

609 East Main Street
Cobleskill, NY 12043
June 9, 2019
Pentecost Sunday

Dear WHLC family,

I'm sorry that I will not be able to join you in person to celebrate the congregation's anniversary. Unfortunately, the distance is too great, and the time is too short for such a trip. However, George Hanusa has prodded me to write a short remembrance letter, saying that I should feel free to recall the good things and even some bad ones.

As I told him, I now tell you. I have no bad memories of WHLC, other than the fact that I'm not able to be with you anymore. It wasn't until I left for seminary and the wider world that I discovered how special WHLC was and, I trust, continues to be.

Those who remember me will tell you that I was a very awkward child – socially, academically, and in almost every other way. I was always a target of bullies in school. However, there was always one place I knew I was safe. It was in church. Windsor Heights was always a place of welcome, love and support – not only for me, but for my entire family. You became my family – our family. It was this care and concern which shone through not merely on Sundays, but every day of the week.

This was especially true during my mother's long struggle with breast cancer. Through the years, you welcomed Nathan (my brother) and me into your homes whenever my dad's pastoral duties or my mother's illness made it impossible for us to stay at home. There was always someone ready and willing to look after us when our parents could not.

However, I think the best way for me to express how special WHLC was for my family is to share this story I gave in a sermon almost 20 years ago:

You see, the story of Advent – the story of Christmas too – isn't all about power and glory. It's about a God who cares so much for us that God lays the power and glory aside. God enters gently through the back door. God takes on the form of a servant. God comes into homes and lives that are in a shambles – into a world which is a real mess.

Where was God in all of this? Terrible things – evil things happen to us in this life, things that are not the will of God. But in the midst of evil, sometimes God is hiding.

It was not until several years later, that God finally opened my eyes. My mother's death was no less evil, but I remembered something I hadn't recognized before. During my mother's illness and after her death – we had someone gently walking through our back door every night. Every night, someone from the congregation someone carried supper in walked through our back door – every night for an entire year.

God was there. In the midst of evil, God was hiding in that food and that drink, in the company of friends and strangers – people who weren't afraid to walk through our back door into our messy lives. God prefers the back door.

This year will mark the 20 anniversary of Sara and my ordination. Sara continues to serve part-time at Zion Lutheran church, and we live in their parsonage. I serve a small church in Fort Plain, NY as a “contract pastor,” meaning I preside on Sundays and festivals. I am also on call for emergencies. Although we would love to move back to the Midwest, closer to friends and family, full-time church calls are becoming rarer – let alone for a clergy couple. Full-time pastors are becoming a luxury many congregations can no longer afford. In fact, Sara and I have become “bi-vocational” pastors in order to make ends meet. Both of us work at Albany Medical Center in the sterile processing department (cleaning and preparing surgical instruments) 40 hours a week as our “real” job. Sara is currently studying to become an RN. Right now, I’m just happy to have a job after 5 years of unemployment. Not many places will hire someone whose job experience includes 20 years of parish ministry.

Our family continues to do well: Gabriel will be 11 at the end of this month. Lilly will be 13 in November. Emma will be 15 (!) in December (I have told Sara that she’s responsible for teaching the kids how to drive!). They all do well in school. Gabriel plays base and trumpet; Lilly: flute; Emma; trombone. They are also budding visual artists. Obviously, they get these talents from their mother.

Sara continues to struggle with PNH disease, a very rare blood disorder (one in a million people contract it). She receives blood transfusions about every 6 weeks. Every two weeks, she receives an IV drug called Solirus, which costs \$500,000 a year, but as you know, insurance does not pay the whole bill. Unfortunately, it is the only drug available to treat PNH. Without it, she would probably experience a very painful death as her white blood cells attack her red ones, leading to bone total marrow failure. Before Solirus, life-expectancy for

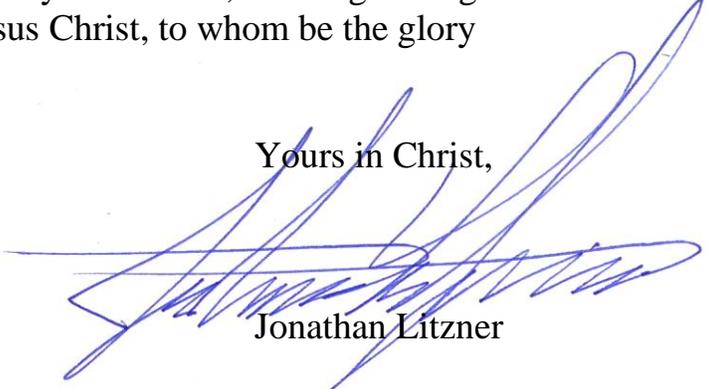
PNH patients was 5 years after diagnosis. With Solirus, life-expectancy is close to the general population. The possible return of lifetime health insurance caps and pre-existing condition exclusions are very real fears for us. If it were not for Obamacare, Sara would be dead now.

My brother Nathan continues to live in Leeds, UK, where he fortunately does not need to worry about medical bills. (FYI, Sara's Solirus was developed by the Britain's National Health Service.). My stepmother, Pat, continues to live in Hot Springs Village, AR. As a double-amputee with no legs, life is a challenge. Fortunately, Jessica, my stepsister, has a great job as a civil engineer in Seattle. She visits Pat several times a year as do Pat's sisters.

God willing, we will some day be able to visit you again. There used to be a sign facing 66th street with the church's name on it. Perhaps it is still there. My dad always found it amazing that a Lutheran church would have a quote from the book of James on the back of that sign, to be seen by all as they left the church. "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." (James 1:22a). That has always been my experience of WHLC.

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Litzner', is written over the typed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Jonathan Litzner