

Next stop for doing God's work: Penfield

Shelly Klingensmith's decision to trade in the bright lights and big city for the church has led her to a small congregation on the edge of Penfield and Webster.

By **AMY CAVALIER**

Messenger Post Staff

Bethlehem Lutheran is a quaint white church that sits close to the road. Blink if you're going too fast and you might miss it.

Shelly Klingensmith would have never known it was there before she became vicar. She'd never even been to New York up until about six months ago. Now her name appears on the sign out front.

She didn't grow up in the Rochester suburbs. Ask her where she's from, she responds with, "It's a long story."

Change has been the one constant in Shelly Klingensmith's life. She was born near San Diego and moved to Michigan shortly after. Her father, Richard, was in the Navy, and later the Air Force, so they moved – a lot.

"For the first 16 years of my life, we moved about every two years," she said. "... People always say it must have been a hard life. I didn't know anything different. You wonder what it would have been like to stay in one place, but then I would have missed out on what I did have – the sights I saw, the people I met. That's a wonderful experience that I can't trade for anything."

In her early teens, Klingensmith's family moved to Las Vegas. Her father had retired from the Air Force and went back to school to be a slot machine mechanic. After graduating from high school, she worked at a bank and as a case manager for the state of Nevada welfare department. She also dedicated her time to a Lutheran church she attended in Las Vegas.

"I liked helping people walk with God and discover their faith," she said. "It seemed I had a knack for it."

After getting a bachelor's degree from the University of Nevada, she traded in the bright lights of the big city to commit her life to God. She enrolled in Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio in 2004 and is now in her third year. She is serving out her internship as a vicar, or a pastor in training, at Bethlehem Lutheran.

As she had done many times in her childhood, Klingensmith packed up her things and moved, leaving behind her family, her home and her animals. That is, all but Samantha, her cat.

"It's not a decision I made entirely on my own," she said. "It's not all about me. It's about God."

STRAWBERRY SOCIAL

Members of the public are invited to Bethlehem Lutheran's strawberry social, complete with hot dogs, barbecue and ice cream, starting at 4:30 p.m. and continuing until the food is gone, Wednesday, June 21. It is at 1767 Plank Road, Penfield.

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Pastor Paul Shoop of Immanuel Lutheran in Webster is overseeing her internship, but Klingensmith is responsible for much of the day-to-day operation of the church. She said it's uncommon for a vicar to do an internship that involves heading up an entire parish.

"I'm loving the experience," she said.

Longtime parishioner Ken Francis of Webster said Klingensmith is doing a "super job" functioning just like a normal pastor.

"The congregation really likes

her," he said. "She's really down to earth, her sermons are good ... She's very likeable and approachable."

Writing the sermon every week takes up a large part of Klingensmith's day. "Sermons are a huge part of being a minister," she said, "but it goes beyond Sunday morning services."

Klingensmith visits homebound parishioners and recently did her first funeral and baptism. She also does administrative work at the church. Before Klingensmith came to Bethlehem Lutheran, the parish was relying on "visiting pastors" to deliver Sunday Mass.

"There was a lot of doubt

of what the future held when we had visiting pastors every week," said Francis. "I think she's drawn it all back together."

Klingensmith hopes she is helping the parish grow, just as its members have helped her grow. Someday, she said, she hopes to return to check on the faith seeds she has planted.

Meanwhile, Klingensmith said she has grown accustomed to life in the "boondocks," living in the parsonage next door. She feeds the birds and waits to get a glimpse of a deer.

"It does get quiet," she said. "Right now I'm enjoying it. If it gets old, I might have to do something to change that."

Klingensmith's last day is Aug. 19. Mary Molnar, another intern, will come from her school to take over leading the parish. For Klingensmith, there is more change ahead, new places to see and people to meet. She said she has no regrets.

"A regret would mean you would change something and it would change where you are today," she said. "I can see where God has touched my life and put things in my path to lead me right where I am today."

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