

The Lantern - January 2026

First English Lutheran Church, ELCA



“Sharing the Light of Christ”



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

STAFF AND CHURCH COUNCIL

Pastor: Reverend Mary E. Zupansic

pastor@firstenglishlutheranwausau.org

Parish Administrator: Debra Kluetz

parishadmin@firstenglishlutheranwausau.org

Minister of Music: Daniel Larson

Pianist: Hal Osborn

Custodians: Shawn & Jenny Blaschka

Sunday School Superintendent: VerJean Detert

Church Council:

Officers:

President: Cindy Hermel

President-Elect: Mike Vanningan

Past President: Sherry Larson

Treasurer: Marla Zumann

Recording Secretary: Karen Czechowicz

Council Members:

Carla Baumgardt

Russ Michalski

Jenny Blaschka

Kalynn Pempek

Angela Greenfield

Dina Santangelo

Neil Juedes

Lois Stasko

Michael Klapperich

Nicholas Schumacher (Youth Rep)

Your comments, questions and concerns are

important to us. Feel free to talk to any

member of our staff or Church Council.

From Pastor:

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

Merry Christmas! Yes, the Christmas season continues for 12 whole days – from December 25 thru January 6th. On the 6th we celebrate the Epiphany of our Lord. We recall that the Magi followed the star to the place where they found the infant Jesus and his mother Mary. Upon finding the child they offered gifts. Gold – a possession of kings, frankincense – used in ritual to indicate the presence of a deity, and myrrh – an oil used at the time of death as well as for anointing priests. And so, the gifts given to the Christ child indicate, or manifest, make known, to us who Jesus is – the Messiah, the King of kings!

Here's the thing, gift giving and receiving doesn't end with Christmas! Just as the star led the Magi to the place where the infant Jesus and his mother were, and they recognized who Jesus was. So too might we seek and take time to notice the presence of Emmanuel, God with us, each and every day of this new year!

The one who took on flesh and dwelt among us continues to be present with us each and every day. Emmanuel is given to us as a gift from God the Father. The one who took on human flesh, was born in a manger, died on a cross, and rose again to defeat sin and death, continues to bring us blessing upon blessings. Gifts upon gifts!

What gifts will we receive from Emmanuel?

Gifts of forgiveness and salvation...

Gifts of second chances...

Gifts of healing...

Gifts of new opportunities...

Gifts of “ “ fill in the blank! ” ”

And what gifts will we give and receive from one another?

Gifts of forgiveness...
Gifts of second chances...
Gifts of healing...
Gifts of new opportunities...
Gifts of “ *fill in the blank!*”

In 2026, might we be like the Magi and seek the Lord. Might we be like the Magi and offer our finest gifts to Emmanuel. As we recognize Christ among us, might we seek to bless one another with gifts that point others to Christ. Let the gift giving and receiving continue! Amen and Amen!



First English Mission Statement

*Our mission is to grow in faith,
serve our neighbors, and
support one another.*

PARISH RECORDS...December 2025

*** Funeral:** “*...in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God...*”

December 6: Joyce Utecht

*** New Members:** *on Dec. 21, we welcomed the following persons to our family of faith at First English:*

Renie Hamilton
Reuben Roehl
Linda Swansen



Our next committee night will be Tuesday, January 6, 6:30 p.m. We'll gather in Fellowship Hall.



8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
(closed for lunch: Noon – 1:00 p.m.)

Deadlines:

Bulletin: Wednesday afternoon
Next deadline for the Feb. Lantern: Jan. 17

Note: there will be no worship services on Thursday, Jan. 1.

Thursday Night Worship:

January 8, 15, 22, 29
in the sanctuary – 6:00 p.m.

THE MITTEN TREE

Thank you all so very much for your donations to this year's Mitten Tree!

A total of **285 items** (hats, mittens/gloves, set, scarves, and headbands) were collected and distributed to area schools:

Thomas Jefferson Elementary School
Wausau West High School
John Muir Middle School
Horace Mann Middle School



This is a wonderful response! Food for thought: try catching some after-Christmas sales and purchase for next year's Mitten Tree! A big thank you to Kathi Zoern and Joan Heahlke for delivering our gifts!

CHRISTMAS PRAYER

God of all time,
we praise and adore you for breaking into the darkness of this world
with the glorious light of your presence.
A light which made your love for the world visible
in the babe born in Bethlehem—
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior.
A light which guided those gift-bearing travelers
from afar
to find and worship the Christ-child.
A light which leads us to you, now revealed in
Jesus Christ.
Receive our worship
for it arises from hearts and minds
in awe over the enormity of your gift to us of pure
love.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen
— Moira Laidlaw
(Submitted by Rob Knock who knew Moira and received permission to use her prayers).

AFTER WORSHIP COFFEE HOURS

Check out the new sign-up sheet in the narthex if you would like to provide after-worship treats on Sundays. We extend our worship experience by staying after worship to share some fellowship with each other, especially with a treat! You don't have to provide fancy treats are just fine, and there is always someone around to help with making coffee! Thanks!



ELCA WOMEN

Charity Circle...

will meet on **Tuesday, Jan. 13, 9:00 a.m.** in the Bethany Room.



Shalom Circle...

will meet on Thursday, **Jan. 15, 6:45 p.m.** in the Fireside Room.

TREASURE SALE NEWS...

Items for next year's Treasure Sale are coming in nicely!



We are accepting clean clothes in good condition, housewares, collectibles, books, linens, DVDs, CDs, and more. If donating linens, please mark them with what size they are. This is very helpful.

We will accept small appliances in working condition, and furniture.

Your donations can be brought downstairs in the hallway by the Sunday School rooms. There is a sign on the door.

Thank you so much for your donations!



AS YOU THINK

about taking your holiday decorations down for another year and find that you have Christmas lights that don't work, don't throw them out. Bring them to the narthex coatroom and place them in the container. They will be taken to Habitat for Humanity, then sent for recycling. Since 2014 the Habitat Wausau Team has collected 46,355 pounds of holidays lights. The lights were recycled and kept out of our local landfill. The proceeds from the collection of holiday lights help Habitat Wausau purchase needed tools for the construction team.

ADDRESS / PHONE NUMBER CHANGES

Here is a request...if you have an address change or a phone number change please let Deb know in the office so she can update our records. Thank you!



FREE LITTLE PANTRY

The Food Pantry Transition Team is looking for a willing woodworker who would build a Free Little Pantry for First English to provide food for our neighborhood friends in need of assistance.



A materials list, diagrams, and specific directions will be provided. In addition, the FELC Council will purchase and provide the needed materials. Please contact the church office if you are able to help us make this neighborhood outreach a reality.

LET US REMEMBER...

those in our congregation who are confined to their homes or are in nursing home or assisted living facilities due to illness, rehab/therapy, or are just unable to attend worship or fellowship activities. They would love and appreciate

hearing from their church family with a card, visit, note or phone call.

Cady Home

1805 N. 6th Ave., Wausau WI 54401

- Michelle Detert Room 4

Crossroads Care Center

717 E. Alfred St., Weyauwega, WI 54983

- Rick Petzke

Mountain Terrace Senior Living

3402 Terrace Ct. Wausau WI 54401

- Diane Zuelke Room 133

Primrose Retirement Community

2100 Townline Rd. Wausau WI 54403

- Kathie Peterson Room 228

Rennes Health and Rehab

4602 Barbican Ave. Weston, WI 54476

- Sue McKee #235

Rennes Health and Rehab

4810 Barbican Ave., Weston, WI 54476

- Ila Bartelt #206

Sylvan Crossings on Evergreen

1605 Evergreen Rd., Wausau WI 54403

- Dolores Hintz Room 13

Wood Aven Living Community

1821 N. 4th Ave. Wausau 54401

- Gary Klingbeil Room 110

AT HOME...

- Geraldine Hopperdietzel

2505 N. 4th Ave. Wausau 54401

- Delphine Saeger 151700 Fern Ln.

Wausau 54401 715-298-3210

- Eleanor Thorpe 2901 N. 7th St. Apt. W102

Wausau 54403 715-298-1865

TO ALL ACH OFFERING GIVERS...

The packets containing the “special” envelopes for January / February 2026 are available in the narthex and church office. In this new packet are: *Initial; Food Pantry, Building Improvements/Elevator Fund, ELCA Lutheran Disaster Response, Lenten Self-Denial, Lent).*



OUR THANKS TO...

these members who have designated First English as the recipient of their Thrivent Choice Dollars in December:

Mike Vaningen
Connie Vaningen

FIRST ENGLISH IS ON INSTAGRAM



First English now has an Instagram social media page to help spread the word about all of the wonderful things our church is doing. If you are on Instagram, be sure to follow "firstenglishausau." You'll see the same photos/posts that appear on our Facebook page. If you have any news and photos to share on our Instagram, Facebook, or web site, please email kmpempek@gmail.com or sue.juedes@gmail.com.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES...

will resume on **Sunday, January 4, 10:15 a.m.** It will be nice to see students and staff again after the holiday break!

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF FIRST ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH...

will be held on **Sunday, February 8, 2026**, beginning at 10:15 a.m. in the sanctuary.



Members, please mark this date on your calendars. Your support and participation in the ministry of your congregation in the new year 2026 is greatly appreciated.

Articles for the 2025 Annual Report are to be in the church office no later than Monday, January 15th. Please submit your reports by email if at all possible.

Attention Church Council Liaisons...

Please ask your committee chair to submit the following information for the Annual Report: “Submit an annual summary for the year 2025 by January 15th. The summary should include the names of the committee members, a summary of what was accomplished during the year 2025, and if the committee has a checking account, a summary of income and expenses for 2025.”

Epiphany of Our Lord January 6, 2026

Lessons in wise faith



“The Magi teach us true faith,” said Martin Luther.

Given the obstacles they encountered, we would understand if they had given up altogether!

First, the travelers were “off the mark,” coming to Jerusalem to seek a newborn king in a “royal palace.” Then, directed to Bethlehem, the wise men found a sight “so utterly out of keeping with a king” — a poor young woman and child, in a “poor hut” — that one might expect them to head straight home. “But,” declares Luther, “with a great, strong and full faith they ... follow the word of the prophet and the witness of the star in all purity of heart,” bowing to worship and honor the Savior.

—Based on Luther’s sermon for the Festival of the Epiphany (1522), *Luther’s Works*

Many thanks to...

- † the great crew who set up the Christmas trees and wreaths in the sanctuary and Fellowship Hall and to the volunteers who decorated them. A job well done! Thanks also to those who will be helping to “untrim” them as well!

- † Dan Larson and Hal Osborn for their musical gifts of providing beautiful music for Sunday morning and Thursday evening worship during the Advent and Christmas season.

- † the singers, ringers, and soloists for their gift of music for our Advent and Christmas services.

- † To our Sunday School students for their beautiful presentation of their Christmas Program. Our sincere thanks to their teachers, leaders and parents for their caring leadership!

- † Our Altar Guild for their faithful dedication in their work of preparing our altar and chancell area for the holiday season and each Sunday.

- † All who purchased poinsettias which graced our sanctuary for Christmas and to those who delivered poinsettias to our homebound members.

- † All who do those “behind the scenes” tasks each and every day at the church. You **are** appreciated!



Worship Assistants - Ushers Communion Set-up / Assistants Communionware Washers / Acolytes Greeters / Lectors

TO THOSE WHO ASSIST IN WORSHIP

FYI...this note is just to let you know Sharon Hunter is scheduling the weekly Thursday and Sunday worship service volunteers. If you cannot serve when you are scheduled, please find someone to take your place and let Sharon know so the correct name is reflected in the bulletin. We truly appreciate everyone who helps to make our worship service meaningful. Sharon's information is shunteratdpi@msn.com or 715 212 1672.

WORSHIP ASSISTANTS:

January 4, 2026: Connie Vaningen
January 11: Lynne Santangelo
January 18: Pat Seivert
January 25: Kalynn Pempek

February 1: Connie Vaningen
February 8: Lynne Santangelo
February 15: Pat Seivert
February 22: Lynne Santangelo

ACOLYTES:

January 4, 2026: Kaedyn Hadley
January 11: Brooklynn Detert
January 18: Annabelle Oestreich
January 25: Kynslei Koehler-Dahquist

February 1: Kaedyn Hadley
February 8: Brooklynn Detert
February 15: Annabelle Oestreich
February 22: Kynslei Koehler-Dahquist

LECTORS:

January 4, 2026: Lette Becker
January 11: Karen Briggs
January 18: Addie Fochs
January 25: Sheri Fochs

February 1: Sharon Hunter
February 8: Sue Juedes
February 15: Dawn Kramer
February 22: Kalynn Pempek

GREETERS:

January 4, 2026: Jenny & Shawn Blaschka
January 11: VerJean Detert & Angela Greenfield
January 18: Cindy Hermel / VerJean Detert
January 25: Dilynn Koehler / Deb Kufahl

February 1: Lonnie & LeAnn Lewis
February 8: Gene & Lynn Schulz
February 15: Lois Stasko
February 22: Mike & Connie Vaningan

LECTORS: (Thursday Evening Worship)

January 1, 2026: No worship
January 8: Barry Levine
January 15: Bobbie Levine
January 22: Maralee Moellendorf
January 29: Marla Zumann

February 5: Cheri Breneman
February 12: Barry Levine
February 19: Bobbie Levine
February 26: Maralee Moellendorf

COMMUNION SET-UP:

January 4, 2026: Marla Zumann
January 11: VerJean Detert
January 18: Deb Kluetz
January 25: Dawn Kramer

February 1: VerJean Detert
February 8: Deb Kluetz
February 15: Dawn Kramer
February 22: VerJean Detert

COMMUNION SERVERS (Thursday Worship)

January 8: Barry Levine
January 15: Bobbie Levine
January 22: Cheri Breneman
January 29: Barry Levine

February 5: Bobbie Levine
February 12: Cheri Breneman
February 19: Barry Levine
February 26: Bobbie Levine

COMMUNION ASSISTANTS:

January 4, 2026: Sherri Bagby
January 11: Lette Becker
January 18: Sharon Hunter
January 25: Joan Heahlke

February 1: Jenny Blaschka
February 8: Shawn Blaschka
February 15: Lette Becker
February 22: Angela Greenfield

ALTAR GUILD:

January: Jane Schalow
February: Marla Zumann

COMMUNIONWARE WASHERS:

January 4, 2026: Neil & Sue Juedes
January 11: LeAnn & Lonnie Lewis
January 18: Deb Kluetz / Dawn Kramer
January 25: Bob & Pat Seivert

February 1: Lynne Santangelo
February 8: Neil & Sue Juedes
February 15: Lonnie & LeAnn Lewis
February 22: Deb Kluetz / Dawn Kramer

USHERS:

January 4, 2026: G & L Schulz / D Kluetz /
L Brokaw
January 11: L & M Heyne / M Schumitsch
January 18: M & C Vaningen / S Hunter
January 25: S & D Kufahl / S Wendorf

February 1: D Chapman / B Lampe / E Zabel
February 8: J Blaschka / N & S Juedes
February 15: G & L Schulz / D Kluetz /
L Brokaw
February 18 (Ash Wednesday) M & L Heyne /
M Schumitsch
February 22: M & C Vaningen / S Hunter

Subs: Shawn & Jenny Blaschka, Lowanne
Brokaw, Matt & Lori Heyne, Sharon Hunter, Sue
& Neil Juedes, Deb Kluetz, Deb Kufahl, Mike
Vaningan, Earl Zabel

FIRST ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2025, 6:00 P.M.

Members Present: Jenny Blaschka, Karen
Czechowicz, Neil Juedes, Angela Greenfield,
Cindy Hermel, Kalynn Pempek, Sherry Larson,
Dina Santangelo, Nicholas Schumacher, Lois
Stasko, Mike Vaningen, Marla Zumann, Pastor
Mary Zupansic, Scott Kufahl, Sharon
Hunter(guests)

Members Absent: Carla Baumgardt, Michael
Klapperich, Russ Michalski,

Cindy Hermel led opening devotions provided by
Carla Baumgardt.

Reports:

October Meeting Minutes: The October Council
minutes were reviewed. Neil Juedes moved and
Jenny Blaschka seconded a motion to approve
the October minutes. Motion passed.

Financial Reports: September Financial Reports
were provided via email. Lois Stasko moved and
Kalynn Pempek seconded a motion to accept
the financial reports as presented.

Committee Reports:

- **Pastor's Report:** Prepped with family for
funeral of Alan Sexter and performed a
cemetery committal service for Arlan and
Shirley Erickson. Planned and led a
communion workshop for five of our youth
and their parents. Attended Region 5 Gender
Justice Boundary Training. Participated in the
installation service of Pastor Jack Bushe at
St. Andrews. Attended the Wisconsin River
Valley Conference meeting. Working on a
new member class to be held on Sunday,
December 7. Will be assisting with the
Thanksgiving worship service at St. Andrews
on November 26.
- **Parish Ed** – Discussed the Christmas
program. The preschool students will sing
There was a Savior Born for Us to the tune of
Bingo. The primary class will present The
Good News, a puppet presentation. First
Communion was held Nov. 9 & 16, 2025.
- **Worship & Music** – Christmas Eve services
will be at 4:00 and 7:00 p.m. The trees in the
sanctuary will be put up prior to Christmas.
Carol history Sunday will be December 28.
- **Stewardship** – Discussed the new
Stewardship program used this fall. The group
is hopeful more time and talent sheets will be
returned. Thank you notes were written and
will be sent. The Stewardship Committee will
coordinate the delivery of Christmas flowers
to shut-in members as was done in the past.
- **Church & Society** – Sherri Bagby discussed
her trip to Israel in the November 2 adult
form. Twenty members attended.

Volunteering on December 18 from 2:00-4:00 p.m. for the United Way Community Closet. Matt & Lori Heyne volunteered for the upcoming community supper on December 20.

Property – The floor tile at the Cedar Street entrance will be replaced the week of November 24. The Committee will contact EO Johnson to request a quote for replacing our office desktop printer and two copy machines with one color copier/printer to use for regular office printing as well as special print projects. The Committee is exploring options for help with cleaning the church. Shawn and Jenny Blaschka have been volunteering to clean the church, and we're grateful for their service. We'd like to develop a back-up plan for when they are not available and also to ask for additional volunteers to help with ongoing tasks. A sign-up sheet with a list of cleaning tasks will be created and placed in the narthex for members interested in helping with specific tasks. We'll explore a cleaning service or individual to hire, if needed. Window wells will need to be purchased in 2026. Scott Kufahl will get quotes from manufacturers.

- **Youth** – Nothing to report.
- **Wage & Policy** – Changes were made to the personnel handbook to reflect correct titles and changes in duties. The handbook has information about personnel evaluations. The purpose of evaluations is to offer support and guidelines. We have four paid employees: Pastor Mary Zupansic, Parish Administrator Deb Kluetz, Minister of Music, Dan Larson, and pianist Hal Osborn. The council acknowledged the updates to the position designations.
- **Fair Stand** – Fair Stand report for 2025 and distribution options were presented. A total of \$18,750 is proposed to be allocated for congregation needs and outreach.
- **Treasure Sale** – Mini-Christmas sale took place on November 7 and 8.

- **Narthex Screen Proposed Location & Sample Content** – Council was shown a representation of where the narthex screen will be located and a sample of possible contents. The screen will be 42" and will be used for posting a wide range of informational content.

New Business:

- **Realm** – Sharon Hunter and Cindy Hermel assisted council to set up the Realm app so the council can be a test pilot for group communications.
- **Monthly Neighbors' Place Donation.** – Since July, First English Lutheran Church has made \$200 per month donations to The Neighbors' Place along with an additional fair stand donation of \$500. Since we have sufficient funds in the account due to the generosity of the congregation, it was suggested that we increase the monthly donation to \$500 for the near future. Mike Vanigan moved the Dina Santangelo seconded a motion to increase our donation to \$500 per month. Motion passed.
- **Nominations Committee Approval** – Karen Briggs will chair the nominating committee. Deb Kufahl has volunteered as a non-council member and Neil Juedes, Marla Zumann, and Lois Stasko volunteered as council members. Sherry Larson moved and Mike Vanigan seconded a motion to approve the recommendation of the nomination committee. Motion passed.
- The committee working on welcoming guests and maintaining our membership suggested we institute the member family of the month. Committee is proposing selecting someone new and alternate with someone who has been a member for a while. A bulletin board could be dedicated to the family member of the month with information about their life, including hobbies outside of the congregation. Looking for a launch of January 2026.

Next Meeting Date: Monday, Dec. 15, 2025

A motion to adjourn was made by Mike Vanigan and seconded by Sherry Larson. Meeting adjourned. Closing devotions were presented by Cindy Hermel provided by Carla Baumgardt.

Karen Czechowicz, Recording Secretary

Old Business:

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE from the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

Have you ever heard a whisper? “Hello!” Can you all whisper back to me? Whispers are quiet, gentle, almost like a secret. You have to lean in close to hear them. And I wonder if it’s possible for the heavens to whisper at Christmas?

One silent night, far away, in a town called Bethlehem, the stars twinkled brighter than ever. And the angels were there, too. It was as if the whole sky was whispering: “Something wonderful is happening ...”

Let’s all look up at the ceiling like we’re looking at the stars.

Can you twinkle your fingers like stars? Now let’s whisper together, “Something wonderful is happening ...”

The heavens weren’t shouting. They weren’t making a big noise. They were whispering, because whispers make us stop, listen and pay attention.

And what was the whispering about? A baby. A tiny baby lying in a manger. His name was Jesus.

Can you pretend to rock a baby in your arms? The night Jesus was born, the shepherds heard the whisper in the sky when the angels sang. The Wise Men sensed the whisper in the star that guided them. And Mary and Joseph felt the whisper in their hearts: “This child is special. This child is God’s gift.”

Sometimes we think God only speaks in loud voices or through big miracles. But Christmas reminds us that God often whispers. God whispers love and kindness and peace.

Can you think of one kind thing you could whisper to someone this week?

So, this Christmas, listen closely. The heavens are still whispering: “Jesus is here. God loves you. Share that love with the world.”

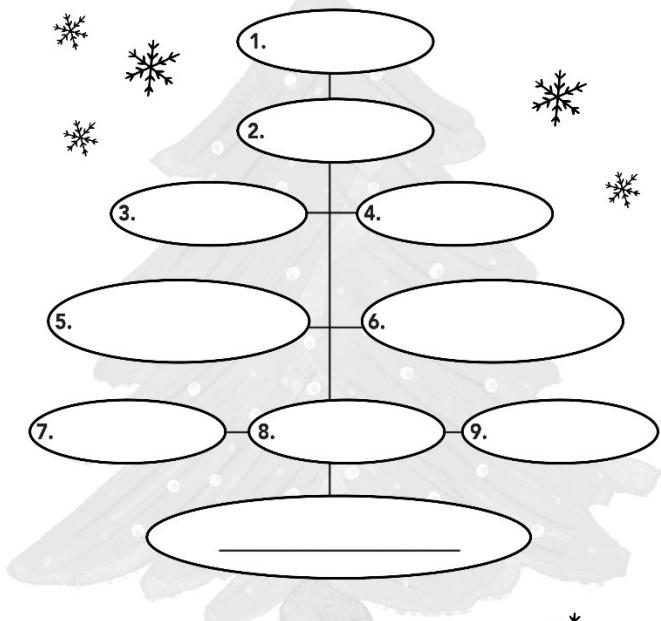
Let’s all whisper together: “Jesus is here.”

Now say “God loves us” in a joyful voice! Amen.

Puzzle!

Write the answer to each clue in the correct circle.

Then jot down the first letter of each answer and unscramble those letters to form a word about this season. Write that answer at the bottom of the tree.



CLUES

1. You trim this at Christmas.
2. One who governs
3. The first word of a popular carol, it means “Listen!”
4. You burn this to make the air sweet.
5. “For unto us is born this day a _____ ...”
6. She was betrothed to Joseph.
7. Shepherds heard them sing.
8. A Christmas song
9. ‘Tis the _____ to be jolly!”

Answers: 1. tree, 2. ruler, 3. hawk, 4. incense, 5. Savior, 6. Mary, 7. angels, 8. carol, 9. season; Christmas

The Rev. Yehiel Curry Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America