

# *in touch*

SUMMER 2020

News & Information From Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries



**TOUCHING LIVES  
DURING A TIME  
OF CRISIS**



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Images used throughout this issue have been captured at varying times throughout the pandemic. ALSM adheres to protocols and takes measures to protect our residents and team members from exposure to COVID-19 by following the guidelines of the CDC, DOH, and the PA Department of Human Services.

Cover: Brenda Harris & Tracey McGeary,  
The Lutheran Home at Johnstown



Patrica W. Savage,  
President/CEO

***“It has brought  
a new sense of  
caution but also  
an enhanced  
sense of  
mission.”***

## Greetings!

*“And then the whole world walked inside and shut their doors and said ‘We will stop it all. Everything. To protect our weaker ones. Our sicker ones. Our older ones.’ And nothing, nothing in the history of humankind ever felt more like love than this.”* Kate and Gerry McCann, posted by Freehearts.org

This message certainly reflects what has unfolded here at the senior communities of Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries (ALSM). During COVID-19, the past several months have been full of reviewing and responding to precautionary guidelines of regulating bodies. Every day has brought new challenges, but each day has also brought a new opportunity to affirm our mission at a level no one could imagine six months ago, “to serve with love, compassion, and mercy in the Name of our Lord, Jesus Christ.” Were there tears and frustrations? Of course. But there were also smiles and laughter, diversions, new activities, a heightened sense of unity, an outpouring of love and support.

Yes, the “going” got tough. We had to close several of our programs. We had to buy personal protective equipment and enforce precautions. Our residents have to visit their families remotely, wear masks, social distance and temperature monitor. Our staff has to wear masks and have their temperatures taken frequently. Certainly a whole different reality.

Now, as we move into the green phase of reopening, not much is different for our senior communities. We remain as always with our precautions. We await the results of the testing of our residents and staff as mandated by our regulating bodies. Our child day care is reopened and our ALSM at Home Care program continues to serve clients. We reopened our Senior Daily Living Centers in the past few weeks.

I thank each and all of our staff, our residents, and our residents’ families for understanding the importance of protecting each other from this fearful virus. It has brought a new sense of caution but also an enhanced sense of mission. Yes, we walked inside and shut our doors and rose to the occasion to protect each other and love each other even more.

**And remember, storms don’t last forever.**

In service,

Patricia W. Savage  
President/CEO



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Ask The CEO

**Q:** Have referrals for services continued to be received during the time of COVID-19?

**A:** Referrals for services continue to be received. They are considered on a case-by-case basis with screening precautions in place.

**Q:** What has ALSM done to protect the residents and the staff?

**A:** Each day, members of the ALSM leadership gather to review any new regulations or guidelines that we receive from the PA Department of Health (DOH) or the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) or Center for Medicare Services (CMS), among other licensing/regulating bodies. Our senior community staff are masked and temperatures of staff and residents are taken regularly. If staff members are sick, they are referred to their physician for consultation. Residents have remained in their rooms and use such technology as Facetime to visit virtually with family members. Meals are provided in resident rooms. Visitors and volunteers are not allowed on site.

**Q:** Has ALSM received all of the personal protective equipment (PPE) that is needed?

**A:** ALSM received an allocation of PPE from the PA Emergency Management Agency. In addition, many community groups sewed fabric masks that we use for our residents. Mount Aloysius College and Saint Francis University have also provided PPE from their nursing programs. ALSM purchased additional PPE at its expense. Thanks to those donors who responded to our appeal to pay for PPE.

SENIOR  
DAILY LIVING  
CENTERS  
REOPEN

Closed since March because of COVID-19, the Senior Daily Living Centers reopened over the past few weeks with safety guidelines in place from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Department of Aging, Department of Human Services and the Department of Health. It is wonderful to be together again!



Senior Daily Living Centers  
Top & Right: Louise Donlan, Altoona  
Above Left: Danny Horner, Somerset





## GIVING MATTERS Greetings!

Much has changed over the past few months for all of us. Time spent in quarantine has allowed us the opportunity to reflect on our blessings. Many of us are enjoying

the simple activities of summer and being outdoors. I hope you and your family have stayed safe.

As you likely know, one change for Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries was the unplanned need for personal protective equipment (PPE) to keep our residents and staff team members safe from the Coronavirus. Many of you may have received a letter from our President and CEO sharing details about ALSM's COVID-19 Fund to assist with extra expenses such as masks and additional cleaning supplies. I would like to share some specific information from that letter.

ALSM expects to spend at least \$100,000 in PPE. The three senior living communities use approximately 2,000 masks a week and 10,000 gloves a week. If there is an active COVID-19 case, we will need the added PPE of N-95 masks and shoe covers. We have received a supply of face shields from Saint Francis University.

To those of you who have already supported this appeal, thank you. If you have not and would like to do so, you can give securely online at [alasm.org/donate](https://alasm.org/donate) or include a gift in the remittance envelope in this newsletter. Please write COVID-19 Fund and the name of the senior community you want to support in the comment box.

We are all in this together and together we can help end the spread of this virus.

*Thank you for your ongoing support of ALSM.*

In service,

*Andrea Schurr*

Andrea Schurr  
Director of Mission Advancement

### YOUR GIFT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

- Your \$105 gift purchases 4500 gloves
- Your \$100 gift purchases 100 masks
- Your \$25 gift purchases 3 surgical gowns

### PPE PRICING GUIDELINES:

Surgical masks are \$1.00 each  
N-95 masks are \$4.00 each  
A case of shoe covers are \$25.00 each  
Surgical gowns are \$8.00 each  
A case of 1500 gloves are \$35.00  
N95 test kit are \$90.00 each



TIME FLIES WHEN YOU ARE HAVING FUN



In the midst of adjusting to changes and new safety protocols, Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries' staff team members have done a great job in keeping our residents' spirits high! Our team has been creative by planning theme days, costume days and serving delicious treats.

*Your dedication and commitment to those persons we serve has been inspiring!*



Andrea King, Desiree Sager and Mariya Anosova, The Oaks at Pleasant Gap



Rachel Wachter, Audrey Bradley, resident, and Kristen Kos, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg



Ruth Hack, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown



Dolores Limrick, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg



Rosella Waddell, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown



# Keeping The Faith

## FOR LUTHERAN HOME RESIDENTS AND STAFF

Since Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries church-related group activities have been cancelled due to COVID-19, the pastoral care that Lutheran Home residents typically receive is now mostly one-on-one. While each ALSM campus has been staging creative types of worship activities, including hallway hymn sings and church services broadcast over the PA system, one thing common to all locations is paramount. "Helping residents combat a sense of loneliness," according to Pastor Ralph Hamer, Director of Pastoral Care and Congregational Relations, is "our top priority." This especially includes those residents who are under hospice care and those unable to sit in their doorways for any semblance of connection to the community. Whenever appropriate, Pastor Hamer emphasized that a sense of lightheartedness goes a long way when attending to residents' spiritual needs and he tries to bring a "sense of humor" to his visits with residents.

Pastor Hamer is also tending to the spiritual needs of the ALSM team. He has been spending time with staff members who are experiencing their own feelings of grief, both personal and professional. He gave a few examples of long-time residents who have died during the last few months of chronic illnesses and the staff members who were not able to observe the usual rituals, such as attending the funeral services and spending time with the residents' family members. Talking with staff about their feelings of loss is important for their health and well-being.

As the days progress, Pastor Hamer says that ALSM will continue to "re-think what worship will look like for residents in the future." As for now, keeping the faith and the personal connections within the current health and safety guidelines is the important focus for pastoral care for residents and staff alike.



*Sarah Heckman, The Oaks at Pleasant Gap*



*Ken Woomer, resident, and Kristen Kos, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg*



*Helen Cardone, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg*



*Maryann Robatin, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown*

Easter week at The Oaks at Pleasant Gap was very colorful this year, according to Pastor Elisa Osman, Chaplain. While many residents were disappointed that they could not participate as usual in the group services during Holy Week, Pastor Osman and Mariya Anasova, Enrichment and Volunteer Coordinator, decided to make Easter week as unique as possible.

Fifty sets of "Resurrection Eggs" were made. Each day of the week, there was an egg to open with a reading inside that corresponded with a specific color. For example, Monday's egg was green and contained a small palm inside and the scripture from Matthew 21:1-11, discussing Palm Sunday and Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The week ended with Sunday's yellow/gold egg. This egg was empty, signifying the empty tomb. The scripture for this was Matthew 28:1-10.

In addition to the Resurrection eggs, the dining services staff at The Oaks spent extra time and effort making self-contained safe communion cups for each resident. Pastor Osman appreciated everyone's help and she said that her pastoral care "is really a team effort. Everyone is such a blessing."

While this was a vastly different way to celebrate Easter week, Pastor Osman said, "It was fun to do, and I believe people found it meaningful."

For the time being, Pastor Osman continues to lead and broadcast church services from the main lobby to different areas of The Oaks. Residents sit in their doorways and worship, sing, and wave enthusiastically. As Pastor Osman so eloquently put it, "We worship distantly yet together."

Laughter and worship were a large part of the Easter celebrations at The Lutheran Home at Johnstown. Residents loved that the Easter Bunny (played by Suzy Albaugh, Life Enrichment Manager) delivered an Easter-gram to each resident. In addition, in the days leading up to Easter Sunday, Lenten Services of the Word were broadcast in the hallways for residents with Pastor Helmers using a portable speaker and microphone.





## ALSM AT HOME – STAYING AT HOME HAS NEVER BEEN SO IMPORTANT

***Judi Dryburg, a team member who provides care in Somerset County, acknowledges the important role she plays for her clients in maintaining their independence***

Michelle Saintz, an ALSM at Home team member for eight years in Cambria County, has never felt as needed as she has in the past few months. She is the only person that many of her clients have seen since the coronavirus Stay-at-Home order went into effect. One client told her, “If I didn’t have you, I wouldn’t have anyone.”

To decrease the risk of exposure to their seniors, many families rely heavily on the care for their loved ones that Michelle and other Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries team members provide. Kaylen Brandt’s mother-in-law, Ruth, is able to remain in her apartment because of the care she’s receives from two

*Above: Left to Right: Kim Weyant, Lanette Richards, Donna Clinger and Wendy Jo Bollinger*

team members who visit her a few times each week. Kaylen said, “They have really stepped up when I haven’t been able to. Making sure she’s eating properly and has what she needs. They’ve established a trusted relationship with her. That really means a lot.” The socialization that Ruth has with them is just as important as the other kinds of care they provide.

Judi Dryburg, a team member who provides care in Somerset County, acknowledges the important role she plays for her clients in maintaining their independence. She knows that for many clients, she is the only person that they are able to interact with and they are “always so appreciative of the company.” When asked about the extra safety precautions she’s had to take during this time, she answered, “that it’s all worth it”, to make sure everyone stays safe and healthy.

The ALSM at Home program provides trained caregivers to assist older adults in the comfort of their own homes, so they can lead their lives as independently as possible. Working with the client and their family or existing caregivers, our competent, compassionate and professional team members establish an individualized care plan. Our program offers flexible scheduling, too. Depending on need, we can provide services hourly or for longer blocks of time, whether once or twice a week or every day.

***“They have really stepped up when I haven’t been able to. Making sure she’s eating properly and has what she needs.”***

**– Kaylen Brandt, Client’s Daughter-In-Law**

## ALSM AT HOME, NOW MORE THAN EVER

**Care And Companionship  
In Your Own Home,  
At Your Own Pace**

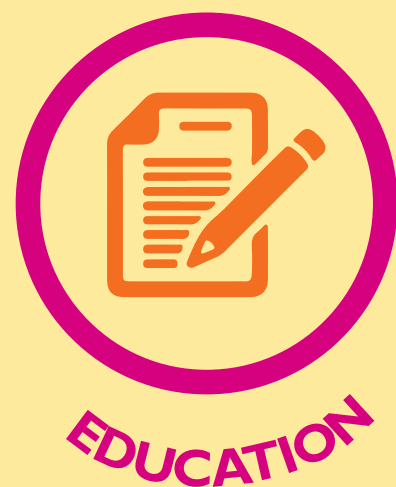
- Personal Care, Bathing, Dressing, Grooming
- Light Housekeeping, Laundry
- Errands
- Medication Reminders
- Flexible Schedules, Including Overnight And Weekends
- Respite For Family Caregivers

Our In-Home Services Are Available  
In Blair, Cambria & Somerset  
Counties

***If You Would Like More Information,  
Please Call Allegheny Lutheran Social  
Ministries At 814.696.4568 Or Toll  
Free at 1.855.280.2576***







Denise Stayer, Administrator of The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg took a moment to consider and then said, "For me, the biggest challenge has been to provide continual education for staff and residents since information is constantly changing." The continuous reinforcement of infection control has been paramount in ensuring the safety of everyone at her campus. She reflected on her role as an administrator and also her experience as a registered nurse, adding that she and her staff have been working long hours and doing all they can and still "wondering if we're doing enough for people." Time and time again, Denise has observed how the staff and residents have found

creative ways to maintain and increase their interaction with others, becoming Pen Pals and spending extra effort to ensure residents could connect with family via phone and Skype. She emphasized the importance of meeting these psycho-social needs as well. Denise applauds her staff for "living the core values of ALSM every day and coming together for the good of all."

It didn't take Nichole Walker long to identify one of the many challenges as the Administrator of The Oaks at Pleasant Gap when two residents tested positive for COVID-19. "Making sure we were clearly communicating to everyone – staff, residents, families, and others in the community about

*Left: Left to Right: Tonya Carson, Tina Kravets, Zachary Chamberlain, Elizabeth Widmeyer, Tonia Letrent, Dawn Hammond, Jamey Clark, Amy Higgins, Laurie Hollis and Sherri Horne*

*Below: Trista Brendlinger, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown*



what was happening and how we were responding." She added that overall, people at The Oaks quickly grasped the severity of the situation and continued to strictly follow all of the safety protocols that had already

been put into place. Daily phone calls and email messages from both residents and family members reinforced that there was a "feeling of security and contentment even with the anxiety of changes and being unable to see family." As for her staff, she could not say enough about all they've done and no amount of "appreciation and recognition are ever enough." From hand delivering meals to residents' rooms, setting up extra equipment throughout the campus, going door-to-door with mid-day treats, and helping residents participate in hallway activities, it has "taken every single person" to keep things running and to keep everyone safe.

As Administrator of The Lutheran Home at Johnstown, Brenda Blough was succinct in saying that the "unknown" was the biggest challenge in the last few months. Daily operations had to quickly change in order to meet the requirements of care during COVID-19 and sometimes changes were happening "two or three times in a day." Her staff rose to the challenge and became even

more flexible in how they did their jobs and how they worked as a unified team. While this was new for many people, Brenda said that a number of residents reported that their life experiences had prepared them for this pandemic, citing living through the privations of World War II as one example. "Overall, this pandemic has made us stronger and brought our community closer together and for that, we are grateful."



*Connor Campbell, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg*



*Robert Wray, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown*



# STAYING INTOUCH- LUTHERAN HOME RESIDENTS CONNECT WITH LOVED ONES



## THE LUTHERAN HOME AT HOLLIDAYSBURG

Ruth Heverly turned 99 years old in April. Two of her great-great grandsons were there to help her celebrate – even if it was through her room window – but the distance did not diminish the big smiles, the loud singing, and the many Happy Birthday signs being waved as Ruth smiled and waved back at everyone. Philip, Ruth’s son, said a highlight of the day was when Ruth’s 4-year-old great-great grandson “laid his hand on the window and Ruth placed her palm on his through the glass.” Tears mingled with laughter for the rest of the family as the two of them smiled broadly at each other.

Lisa Moore can’t wait for 2:30 PM every day. That’s when she is able to Skype with her mother, Janet, who has dementia and limited speech. Being able to see her mom means the world to Lisa. She said that her biggest concern about her mom at the beginning of COVID-19 was “that she would forget us. The Skype sessions are as important for me as they are for her. Anything I can do to make her laugh, I do. That makes my day.” Lisa is grateful for all the staff who help make these Skype sessions possible and added, “They are doing everything they can to take such good care of my mother.” Lisa is counting the days until she can see Janet again and give her a hug.



## THE LUTHERAN HOME AT JOHNSTOWN

Diane Pringle is still able to regularly talk to her mother, Florence, on the phone with help from the staff. Diane said that ALSM social worker, Carol Adams, has “been wonderful” in helping to facilitate these interactions. Even though Florence’s short-term memory is limited, Diane smiles when “I call her mommy and she calls me baby.” Their mother-daughter bond is as strong as ever. Florence celebrated her 97th birthday in April and on this day, as well as on Mother’s Day, the staff helped the family Facetime. Diane can’t wait to be able to sit with Florence and talk in person about old times, many of which her mother is able to remember in detail. Diane added with a catch in her throat, “I miss her like crazy.”

*Top: Ruth Heverly, resident, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg with family  
Circle: Verna Sendek, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown*

Sally Fuge has lived near her mother, Rhoda, her whole life. Because of the COVID-19 restrictions, they have not been able to see each other in person since mid-March. Sally said, “This is the longest time in my life that I haven’t seen my mom and it’s really difficult for me.” Using Skype, talking on the phone, and visiting her mother through her room’s window have all helped Sally stay connected with Rhoda, but Sally longs for the day when they can sit together side-by-side. Sally added that she is so relieved that her mom moved into the Lutheran Home in January and the “atmosphere there has changed her whole mood. She’s a lot brighter and she’s being so well taken care of.”

## THE OAKS AT PLEASANT GAP

Leigh Wheeler and his mother, Marilyn, still talk on the phone daily. Only now, a few feet and a pane of glass separate son and mother, yet their conversations are as lively and engaging as ever. It means a lot to both of them to be able to see each other and wave as they talk through Marilyn’s window in The Manor. Leigh, a retired physician, cites the admiration he has for the staff at The Oaks, saying, “The most impressive thing about the staff is that they genuinely care about the residents.” He also said how important it’s been that the administration of The Oaks has kept residents and families informed and up to date about the comprehensive health and safety measures being taken. “They’ve been open and honest about everything,” and he has full confidence in his mother’s care, emphasizing, “That’s why she’s lived happily at The Oaks for the past ten years.”

The Kowalczyk family have been staying in touch with their mother, a resident of The Oaks, through Skype and Facetime during the past few months. These interactions have been important for all of them to stay connected. Being able to see their mother is exceedingly reassuring during these stressful times. The family is also grateful that their mother is living in a place that has as much empathy and concern for its residents and that “family and community” is such a focus. “We are particularly thankful for the diligence, patience, and flexibility Mariya Anasova has shown to both Mom and our family in scheduling these virtual calls.” The family considers everything The Oaks staff members are doing as a gift of love and devotion that can never be re-paid.



*Lilly Kowalczyk, The Oaks at Pleasant Gap*



*Resident Linda Rice and her daughter Jenn Priest, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown*



## GROWING YEARS EARLY LEARNING CENTER PROVIDING CONTINUITY IN JOHNSTOWN

Because Growing Years Early Learning Center provides care for children of essential workers, a waiver was granted from the state during COVID-19 for the Johnstown Center to remain open, even as other child care centers were required to close. The continuity of child care was important in providing a familiar stability for both the children and their families during this time of uncertainty and stress.

The children at both Growing Years and Kid Stop worked hard to help stay in contact with residents of The Lutheran Home at Johnstown by making them signs and creating many types of cards celebrating Spring, Mother's Day, and Father's Day. The children enjoyed the annual "Teddy Bear Picnic and Walk" on the Johnstown Campus to search for the teddy bears that the home's residents have placed in their windows.



*Left to Right: Dezmon McDonald, Rania Hicks, Nevaeh Rager-Ferg, Aubree Rager-Ferg, Kaci Durst and Mackenzie Spence*



*Top Left: Abigail Yoder, Adalyn Albaugh and Mackenzie Spence*

*Top Right: Abraham Albaugh and Dezmon McDonald*





# Thank You

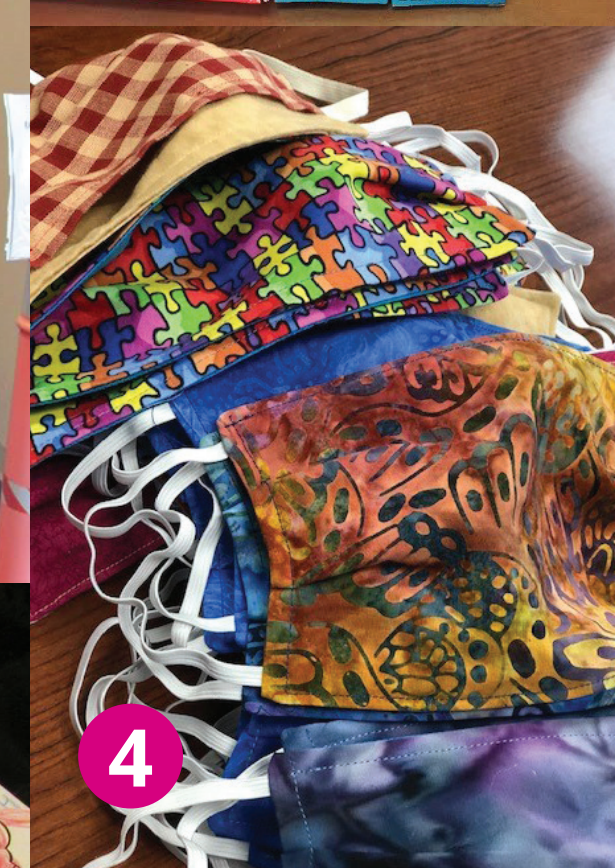
## FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Over the past several months of COVID-19, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg, The Lutheran Home at Johnstown and The Oaks at Pleasant Gap have been touched by the expressions of kindness received from friends, families and the communities in which we serve.

We extend our heartfelt "thank you" to all of you. Your generous support has been overwhelming and appreciated tremendously. Your gifts have provided much needed safety supplies, entertainment and smiles to our faces. We feel your love and support.

*Allegheny Lutheran Social Ministries has been blessed by you. Thank you!*

1. 360 Care PPE donation to The Lutheran Home at Johnstown. 360 Care provides dental, podiatry, optometry and audiology services to The Lutheran Home at Johnstown.
2. Facebook group donations to The Lutheran Home at Johnstown
3. Dr. Rita Trofino, Associate Dean, School of Health Services and Education at Saint Francis University, presents donation to Amy Zook, Director of Nursing, The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg
4. Altoona Community Theater (ACT) costume makers Bonnie Gordon, Janet Littrell and Mary Lee O' Harrow made and donated masks
5. Cards donated to our residents
6. Window signs of support at The Lutheran Home at Hollidaysburg





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