above on the left) was a leading figure in American Lutheranism. From 1916-1956 he was a professor of church history and later President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. Wentz (pictured at left above) also served as the first Vice-President of the Lutheran World Federation. His family established with the Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic an endowment providing prize money for the best history paper on a topic related to Lutheranism in America. The prize is in the amount of \$2,500 and can be awarded in four categories. Read more about Wentz and the prize on the society's web site:

www.lutheranhistoricalsociety.com

Papers for consideration by the prize committee should include a cover sheet which includes the following 1) author's contact information (address, phone, email) 2) institutional affiliation (if applicable) 3) degree program (if applicable) 4) category for which the paper qualifies should be submitted electronically to Pastor Stephen Herr at info@lutheranhistoricalsociety.com

Submission deadline is September 30, 2025



Requirements:

- Four categories
 - 1) First degree seminarian
 - 2) MA./Ph.D graduate student
 - 3) Post-Graduate:
Pastor, Deacon, Layperson,
and/or Faculty member
 - 4) Amateur Historian
- Paper should be 25-35 pages in length, double spaced using Chicago Manual of Style
- The identity and the institution of the author (if applicable) along with the category the paper qualifies for should be on a separate cover sheet from the manuscript
- Papers are to be in the **field of history** dealing with some aspect of **Lutheranism in America**
- Open to all writers regardless of religious identification or denominational affiliation





Lutheran Historical Society **Of the Mid-Atlantic**

Application for Membership/Membership Renewal

(Please submit this Annual Membership Renewal form.)

(Please print or write clearly. Thank you!)

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Congregation (*if applicable*): Please list name, town, and denomination.

I desire membership in LHSMA as a ____ New Member or as a ____ Renewal.

Date of application: _____

____ \$250 Life Membership for an individual or institution

____ \$ 20 Annual Membership for an individual or institution

(Annual membership is for a calendar year.)

____ I wish to give a donation to the society (see below for details). Amount \$ _____

I am interested in the following:

____ Research

____ Reading

____ Publishing

____ Other: _____

Financial gifts to further the work of the Society are always welcome and greatly appreciated. Such gifts may be mailed to LHSMA, in care of the treasurer, Lee Knepp, at the address below. LHSMA is a 501C-3 organization and your gift is tax deductible as permitted by law.

Please complete this form and your check made payable to LHSMA. Mail to:

Lee Knepp, LHSMA

P.O. Box 76

McClure, PA 17841

Cultivating the Next Generation of Church Historians

by Victoria Jesswein

I volunteered to write up some thoughts on how to revive the declining field of church history and what LHSMA can do to cultivate the next generations of Lutheran history scholars.

As I write this, I'm sitting in a dorm room in Bethlehem PA where I am taking the German script course offered by the Moravian Archives. Most of the other students in this course are MA or PhD students in religious history or things that overlap with it. I find that encouraging (I expected it to be mostly retired folks interested in doing genealogy research...)!

I think the interest in church history out there, but the issue is how we make the archives accessible and build connections with other institutions/programs. That way, people beyond our Lutheran bubble can discover the rich material in Lutheran archives. For example, I think there are countless potential projects contained in materials at the Wentz Library that don't necessarily rely on having a background in the Lutheran church. I don't believe church history is dying out, but the field of *pure* church history is definitely in decline (largely because churches in general are in decline.)

Today's researchers are exploring how the Church intersects not just with worship and theology, but also with secular areas—politics, art, linguistics, sociology, LGBTQ+ history, law, whatever. Of course, those connections have always existed, but these scholars now see themselves primarily as historians of those secular fields. They may not even realize how valuable church archives could be for their work. So, our task is to identify where our history and our archives intersect with

the current hot topics in academic research, and to make those connections visible and accessible. We need to be accepting of and even encouraging of research that comes from further afield but still incorporates Lutheran history and/or uses Lutheran archival material from our region.

[Board member] Maria [Erling] brought up an interesting point about younger scholars in LHC [Lutheran Historical Conference]. She believes it is easier for historians to interact without encountering political tensions than it is for theologians or biblical scholars. That makes sense to me; the discipline of history creates a space where scholars can present ideas and collaborate without immediately getting pulled into theological or political fault lines.

That said, we can't ignore that many younger religious scholars may feel disengaged from traditional church history. There is a perception, not entirely unfounded, that the field is dominated by narratives about "dead white men." But Lutheran history, like all history, is far more diverse and nuanced than that. I think that Lutheran history has more to offer than many people realize. We know that within our history, there are silences to uncover and voices we haven't yet heard.

Our work, then, must be to actively seek out the untold stories and open up new avenues of research. The next generation of scholars needs to know that Lutheran history is not a closed canon, but a rich field with potential for entirely new

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areas of research. If we want to grow the next generation of church historians, we need to support and encourage research that expands the boundaries of the field. That means making our archives more accessible but also fostering a culture that values all sorts of curiosity, critical engagement, and the willingness to ask new kinds of questions.

Victoria Jesswein, United Lutheran Seminary library archivist on the Gettysburg campus, and LHSMA board member and archivist, will receive an Award of Commendation from the Concordia Historical Institute for her journal article, "German Language Use at Pennsylvania Lutheran Seminaries." Her article appeared in the Yearbook of German-American Studies, and the award will be presented this coming November at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis. Congratulations Victoria!

Membership Renewal Due

Dear Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic Members and Friends:

This is your friendly reminder that membership renewals for 2026 are now due. Payment of annual dues (\$20 per household or institution) is requested between January 1 and March 31, 2026; however, we accept new members anytime! Please feel free to use the membership form in this issue to renew or join.

For those members who have already renewed, we send you a very big **THANK YOU!!**

Don't want the hassle of remembering annual dues? Then we encourage you to consider a one-time payment of \$250 for a **LIFE MEMBERSHIP!** Both annual and LIFE memberships provide important financial support for the essential activities of the Society, including our annual meeting, scholarly programs, awarding of the Wentz and Biglerville prizes for worthy Lutheran scholarship and publications, recognition of historic Lutheran sites, and Congregational Heritage Workshops, to name a few.

Friends, if you are not a member or have received a complimentary or trial membership, we encourage you to **COME JOIN US!** We are very happy to welcome you! LHSMA is very appreciative of the involvement and support of our current members, and we are always eager to greet new members!

*Friendly
Reminder*

Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic

61 Seminary Ridge
Gettysburg, PA 17325

Email: info@lutheranhistoricalsociety.com
Web: www.lutheranhistoricalsociety.com

*“Preserving, documenting,
and sharing the history of
Lutherans and Lutheranism in
the Mid-Atlantic and
surrounding areas.”*

We're on the Web!

lutheranhistoricalsociety.com

**Lutheran Historical
Society of the
Mid-Atlantic Newsletter**

ISSN 1049-6424

The Lutheran Historical Society of the Mid-Atlantic, in the interest of the preservation and cultivation of Lutheran history in Central and Western Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, and the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. area issues this newsletter two to three times a year.

Notes of announcements, projects, historical celebrations, genealogical concerns, notes of church or Synodical activities, and notes from other historical societies are solicited.

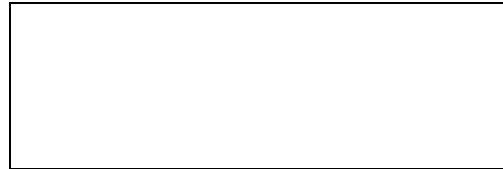
Address corrections are helpful.

Send replies via email to:

Matthew Riegel

info@lutheranhistoricalsociety.com

Subject: LHS Newsletter



VOLUME 36, NUMBER 2

From the Region 8 Archives

Among the diverse holdings of the ELCA Region 8 Archives at the A.R. Wentz Library, Gettysburg Campus, United Lutheran Seminary, are noncurrent records of Lutheran congregations, including historical records of disbanded congregations from five Region 8 Synods, including Alleghany, Delaware-Maryland, Lower Susquehanna, Metropolitan Washington, DC, and Upper Susquehanna Synod. In this issue, we highlight the records of the following congregation:

HOLY TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, WILMINGTON, DE

(Delaware-Maryland Synod)

- Annual Congregational Reports 1971-2003
- Congregation Member Record Cards
- Congregational Meeting Minutes/Reports
 - o 1924-1925
 - o 1928-1942
 - o 1944-1945
 - o 1947-1951
 - o 1957-1970
- Council Minutes
 - o 1906-1909
 - o 1909-1918
 - o 1918-1934
 - o 1938-1954
 - o 1956-1979
 - o 1980-1990
- Legal Papers
- Miscellaneous Papers
- Parish Registers
 - o 1906-1939
 - o 1940-1956
 - o 1955-1992
 - o 1993-2003

For more information, researchers should consult the guidelines to Research Inquiries for the Region 8 Archives Collections on the United Lutheran Seminary website at <http://library.uls.edu/subjects/guide.php?subject=region8policies>.