The Appalachian Lutheran

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I'd like to begin by introducing you to an Appalachian Lutheran.

Helen Bolen is a parishioner of mine that has spent her entire life in Appalachia. When I asked her if I could interview her for a newsletter on my next visit, she gladly wrote a short article herself. -DG

On Friday, September 13, 1937, I was born at home which was about five miles back of Friendly, West Virginia. I was a small, little girl with the cord wrapped around my neck and was unconscious for several hours, without the availability of a doctor which was common in those days, in our beautiful state. Many people visit our state parks (of which there are many) just to vacation and relax.

Now a little more about my life growing up. My two best friends and I went to school together for 12 years and graduated. We also went to church all those years together and spent lots of time together. Life went on, and on November 16, 1959, I married the love of my life. We went on to have four children, 2 girls and 2 boys.

Life went on and Bob worked for Purolator Courier Corp. located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was in charge of the plane there. One time, it had been raining all week, day and night, and in the early morning he was driving the company van. The date was February 4, 1986. I will never forget the date. 4:30 A.M. that morning I was suddenly awakened. I lay there a little longer, then jumped up suddenly and searched the house, even the basement. All was quiet, even the dogs, but something woke me!

It turned out Bob was badly head injured and lay in a coma for six months. My world turned upside down. Suddenly I became a "caregiver." Every weekend my two daughters and I spent wherever and whatever facility Bob was in. He was 57 years old when the accident happened, and I was 48. Bob lived another 13 years then he was gone.

People in our great state are compassionate people and they care and help each other out when needed, in sickness and death.

Changing the subject; many people think that because we are considered the "Ohio Valley" that runs into Appalachia down river, we are called "white trash." We are expected to have no teeth in our mouth, no brains in our head, can't read, write, or do arithmetic, and our children can't go to school because they have no shoes.

Well, let me tell you something ladies and gentlemen, during the Great Depression that was the truth but not any longer. As West Virginians we take pride in ourselves. We are great church people and family oriented and very proud of our state.

Time to wind this down but I wanted to tell you I love music. My mom used to play the piano ad my sister, brothers, and myself used to sing together. When my dad passed away that's what we did that evening without the piano. My daughter Karen directs the music at her church in New Martinsville. She has a beautiful voice. My sister wrote a history on her life, and it was found in her Bible when she passed away.

Here I go again winding up, but just this one thing, and I promise to quit: One of my favorite songs is "God Will Take Care of You." And He does, and He will.

God Bless! Signing off, your Friendly Appalachian "Girl," or should I say Friendly Appalachian "Lady!" Ha! Ha! -Helen Bolen, Sistersville, WV

The Lord Works Faithfully even through Our Ignorance
By Pastor Wes Hromowyk (A.L.L. Board Member)

During the fourth and final year of Seminary, at least when I was in attendance, students were required to fill out a form indicating the location they would like to serve as pastors, ranked from lowest to highest. I went to Seminary in Canada, in part, because it was closer to my home in western New York. I did not know the names of all the different districts that compose the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. I simply assumed that each state had its own district, and those that didn't, would be obvious (for example, "Eastern District" must be composed of several eastern states; similarly obvious "Southern District" and "Rocky Mountain District"). Since visiting the Mountain State in my early childhood, West Virginia has always had an enchanting lure. From my perspective, West Virginia is the closest thing east of the Mississippi River where one can have a true "mountain man" experience.

When filling out the form at the Seminary, I was going to put "West Virginia District" as my top preference. Imagine my disappointment when I found out there was no "West Virginia" district. Ironically, I put Ohio as my lowest preference. Unbeknownst to me then, however, the Ohio District *includes* West Virginia and parts of Eastern Kentucky.

I have been serving Zion Ev. Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio, since I graduated from the Seminary in 2013. On the one hand, the Lord Called me to the District I least wanted to serve (Ohio). On the other hand, the Lord Called me exactly where I wanted to serve (the district that West Virginia is a part of!). The Lord's ways are superior to ours and often also beyond our understanding.

The point is, the Lord works faithfully even through our ignorance and shallow self-centeredness. The Christian Church is the place where two or more are gathered in Jesus' name, who hear the Word of God rightly taught and receive God's holy gifts that are rightly distributed. God's people are in the mountains and in the flat lands. He comes to forgive our sins through His means of grace whether our altars are in the hollow or the city. God's ways are better than our ways. We are the clay, He is the potter. If a country boy like myself can find true joy and whole-hearted contentment serving a wonderful congregation in downtown Columbus, this demonstrates that our Lord works faithfully despite our short-sighted ignorance. It also shows that personal preferences and landscape, geography, or population size have no bearing on a fruitful relationship between congregation and pastor. Where there is an earnest desire to be faithful to God's Word on both the part of pastor and hearer, God will bear fruit. May He bear such fruit as this joint effort endeavor – the Appalachian Lutheran League – gets underway.

A Lutheran Mission in Davidson County, NC
By Vicar Adam Cranford (A.L.L. Board Member)
Davidson County Lutheran Mission (New Jerusalem Lutheran), Lexington, NC

This project started for me in early April 2023 when I drove past an old Southern style, brick, country church building that I'd somehow never noticed before. The sign out front caught my eye with a

prominent Lutheran rose, and the broken letters gave it the name New Jerusalem Lutheran Church. I knew from a friend that there was an abandoned ELCA building in that general area, and the heavy overgrowth on the property indicated that this was almost certainly the one.

The moment I saw it I was immediately struck with the idea that there should be a Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod mission planted in it. Confessional Lutheranism is sorely lacking in Davidson County. Personally, I was driving between 30-45 minute to Ebenezer Lutheran in Greensboro, and I knew others who wished they had a more traditional option closer to home as well. I immediately pulled over and took a few pictures. Shortly afterward I asked one of the elders at Ebenezer about what it would take to plant such a mission. His suggestion was to get in touch with the district office and speak to them, which I did. I was told by them that they would be interested in such a project, and they asked me to track down the owner.

The owner proved difficult to find. None of the numbers attached to the indicated owner on the deed were ever answered, and there was no answering machine. I continued driving past the property once a week or so, and I continued to pray that God would bring some fruit through what still looked like a very promising location, but I never was able to find an actual clue on how to find the owner. Around late August to early September there was a new development; someone cleared all the overgrowth. Thinking maybe someone was finally preparing to sell the property I was prompted to run new searches for the owner, but I still came up empty handed.

That all finally and suddenly changed on September 24th. For some background: I tended only to be in that area on Mondays, or on rare occasions Saturdays. But for some reason, from the moment I woke up that Sunday, I could not shake the idea that kept popping into my mind that I needed to head down that way right after church. After service ended at Ebenezer I went home, but I still couldn't shake the thought. I finally gave in and headed down. As I drove past New Jerusalem, I glanced into the parking lot and to my shock, for the first time ever, there was a car sitting in it. I immediately pulled into the drive. Standing by the side door was a man who introduced himself as Larry Furr; he was the brand new owner.

I asked him about his intentions with the property, and he admitted to me that he was unsure as to what his ultimate plans were. He said he'd felt compelled to buy the property, but that he wasn't sure for what purpose. At that point he was considering the possibility of opening it as a wedding venue. I told him about what my hopes were toward the building, and he told me he would not at all be opposed to allowing me to try. It turns out, he's a member of a Methodist church in Denton, and that he is very much a fellow traveler in some of the current cultural battle we find ourselves in today as traditional Christians; in fact, he helped lead his church in breaking with the UMC over their departure from Biblical standards on the clergy and marriage.

He and I spoke for about three hours that day. He gave me a tour of the building and I was amazed. The space was in excellent condition. Everything was still in place from the last service held - from what I was told- about eight years prior. It nearly looked as though they could have finished up that morning just before I got there. As I walked around it quickly became apparent that it would take no more than a bit of dusting, some vacuuming and sweeping, and a quick polish of the wood to have things ready for our own Divine Service.

By the time Larry and I parted ways he had enthusiastically agreed to allow me the chance to plant a confessional mission in the building. Before the week was out we had a tentative agreement on how a rental of the building would work; I was given the month of October for free to work as I could, and I had a key in hand.

But as surprising as that was, Larry actually got me with one more before we parted that first day. As I was getting into my truck he called me back to say one more thing. "I just thought you'd like to

know, I was just sitting at home watching football when I got the feeling I needed to come up here and check things out." I asked him how long he'd been there before I arrived. "I wasn't even here five minutes."

That week I began speaking with Rev. Dr. Yared Halche, the Mission Engagement Facilitator of the Southeastern District.

Our first service was held on October 29th in recognition of Reformation Day, Pastor Dakota Monday of St Paul Lutheran in Whispering Pines, NC graciously officiating. From there during the first year we held services as close to once a month as we could manage. This past October I was approved by the seminary to begin leading service and so a year from our beginning, on Reformation Sunday again, we began holding service weekly at 10am each Sunday.

We have been adopted as a daughter church by the congregation at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church at 465 Hartness Rd. in Statesville where my pastoral mentor Pr. Loyd Ginn also serves. If you are led to support the mission in its work, please send any gifts for that purpose here with a memo that it should go to fund DCLM.

And now we find ourselves still looking forward and striving toward completing each new step as it arises in the hopes that we will see this mission come to full fruition. We all very much want to see faithful Christianity grow more and more in this county and to reach those whom God will call to His Truth, especially those who've seen and are learning just how bad things can get when you don't take God seriously at his written Word.

It seems plain to us that God's hand has been in this every step of the way. The blessings that accompany it continue to multiply and we hope to be able to become a blessing to the larger community around us by them. All the prayers offered for this project are greatly appreciated, as are any gifts that may be offered toward helping to reap a future harvest for the Lord in Davidson County.

We welcome you to join us this Sunday.

The Story of the Appalachian Lutheran League
by Pastor Dan Golden, A.L.L. Board President

The story of A.L.L. began about a year ago. We hosted a Circuit Winkel (a meeting of area Lutheran pastors) in Parkersburg in the spring of 2024, and we invited along leaders from congregations who had no regular pastor called to serve them.

What we observed was astounding. The fellowship was a true consolation of brethren not only for the leaders of congregations, but for us pastors as well. We thanked God along with Paul and took courage (Acts 28:15).

We shared ideas and opportunities. There was no shortage of ideas of what to do in the face of the challenges of Lutheran congregations spread out thinly over Appalachia. There was a plethora of new connections and networks created that day between Christians who never met before. It became apparent later that one of the pillars of A.L.L. must include a consistent stream of communication. Christian mutual encouragement is good and Biblical, as St. Paul writes: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."

To be sure, we left the end of that meeting feeling recharged with encouragement that is difficult to put into words. But we still had the list of opportunities. These include 1) Ministry to current Lutherans in Appalachia, and 2) Evangelism to people who desire Lutheran teaching and preaching. These are our other two pillars for A.L.L.

The conclusion? "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Matthew 9:37). This is not something we didn't already know. But personally, I felt like we had a rather unique opportunity that the Lord had placed into our laps.

I do not use the word "unique" lightly. For example, there's the geography and topography of the region. If you have every congregation of the LCMS on a national map, and zoom out, you will notice a significant pocket in areas of the country. Central Appalachia is one of those regions. The mountains of the region also pose a challenge, because driving to a congregation is NOT "as the crow flies." In my congregation's circuit, it is about 5 ½ hours of driving time in diameter.

You might also think that well, it is just not a populated area. True, it is not as densely populated as many. But as far as congregational density per capita in the U.S. is concerned, it is at the bottom.

But not only that, I live here, too. You still see Bibles on pickup truck dashboards here. You can hear people tell you that their Christianity is centered on the Bible and nothing else. People talk about knowing Jesus here more than anywhere else I have lived. According to data of major denominations I've reviewed: Just in West Virginia, there are at least 300 Christian congregations that meet faithfully, yet have no preacher.

This past year I have studied Christian missions in Appalachia over the past 150 years. I read about what worked, what didn't work, and what has changed. We have paid attention to God as He has defined the mission, we have prayed, and we have let Him show us the opportunities. I can't help but think of the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). The directors of A.L.L. unanimously agree on the following:

We need an American Missionary. We need a 21st century Circuit Rider.

We formally began organizing in the summer of 2024. Early on, I came up with a fundraising goal of $500 by the end of 2024. That would be enough to cover the initial setup of communications including state licensing, a website and the distribution of this newsletter. A.L.L. is now a 501(c)3 organization with a board of directors.

I could not help but ask God along the way, are we headed in the right direction? God's people gave the answer. At the date of this writing, our current account balance is about $9,500. I'm simply overwhelmed. Glory be to God.

Our short-term goal: to stay in communication with Christians in Appalachia.

Our long-term goal: to fund an Appalachian Lutheran Circuit Rider.

In the meantime, we also want to be able to provide Appalachians with resources that directly relate to Word and Sacrament ministry. This could be hymnals, Bibles, Small Catechisms, website setup assistance, training resources for elders, etc.

For further details, you can find us at appalachianlutheranleague.org.

Please pray for the harvest.

Pastor Mark Hartsough
Senior Pastor - New Hope Lutheran Church Newark/Granville
A.L.L. Board Member

Matthew 16:15

The Appalachian Lutheran League. What great idea for an organization. But, as we embark on this outreach to this community, it gives me a time to reflect. Looking at a map, the Appalachian area seems to take up about 15-20% of the eastern half of the country. It is an area that has been populated for centuries. There is a very rich history in this region with many pages written about it. This region provided much of the coal for a growing country. And, if you ever been to any part of it, it is a very beautiful and scenic area to drive through.

This was my real introduction to the Appalachian Mountains, area and culture. I grew up no where near the area and in a place that looked nothing like that region. I grew up in a small suburb of Detroit, sharing a border on the eastern side. It was densely packed, 50,000 people in 11 square miles. (For reference, 4900 people/sq mi compared to 77/sq mi in West Virginia) We had no mountains, no rushing rivers, no giant canyons, just flat. Later in life through some interesting events, I became an over the road truck driver. I was on a dedicated route that took me through and to destinations in the Appalachian. It was beautiful and made some friends there.

As time went on and I graduated from seminary I was called to Licking County Ohio, with its eastern border being, an Appalachian County. It, looks nothing like where I grew up but very similar to what I drove through. While I was here, a few years ago, the Ohio District asked me to help out a church, in the middle of Appalachia, Christ our Savior - Alderson, West Virginia. Once again, I was driving through the area. For the past three years I have been providing Pastoral care, support, conducting services and arranging for other pastors to conduct services and provide the sacraments.

While living in, and raising a family in the Detroit area, as a layman, I did plenty of urban outreach. While the geography and the demographics may be very different, the need is the same, they need Jesus. They need the Jesus that doesn't approve of sin but they need the Jesus the Bible. The Jesus of the Bible calls us to repentance and offers forgiveness. We as Lutherans are in a unique position because, that is what our theology offers. The Appalachian Lutheran league has the opportunity to bring the saving message of Christ to people right in our own backyard. This is an humbling time because we get to bring Jesus to people and I need that same Jesus.

Pastor Paul F. Becker, Kingsport, TN
A.L.L. Board member

I have been blessed to serve at Concordia Lutheran Church in Kingsport, Tennessee since October 1994. Our LC-MS congregations for a while joined to form what we called the Central Appalachian Lutheran Mission (CALM). We sought to strengthen and support struggling congregations and preaching stations, such as Redeemer, Elizabethton TN, Rogersville, TN and Abingdon, VA. By sharing financial resources and filling vacancies as needed, we have seen God's blessings continue to touch in our region.

While serving a vacancy at Trinity, Bristol, TN I found a copy of "Kenneth Killinger: Mountain Missionary" (Tannen, Sherree R., Kenneth Killinger: Mountain Missionary. Lynchburg, VA: Warwick Publishing House, 1995) which I have read more than once, and highly recommend to anyone interested in spreading the grace of God through the Lutheran Church in Appalachia. The Rev. Kenneth G. Killinger was a mountain missionary. During the 1920s and 1930s, he worked in the area around Marion, Virginia, and throughout Smyth County, establishing a Lutheran church which doubled as a school. He helped provide health care and education to mountain communities, and improve roads. By using Martin Luther's Small Catechism, he brought hope and certainty to people plagued with threats of damnation. The need for solid Law and Gospel preaching throughout Appalachia cries out for our response.

At the end of June 2025 I will be stepping down as the called Pastor here at Concordia Kingsport TN. I am asking God to make plain where and how He would still make use of me to further His Kingdom of grace, especially in this part of the country we have come to know and love. In the matchless name of Jesus the Anointed One, Pastor Paul F. Becker

Information about the Appalachian Lutheran League can be found at appalachianlutheranleague.org

If you would like to support A.L.L., checks may be written to Appalachian Lutheran League and mailed to: 3500 Broad St, Parkersburg, WV 26104. There is also an electronic giving option on our website.

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We appreciate your prayers.

"Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manean a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off." Acts 13:1-3

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