



Meet Bishop Samuel Zeiser

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Witnessing Boldly; Making a Difference

Disability Doesn't Stop Brian Grubb

Linking Music and Worship

Camp Noah and the August Flood

Diving Deep



Bishop Zeiser enjoys working in his garden.

"I enjoy watching things grow," he told a reporter in late July. "I think that it makes the world a better place."

The Rev. Dr. Samuel R. Zeiser now has the opportunity to watch things grow and make the world a better place on a much grander scale. On May 31, 2008, he was elected to a six-year term as bishop of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Bishop Zeiser took office as the new bishop on August 1. It was a Friday – a summer Friday – which meant that the office closed at 1 p.m. But by 8:10 a.m., he was at his desk and working.

By Monday, the office had been rearranged to fit Bishop Zeiser's preferences. By Thursday he was ready to lead his first staff meeting. And by the following Monday, his office window had new curtains (courtesy of his wife, Linda), new pictures hung on the walls, and his calendar was filling rapidly.

A native of Jim Thorpe, Bishop Zeiser was baptized and confirmed at St. John Lutheran Church (the Heights), Jim Thorpe. Although some people suggested that he look into ordained ministry, it wasn't until after he graduated from Albright College in Reading in 1973 that he enrolled in the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

Bishop Zeiser earned a master of divinity degree in 1977 and a master of sacred theology degree in 1989 from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. He also earned a doctor of philosophy degree from Drew University in 2001.

Since his ordination in 1979, he has served St. John Lutheran



Church in Nanticoke, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Johnsonville, Bethany Lutheran Church in West Reading, and Christ Lutheran Church in Allentown.

He and his wife, Linda, are the parents of a daughter, Samantha, who is a first-grade teacher in Athens, Ga.

The position of bishop is not something that Bishop Zeiser sought. "This came very unexpectedly to me," he said after his election. "I thought I was going to retire from this church (Christ Lutheran) in 10 years or so.

"My goal as bishop will be to help pastors and congregants carry out their mission in bold and challenging ways," he said. "I feel that the church has the potential to help people find meaning in their lives through the life of Jesus."

He noted that gardening provides a quiet retreat from the energetic reality of ministry.

But there are similarities between his hobby and his profession as well. He can see the world becoming a better place as Lutheran congregations grow in their sense of mission and members find peace and meaning in their lives through Jesus.



Witnessing Boldly; Making a Difference

West Berks Mission District is improving its neighborhoods

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By Dawn Baxter, Director, WBMD

Pastors and lay leaders from the 13 congregations of the Reading Lutheran Parish have been focusing recently on housing issues and the increasing number of blighted properties in their city neighborhoods.

Leaders discussed and brainstormed many different ideas and possibilities for dealing with the blight, but decided that the focus should be pro-active: to try to *prevent* blight from occurring, one property at a time.

A Housing Initiative taskforce began thinking about ways in which we might do that. Here's the plan that the taskforce envisions:

We recognize that members of all our West Berks Mission District congregations have numerous gifts and skills. Many congregations have work teams that participate in mission trips or Habitat for Humanity builds. We have electricians, and plumbers, and handymen and women who might be willing to share their gifts occasionally with local neighbors with a need.

The WBMD staff has been developing a contact list of folks who are willing to help with such projects. The staff will rally these folks when a need is identified.

Our first project is currently in process. Reading pastors Carol Kehler from St. Paul Lutheran Church and Steve Belinski from Grace Lutheran Church identified a family in their neighborhood in dire need of help. The ceiling of their dining room had collapsed and needed to be rebuilt.

Eight volunteers from the WBMD arrived to tear down the



remaining ceiling and install a new dry-walled ceiling. The homeowner also helped with the project and very much appreciated learning some building and repair skills. The project will be finished in the next few weeks and the family of six will enjoy eating in their dining room again.

As pastors visit with their homebound congregants and notice a need for some home repairs and/or maintenance, we know we can call on this “volunteer repair crew” to lend a hand.

This initiative is meant to be a cooperative effort of youth and adults, crossing congregational lines — exactly the sort of project defined in the WBMD’s Priorities for Mission.

We also realize that this sort of need can be found outside the city as well, so if other WBMD pastors identify members of their congregations that have needs to be addressed, we hope to help there, too. This will be a major challenge, but we really believe we can work together to serve our neighbors and improve our neighborhoods!

The WBMD is witnessing boldly and making a difference!



Disability Doesn't Stop Brian Grubb from heading to law school

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By Darrin Youker, *Reading Eagle*

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Brian Grubb's life was shattered three years ago by a freak accident.

While attending Temple University, the Conrad Weiser graduate tumbled eight feet from a loft bed and landed on the hardwood floor of his off-campus apartment. His head snapped back, crushing a vertebra in his neck.

Today, the 26-year-old Wernersville resident is considered a quadriplegic by his doctors, with no movement below the shoulders on his left side and limited movement on his right.

Although forced to use a wheelchair, Brian vowed to continue his undergraduate work. Now, three years after the accident, he has graduated from Temple and plans to head to law school.

His parents, George and Jean Grubb, are thrilled by their son's tenacity.

"The guts and determination to get back to school and graduate is huge," Jean said. "It speaks a lot to his character."

Before the accident, Brian was only a half-serious student, having struggled academically, distracted by the social side of college.

The fall and the lengthy, painful recovery did nothing to change his jovial nature, but it added a level of maturity as he worked to improve his grades and take college more seriously.



A natural left-hander, Brian learned how to write with his right hand and began to buckle down on academics.

"I have a new outlook on school in general," Brian said. "It is now a question of doing it."

He will return to Temple in August to tackle the university's law program with plans to go into personal injury work. He feels up to the challenge.

"It looks pretty tough," Brian said. "They told me to do a lot of reading over the summer and to have good time-management and studying habits."

Brian enrolled in Temple after graduating from Conrad Weiser High School in Reading in 2000. A year later, he was studying at Reading Area Community College to pull up his grades and continue working toward his communications degree.

"I had a less-than-stellar academic performance," Brian said of his early college years. "My plan was to graduate and move to the beaches."

But after spending a night out with friends, Brian fell trying to get out of bed. His roommate found him on the bedroom floor, not moving and barely conscious. The friend called an ambulance and then Brian's parents.

"It is literally a call you fear getting," George Grubb said.

At the hospital, doctors painted a grim picture. Brian was heavily medicated and facing surgery to repair the damaged vertebra.

"The neurosurgeon said it was probable that he would never move below his shoulders," George said.

Brian was transferred to Thomas Jefferson University Hospital to recover and start working with a physical therapist. Through it all, he maintained a positive outlook, his mother said.

"A psychologist that we met with gave us the signs of depression to look for. It never happened," Jean said. "He cracks us up. He cracks up the doctors. He has a wonderful spirit."

Brian was away from college for six months while he learned how to adapt to his limited motion. He then started taking a few classes at Penn State Berks.

With his right hand, he was able to take notes. Other students would e-mail copies of their notes as well, and Brian was able to take tests at the disability services office on campus, typing his answers on a computer.

"That was the first step in coming back," Brian said of Penn State Berks. "That built the confidence."

Brian returned to Temple and continued to focus on academics. Last semester, he took 16 credits to graduate.

On the Philadelphia campus, Brian had to learn where the handicapped entrances were for all of the familiar buildings. Plus, he needed a health aide to assist him in getting ready for class in the morning and for bed at night.

"For the most part, it wasn't as hard as I thought it would be," he said.

It took three years and countless hours of recovery to adjust to a new way of life. It wasn't until after graduation in May that Brian came to appreciate the magnitude of what he achieved.

"It didn't sink in until a week later," he said. "I'm proud. It is a great accomplishment."



Linking Music and Worship: Synod Teen Attends Lutheran Summer Music

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David Deiter of Hope Lutheran Church, Cherryville, was one of 148 students to participate in the 26th Annual Lutheran Summer Music (LSM) Academy and Festival that took place at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, MN, June 22-July 20.

LSM is an audition-based music camp for high school students that intentionally links music and worship. It is the pinnacle program of the Lutheran Music Program, and is one of the nation's premier summer music training programs for young people.

This year, high school-age student musicians from 30 states and two foreign countries were selected by audition to spend four weeks participating in a rigorous schedule that included individual primary and secondary instrument or voice lessons, large and small ensembles, musicianship class, electives (including church music, conducting, collegium musicum/early music and jazz and more) as well as daily recitals.

Worship is at the core of the community experience and begins and ends each academy day. Students are served by a faculty roster of 36 educators, all of whom are esteemed practicing professional musicians and teachers from throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.

The Academy culminated in the LSM Festival Week. This final academy week began with a Hymn Fest and was followed by student solo and chamber recitals and evening concerts by the band, orchestra and choir. In attendance were more than 1,500 people.

The mission of LSM is to foster musical excellence in a caring community for high school band, orchestra, choral, and keyboard



students from all faith backgrounds. The organization is committed to strengthening and extending the Church's heritage of excellence in music and the arts, and provides daily opportunities for student worship.

Since its founding in 1982, more than 4,000 students have attended Lutheran Summer Music. Hundreds of these alumni have gone on to careers in music education, church music and performance.

New for congregations is the "Young Musicians Partnership," which encourages churches to set up local scholarships for youth interested in attending the Lutheran Summer Music Academy. In return, students in "partner" congregations receive a 10% discount plus matching dollars for the scholarship seeded locally.

LSM 2009 will be June 21 – July 19 on the campus of Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. For more information on the Young Musicians Partnership or Lutheran Summer Music Academy and Festival, visit www.lutheransummermusic.org.





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On August 18, 2007, and into the early hours of the morning of August 19, seventeen and a quarter inches of rain fell in Rushford, MN.

Ten inches of rain had fallen in the days preceding that inundation. The Rushford Creek overflowed its banks and its waters were trapped in the town by the dikes along the Root River. Two thirds of the town was flooded.

The sirens sounded around 2:30 a.m., and fire trucks began circulating through town with a bullhorn to warn residents to evacuate. Most of the residents were able to drive to a shelter, but fire trucks had to evacuate some.

Residents stayed in shelters or with friends and families whose houses were not flooded. Many who were affected went from place to place for months. A few have not been able to return even after a year.

Seventy houses had to be demolished. There was no electricity for several weeks, two of the city wells had been contaminated, and there were port-a-johns in the streets.

There was rejoicing the day residents were able to flush their toilets, but it was weeks before they could do laundry, shower, or cook with water. One major problem that all faced was the flooding of the town's only grocery store, which meant travelling 20 miles to the nearest grocery store.

School began as scheduled in early September 2007, but the effects of the disaster on the students, especially the younger children, were evident. Some were still without homes; others were living with relatives or friends.



Fortunately for the children of Rushford, Camp Noah came to their area this July.

Camp Noah

During a disaster, the first thing many parents would think about is how to protect their children.

Afterward, when the storm clouds break and the waters recede, the thoughts of mothers and fathers turn to dealing with loss, the mounds of paperwork to secure recovery aid, the rebuilding of homes and lives. Often lost in the hectic atmosphere of recovery is the emotional toll events like last year's floods take on victims, especially children.

That's what Camp Noah tries to address.

Camp Noah is a weeklong, faith-based day camp offered for elementary-age children who have experienced disaster. It is staffed by trained camp counselors and is supported additionally by a local mental health professional. Camp Noah combines disaster recovery support for children with fun-filled recreation to form a unique and healing experience.

Children from Rushford were able to attend Camp Noah this summer. Three of the children's houses were not flooded. They felt they had not been affected by the flood. However, once they started talking, all the children realized how much they had been affected beyond the initial flooding.

Here are some of the children's stories. Gwen, one of the counselors at Camp Noah, tells the stories as she and her co-counselor, Deb, heard them from their second and third grade group of girls:

Alice's Story

Alice lives in the Brooklyn section of town, across the Root River, so her house was not flooded. She woke up at 7:30 a.m. and came downstairs to find her uncle, aunt, and cousins sleeping in chairs. That was when she learned about the flood.

She could look into the town and see the flooding, but she was not allowed to go into town. She could see a house that was burning due to an explosion. Her house had no electricity or water.

Her father is a professional photographer and lost all of his equipment and his shop. Her mother is a fourth grade teacher at the Rushford Elementary School.

Alice and her family went to stay with her grandmother until

school started. Her family had to buy groceries in Winona.

Brandy's Story

Brandy and her family were attending a wedding in LaCrosse, about 20 miles away. The building leaked and rain fell on the dance floor and on the wedding cake. The reception ended early and the ride home was scary because the car hydroplaned several times.

Brandy was not aware of the flood until the next morning because she lived on the north side of town. She did experience the lack of electricity, water, and the long ride for groceries. She said her mother tried very hard not to forget anything at the store.

Her father spent two-and-a-half days without sleep while helping to pump water from the town. He was finally was able to come home to sleep.

Cindy's Story

Cindy lived south of the town and only had seepage in the basement. She talked about having no electricity or water. She stayed with a friend where she could see the flooded town. Cindy was very quiet and shy and did not talk about her experience as much as the other girls.

Donna's Story

Donna said her parents first heard swishing sounds coming from the basement around 3:00 a.m. The fire truck came with flashing lights. Donna's mother came upstairs and awakened her, telling her there was a flood and they had to get out. Her cat, Lightening, ran upstairs and she did not have time to look for her.

Donna's mom was able to rescue the other two cats and drove the family to the shelter at the school. The next day she and her mother went with the two cats and slept at the kennel for one night.

She went to her grandparents about 200 miles away, then to the Quality Inn in Winona, and then spent two weeks in Lanesboro before being able to get back to Rushford.

Elise's Story

Elise's family (mother, father, and three sisters) drove to her Grandma's in Spring Valley when they were warned about the flood.

When Elise and her family were able to return to see the house, it was all muddy and everything was all jumbled up. Her family moved into a camper [FEMA trailer] for five months.

After the family moved back into the house, the basement caved in and the house had be jacked up so the foundation could be fixed.

Gina's Story

Gina's mother worked for City Hall and got a call to go and help open a shelter. Gina's dad and brother watched the Weather Channel for awhile. When her dad decided to leave, Gina, her father, and her brother put on fishing boots and walked to the school.

Gina's family lived with her grandmother in Lanesboro until they could move back to the house. She was able to see her house three days after the flood. It was muddy and everything in the basement was lost.

Joy's Story

Joy lived with her mother and teenage sister Candy. Joy and her mother were sleeping, but Candy was awake when the evacuation was ordered; she woke her mother and Joy.

The porch and backyard were covered with water. Joy's mother and Candy walked; Joy was carried by a fireman. She was wearing her warm, fuzzy slippers and, when one fell off her foot, the fireman retrieved it for her. They were able to save their deaf dog Spots.

They were taken to the school by boat. As they were leaving Joy saw a rabbit drown in the yard.

Joy was able to see the house when allowed back in town. She lost all her porcelain dolls and everything in the basement.

Joy and her family then moved to Iowa to live with her grandmother. Her mother sold their house and moved to Fountain so she could return to work. Joy's last move was to Lanesboro where she attended school all year. Her mother is trying to find a place to live in Rushford.

Her mom drove the 20 miles from Lanesboro to Rushford in order for Joy and Candy to attend Camp Noah. Candy was one of the teen helpers for a K/1 class.

Suzanne's Story

Suzanne was the child most severely affected by the flood. She lived in the trailer park with her step-parents and six siblings. The trailer park was destroyed by the flood water and contaminated by the Water Treatment Plant. She was not able to return to the trailer to see if they could recover anything. Her pet dog drowned

in the flood.

Suzanne could not talk about the flood with the other children. The most she was able to say in the group was that she lost all her toys. I talked with her one-on-one and she did say that her family was able to drive to the shelter.

She also talked about all the new clothes and shoes that she had been given. She loved wearing dresses and informed me every day that she was wearing a dress and was wearing matching flip flops. She wanted to know why I didn't wear dresses.

Suzanne participated in all the activities and related well to the other children. However, my co-teacher and I noticed behavior that concerned us, so we asked the psychologist, Stacy, to observe her. Stacy took Suzanne out of class several times for one-on-one conversation. Suzanne was not willing to say very much about the flood to Stacy either. She seems to have all her emotions locked tightly inside. Stacy will be following up with Suzanne's family.

We learned that she was a sweet girl before the flood, but was now sullen and angry. She was very quiet and would look down when someone talked to her. Every once in awhile she would smile shyly.

Suzanne's family had to move out of town and she attended another school before moving back to Rushford. They have recently moved to a house in a nice neighborhood. She is excited about the new house and the fact that she is back in Rushford Elementary.

Deb's Story

Deb was my co-counselor for the group. At the time of the flood, she and her family were in Boston looking at MIT for their son. She turned on CNN one morning only to learn of the flooding in Rushford. During the newscast, she actually saw her house and trucks floating.

After they returned, it was three weeks before they were able to see the damage to the house. Her son's room was in the basement and he lost everything. He was not able to cry until Christmas.

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SEPTEMBER 2008



The Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Diving Deep
into the Waters of the Faith

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By Chandler Carriker, Director, Theological Education with Youth (TEY)

I write to share some of the joys we experienced this summer in Theological Education with Youth (TEY).

Both our Crossroads Event and Summer Theological Academy were incredible experiences of collaborative theological exploration, with seminarians, faculty and staff, and youthful theologians diving deep into the waters of the faith.

The Crossroads Event, held at Gettysburg Seminary June 22-28, was an opportunity for rising eleventh-graders to explore the places where the church is called to minister to the world, and, through these immersion experiences, build a sense of solidarity.

Participants visited Lutheran Disaster Relief of New Jersey and explored the resources available to our congregations for reaching out and for preparing. We visited with Lutheran Advocacy Ministry of Pennsylvania (LAMPa) and participated first hand in an act of advocacy on the steps of the Pennsylvania State House. We spent time with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) in Baltimore and dove into the complexities and needs of caring for the stranger amongst us.

And this is only a sample of our week together. The 12 young people who were taken part in the event were incredible witnesses to the strength of young voices in calling for justice and mercy in the world.

The Summer Theological Academy, held at Susquehanna University July 12-26, was two weeks of deep theological exploration as 16 rising seniors engaged in classes on Third World theology, diverse perspectives on the New Testament,



Psalms, and the art of homiletics. Everyone took the homiletics course. At the end of the two weeks, we were blessed with sermons on the parable of the Prodigal Son by nearly all of the participants.

During the two weeks, youth, faculty, and seminarians lived in a lively learning community. This community was not only valuable to the learning at hand, but was a classroom of discipleship all its own.

TEY's next programs are this fall. Affirmation of Baptism Festivals will be held on the campus of Gettysburg Seminary on Saturday, October 25, and on the campus of Philadelphia Seminary, Saturday, November 15. More information and registration materials are available on the TEY website, www.theologicaleducationwithyouth.com.

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