

# BLUFFTON

A magazine for Bluffton University alumni and friends | Spring 2025 | Vol. 22 No. 1



**FAITH AND MEMORY**



# PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Looking back on the past academic year, I find myself reflecting on challenges and triumphs, both for our campus community and in the world around us. In times of significant disruption, many of us turn to our faith and the memories of God’s faithfulness as sources of strength and hope.

This issue of *Bluffton* is dedicated to this year’s Civic Engagement Theme of “Faith and Memory in Challenging Times.” As we look back, I cannot help but discern God’s providence in the selection of that theme: it has woven itself powerfully throughout our campus experiences. From the struggles we’ve faced to the moments of profound connection and reflection, we have seen how faith and memory sustain us in uncertain times.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that faith is “the assurance of things hoped for” (11:1). Throughout the year, we have been reminded that faith does not mean our paths are certain. Instead, faith is the conviction that God is trustable. And that conviction is built in us by the stories of God’s providence that make up our collective memory. Stories from Scripture like those of Sarah and Abraham, Peter and Mary Magdalene, but also stories like those of Naomi Brenneman and Don Schweingruber shape our memories of faithfulness and guide us in difficult times. These stories remind us how to act with hope and persistence, trusting that God’s presence continues to lead us forward.

In the past year, our campus has been a place where faith and memory have come together in powerful ways. Whether in our classrooms, service projects or daily interactions, we have drawn strength from the rich history of Bluffton University. As we marked the 125th anniversary of Bluffton’s founding, we celebrated not only the institution we have built but also the faithfulness of the generations before us who laid the foundation for the work we do today.

2025 also marks the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism, the stream of Christian witness that birthed the Mennonite Church. This milestone invited us to reflect on the enduring legacy of those who have sought to live faithfully, often in the face of great adversity. As we considered this history, we remembered that our heritage is marked by patient perseverance—of continuing to act with faith, hope and love even when the path forward is unclear.

We carry forward the witness of the past. The memories of those who walked before us can shape our faithfulness in every season of life. They encourage us to act boldly, knowing that we do not face the challenges of this world alone.

I am thankful for the ways our community embodies faithfulness. We have faced our share of obstacles, but we have also experienced growth, connection and hope. And as we look ahead, we do so with the assurance that our shared memory of faithfulness will continue to guide us in the days to come.

With deep gratitude for all that we’ve accomplished together,



Dr. J. Alexander Sider  
Interim President



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Spring 2025 Vol. 22 No. 1

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## BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY MISSION:

*Bluffton University seeks to prepare students  
of all backgrounds for life as well as vocation,  
for responsible citizenship, for service to all  
peoples and ultimately for the purposes of  
God’s universal kingdom.*

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We welcome your comments!

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On the cover: Ministry team performing  
Photo by Andrew Collinsworth '25





# FAITH AND MEMORY IN CHALLENGING TIMES

In times of social, political, economic and institutional disruption, as well as personal uncertainty, human communities and individuals have turned to faith and to memories of faithfulness as sources of hope and guidance. The relationship between faith and memory is illustrated by the writer of the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews, who in Chapter 11 defines faith as “the assurance of things hoped for” before recalling the faith stories of biblical characters from Abraham and Sarah to Rahab and Gideon. Faith has a history, in other words, with saints and stories by which we remember how to act faithfully—with the assurance of hope rather than the certainty of outcome.

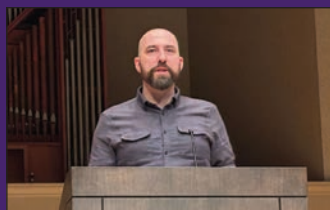
During the 2024-25 academic year, our civic engagement theme activities at Bluffton have focused on this relationship between faith and memory as we face significant challenges: from destructive wars in Gaza, Sudan and Ukraine, to a polarizing national election in the U.S. We have commemorated two significant milestones in Bluffton’s faith history: 125 years of peace church education beginning with the founding of Central Mennonite College on our campus and 500 years of Anabaptist faith from the beginnings of the Mennonite church during a baptismal ceremony in Zurich, Switzerland. As we remembered the stories of Bluffton and of its Christian heritage, we have considered how these memories of faithfulness may help us face the challenges of our time with resilience and hope.



**Dr. John Fea**, distinguished professor of history, Messiah University, presented Bluffton University’s annual Keeney Peace Lecture Forum on Feb. 4.

During the event, the author of numerous books on U.S. religious history expanded on how American evangelicals considered and rejected alternative paths of political witness to the current embrace of fear, power, nostalgia and culture wars.

Bluffton’s Keeney Peace Lectureship was established in 1978 by the family of William Sr. and Kathryn Keeney to express appreciation for Bluffton’s influence and to strengthen the continuing peace witness among the community.



**Rev. Dr. Maxwell Kennel**, director of Pandora Press and editor of the Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies Series, came to Bluffton University the week of March 24, 2025, for spring semester’s Spiritual Life Week. Kennel provided the Forum and Chapel messages and worked with students as they explored Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and the theme “Faith and Memory.” A key point raised in Kennel’s speech was the critique of both theological and historical traditions that oversimplify or idealize the past.



## Q & A with **CHALSI CAMPBELL ’12** Campus Pastor



### **How do you see faith and memory shaping the identity of Bluffton University and its students?**

Every student has a story and a past that shapes who they are and their faith journey. Working with the theme of “Faith and Memory” has allowed us to really focus on students and Chapel speakers’ testimonies and faith journeys.

### **Can you share a personal experience where faith played a role in how you processed or recalled an important memory?**

When I think about the most important moments in my faith journey, it is almost always centered around moments with others or in community. One of my earliest memories is attending a youth service retreat called “Youth Elect Service” or “YES.” We spent a week volunteering our time fixing up houses in the area, then we went to Mass every evening followed by hours of fellowship at the end of the night. I would have identified as Christian before this experience, but YES really made my faith my own. It was the first time I saw the way service, worship and fellowship worked together to build my relationship with God.

### **How do you encourage students to engage with this theme in their spiritual and academic lives?**

I cannot express how important learning about the Bible as an academic text has been for my faith journey/formation. The professors I had at Bluffton really encouraged me to ask hard questions and wrestle with the text. It was frustrating at times, and it challenged me often. But I grew so much in my faith because I

went through it. I would encourage students to do the same. That is why having students take academic religion classes is so important. It exposes students to those concepts and encourages them to ask the hard questions.

### **Can you highlight specific campus events, discussions or traditions that help students explore the connection between faith and memory?**

We had several Chapel speakers give messages focusing on “Faith and Memory” this semester. I think any intentional (or unintentional) conversations about stories from their faith journey help students explore this topic. We hosted a “Music, Memories and Mosaics” night for SLW, which encouraged students to think about music that is meaningful and nostalgic for them and turning those memories into art.

### **How do you hope students will apply what they learn from this theme to their future careers and personal lives?**

Bluffton was a really important place and space for me and my faith journey. It was not just the theology and Bible classes that left an impression on me and my faith. The overall focus on relationships and community building shaped the way I live my life both personally and professionally. I feel that our mission to “prepare students of all backgrounds for life as well as vocation, for responsible citizenship, for service to all peoples and, ultimately, for the purposes of God’s universal kingdom” is not just seen in the religion department classes, but it truly woven through our Bluffton Blueprint, campus culture, student life experience and the events hosted throughout the year.

### **Why is this theme important in the context of celebrating both Anabaptism at 500 and 125 years of Bluffton University?**

The theme is important because it makes us stop, pause and intentionally think about the past and how it shapes our present and future. We cannot fully appreciate where we are and the beliefs that we have today, without acknowledging all that came before us.

### **Campus Ministries focused on Deuteronomy 6:4 this year. How do those verses relate to faith and memory?**

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 instructs the Israelites to remember. Remember to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. The way you do this is by binding God’s word to your head and your heart, but most importantly it is by passing the word of God on to your children. This passage is foreshadowing how important the memory of passing on God’s word will be to generations to come.







# ANABAPTISM at FIVE HUNDRED

By commemorating Anabaptism at 500, Bluffton University has reflected on its faith heritage as a Mennonite institution. Such reflection helped us explore the 2024-25 civic engagement theme of “Faith and Memory in Challenging Times;” strengthens our community’s commitment to our enduring values of discovery, community, service and respect; and contributes to the conversation at Bluffton about the distinct faith commitments and practices that will endure on the Bluffton campus.



During Bluffton University's Forum on Tuesday, March 18, **Dr. John D. Roth**, emeritus professor of history at Goshen College and project director of MennoMedia's Anabaptism at 500 initiative, reflected on what tradition teaches us about life's most challenging question: What is the Good Life?

“Human beings are created for relationships,” said Roth.

“At the core of our view, we yearn to live in intimacy, harmony, transparency and trust with God, each other and the natural world. That’s our deepest purpose in life, to live in love.”

Roth’s reflections were rooted in his own journey as a historian, emphasizing that history is not just a collection of facts but a map of human experience. He explained how understanding history helps us make sense of the present and navigate the challenges we face today.

*“The good life is not just about personal fulfillment,” said Roth. “It is about contributing to the healing of the world. It’s about making God’s love and truth visible in the world through acts of service, forgiveness and compassion.”*

“What is the star that will orient your life?” asked Roth. “What will give your choices meaning, rather than just being impulsive or random? The good life is about aligning your life with what truly matters, and in the Anabaptist tradition, that means living a life of love, truth and healing.”

Roth offered a message of hope and encouragement to the next generation of leaders, urging them to take the time to ask the big questions, to seek alignment with their true purpose, and to contribute to the healing and restoration of the world.

“You are loved fully and unconditionally,” said Roth. “As you move forward in your studies and in life, remember that the good life is rooted in the grace and love that God offers.”



**Eric Kurtz**, a Goshen College graduate and executive director of Mennonite Central Committee Great Lakes, shared the history of Mennonite Central Committee at Bluffton University’s Forum on Tuesday, March 11.

Mennonite Central Committee addresses issues such as mass incarceration and restorative justice, welcoming the stranger,

racism and sexism in the community, peacemaking, climate change and reducing gun violence. MCC serves 45 countries worldwide. Kurtz touched on the topics of racism, immigration and armed conflict during his Forum.

“MCC embodies what it means to be Anabaptist,” said Kurtz. “MCC focuses on the Anabaptist principles of peace, nonviolence, service, simple living and following Jesus.”

MCC has a commitment to dismantling racism. The organization was able to carry out this commitment by sharing the story of the Henrietta Dismukes Hospital. The hospital was a premier hospital for African-Americans in the 1930s.

*“Our greatest tool is hope,” said Kurtz. “Hope is not the same thing as optimism; you can have hope without being optimistic.”*

Through the work of Mennonite Central Committee, the staff is able to work with individuals and families experiencing forced migration and displacement.

“The main drivers of forced migration are natural disasters, increasing climate change, violence and conflict and economic recessions,” said Kurtz. “One of MCC’s goals is to prevent migration by helping people make a living.”

MCC also aids in munitions disposal for countries who have experienced armed conflict. Kurtz mentioned his work in the country of Laos, specifically, which led to many international agreements concerning post-conflict munitions disposal.



## pages of Persistence

An exhibit of early Anabaptist Bibles

MUSSELMAN  
LIBRARY



### Bible exhibit

Bluffton University hosted a display of early Anabaptist Bibles in the Musselman Library Historical Collections titled “Pages of Persistence” from March 9-23, in Musselman Library’s Reading Room.



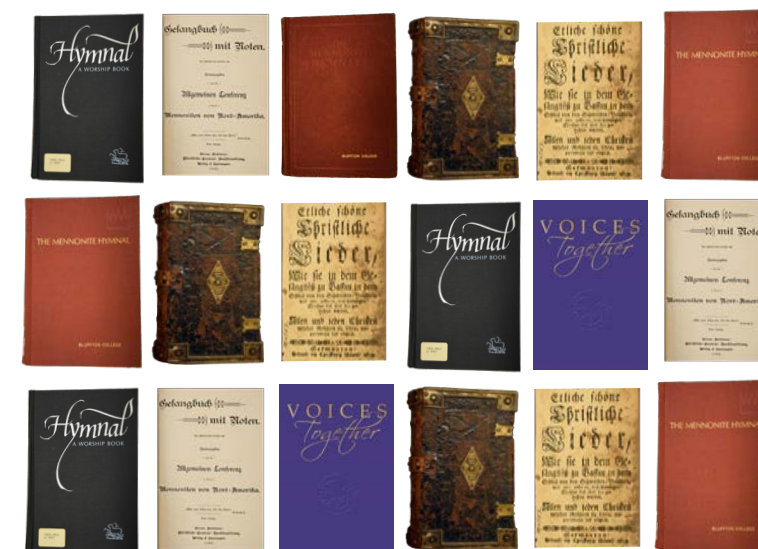
### Spring Choir concert and Womens Choir concert

Camille Lively, director of music, First Mennonite Church, directed the choral concert “Five Centuries of Anabaptist Singing- A Musical Odyssey,” on Sunday, April 27. Wendy Chappel-Dick, MBA '08 and ensemble will present “100 Years of Mennonite Women Through Story and Song,” at 7 p.m. Friday, June 20, at First Mennonite Church.

*These events made possible with the generous support of Lowell and Marty Hostetler.*

### Readers Theater

Bluffton University hosted a Reader’s Theatre, “I Have Not Forsaken the Word of God,” Sunday, April 13, in College Hall’s Ramseyer Auditorium. The production was directed by Dr. Melissa Friesen, Mary Nord Ignat and Joseph Ignat professor of theatre and communication at Bluffton University, and was based on testimony of Jacques d’Auchy from “Martyrs Mirror.”







Bluffton University is proud to introduce Dr. J. Alexander Sider as its interim president—a familiar and trusted face who has been shaping the Bluffton experience since 2006. Affectionately known as Alex by students and colleagues alike, he has worn many hats during his time at Bluffton: professor of religion, mentor, scholar, and most recently, vice president and dean of academic affairs. Now, as he steps into presidential leadership, Alex brings with him not just institutional knowledge, but a genuine love for the community that defines Bluffton.

A proud graduate of Messiah College and Duke University, Alex has long felt called to teach theology and ethics within a Mennonite context. That calling led him to Bluffton nearly two decades ago—and it still fuels his passion today.

“Bluffton is distinctive in the way we talk about our Mennonite identity,” said Sider. “We open up to a broad community of people.”

Known for his curiosity, compassion and collaborative spirit, Alex enters this new chapter with a clear and grounded vision:



stabilize operations, strengthen community ties and rebuild trust. His leadership is rooted in relationship-building and guided by a belief that every person has something valuable to offer.

Beyond campus, Alex’s life is full of joyful chaos. He and his wife, Bluffton alumni Kathy Dickson ’03, are raising two energetic boys, Evan (10) and JD (7), whose sibling rivalry keeps things interesting. Their home is also filled with fur and fun, thanks to two cats, Ocean and Chirho, and a golden retriever named Tucker.

But at the heart of everything, Alex is driven by a deep sense of community. It’s what first drew him to Bluffton, and it’s what continues to inspire him every day.

**“Whoever you are and whatever background you come from,” he says, “you’re invited to be part of this place.”**

As Bluffton looks ahead, we are excited to see the impact of Alex’s leadership—and we hope you’ll join us in welcoming him into this new role with open hearts and high hopes.



# ALEX'S FAVORITES

## Bluffton memories:

- Accidentally breaking a podium in half during Biblical Worldview
- Watching former CFO Willis Sommer eat what he thought was guacamole, when in reality, to his and everyone else’s surprise, it was a giant ball of wasabi

## Location on campus:

- Beeshy Bridge

## Hobby:

- Immersing himself in role-playing games. Some of his favorites are Pathfinder and D&D

## Meal to cook:

- Vietnamese fried rice from the "More with Less" cookbook

## Vacation:

- Cape May, N.J.

## Outdoor activity:

- Bicycling and visiting Lake Erie

## Book:

- Too many to pick just one—but he’ll always have a good recommendation!

## Animal:

- Loves cats, but is especially fascinated by wolves and owls

## Languages:

- Speaks: English
- Reads: English, German, French, Hebrew and Latin

## Bible verses:

- Romans 8:38-39 and 2 Corinthians 4:1



# MEET THE CABINET

## John Burkhart

*Vice president of fiscal affairs*



John Burkhart, a proud 1994 Bluffton grad, is as comfortable with an excel sheet as he is with a smoker full of cheese and meats. A numbers guy through and through, John's career took him to Filtech, Mid Bus, and Cooper Tire, where he mastered roles like accountant, controller and internal auditor. Along the way, he earned certifications like CPA, CMA and CFM because why settle for one when you can have three?

Returning to Bluffton in 2015 as a business faculty member, John eventually served as interim VP of fiscal affairs for a short time in 2022, before taking on the role permanently in 2015. His favorite part of Bluffton? The people. Whether it's his colleagues or the students, John's relationships here are what truly keep him engaged.

Outside of work, John's all about sports rooting for the Bengals, Reds and Blue Jackets. John also enjoys smoking delicious meats and cheeses. He's married with two adult children and one future Beaver in 6th grade.

With a strong foundation in Bluffton's past and a clear vision for its future, John's ready to ensure the university continues to thrive for years to come.

## Claire Kleman

*Interim vice president for advancement and enrollment management*



If you're looking for someone who bleeds purple and white, look no further than Claire Kleman. A proud third-generation Bluffton grad, Claire's been rocking her Beaver spirit since long before she officially joined the staff in 2018. Her grandpa, Gary Clay, graduated in 1977; her mom, Lydia (Clay) Mendenhall, graduated in 2002 and again with her masters in 2024; and her sister, Annie Mendenhall, graduated this May! Claire graduated with her bachelor's from Bluffton in 2018. She earned both a MBA from Bluffton and master's in criminal justice and forensic psychology from Trine University in 2020. Claire has worked in a variety of roles in both the advancement and enrollment divisions and now serves as interim VP of advancement and enrollment management. When she's not on campus, she's likely baking macarons, feeding her sourdough starter or playing soccer at the YMCA.

She lives in Findlay with her husband Luke, a doctor of physical therapy and Bluffton's head swim and dive coach, and their very photogenic (and energetic) mini dachshund, Zuko. The two tied the knot in July 2024, which means Claire's juggling newlywed life, puppy parenthood and leadership.

With deep Bluffton roots and a commitment to project management, Claire's ready to help Bluffton shake off the challenges and step into its next era.

## Phill Talavinia

*Vice president for student affairs and athletics*



If you've ever wondered who knows everyone in Bluffton, Phill Talavinia is your guy. Vice president of student life and athletics by day, local councilman by night, and golf enthusiast whenever he can sneak away. Since arriving at Bluffton University in 1985, Phill has worn nearly every hat, from athletic trainer to VP, with the kind of enthusiasm that makes you believe he might actually enjoy meetings. Phill earned his bachelor's degree with a double major in athletic training and business management from Anderson (Ind.) University in 1985 and his master's of business administration from Bluffton in 2013. Prior to his time at Bluffton, Phill did a multiyear internship as an athletic trainer with the Chicago Bears.

His favorite part of Bluffton? The people, of course. And after four decades, he's built quite the fan club. Whether he's chairing a village committee, teeing off with friends or walking his puppy Remi, Phill somehow finds time for everything—and everyone. He's married to Michelle, a Bluffton 1999 alumni and registered dietitian, and together they're cheering on their daughter Avery, soon to be a University of Findlay student aiming for physical therapy.

As Bluffton continues to grow, Phill's just excited to keep working with good people—especially if they can swing a golf club or share a laugh. And maybe, just maybe, he'll even let you win a round.

## Dr. Gayle Trollinger

*Interim vice president and dean of academic affairs*



If you've ever wondered how one person can make a big impact across campus, meet Dr. Gayle Trollinger. Since arriving at Bluffton in 1996, she's taken on more roles than most people can count—department chair, program director, associate dean, accreditation expert, and now interim VP and dean of academic affairs.

Gayle's favorite part of Bluffton? The people, both colleagues and students, who bring energy, heart and purpose to campus every day. She's especially excited to see how Bluffton will evolve over the next five years, navigating new challenges while staying true to what makes it special.

Outside of her academic world, Gayle is an avid traveler. Whether exploring India, Northern Ireland or Colombia, she loves discovering something new in every place she visits. At home in Findlay, she enjoys life with her retired-attorney husband, two daughters, two sons-in-law and four incredible grandchildren. She also has two stepdaughters, two stepsons-in-laws, and a whole lot of love to go around.

Bluffton's future looks bright—and with Dr. Trollinger helping lead the way, it's sure to be an exciting journey.





# 125TH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT

*Saturday, May 3, 2025*

Bluffton University graduated its 125th class during the Saturday, May 3, Commencement ceremony. The 125th graduating class consisted of 189 bachelor's and master's degrees.

Drawing inspiration from poet William Stafford, Commencement speaker Dr. Perry Bush, emeritus professor of history at Bluffton University, challenged the Class of 2025 to "follow the authentic line"—a path of truth, service and reconciliation—in a world marked by division and distrust.

Referencing Bluffton's mission statement and the enduring motto "The Truth Makes Free," the address called on graduates to embrace not only their vocational training but also their responsibilities as citizens and moral leaders. Dr. Bush reminded students that their education prepared them to critically evaluate information, uphold ethical reasoning and seek understanding across differences—skills vital in an era shaped by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising polarization.

"You are one of the first COVID generations to graduate from college," said Dr. Bush. "You have already learned resilience. Now carry that forward—with authenticity, humility and hope."

The speaker also reflected on Bluffton's educational values and legacy.

"This motto, 'the truth makes free,' isn't just an empty, forgotten statement," said Dr. Bush. "It profoundly shapes what we do here and the kind of education you've received."

The speech traced Bluffton's historical commitment to intellectual freedom and spiritual inquiry, dating back to 1913, and urged graduates to live out those values in their personal and professional lives.

The address closed with Stafford's poetic invitation to follow "a line that holds together something more than the world," leaving graduates with a final charge: "Speak truth. Serve others. And in a divided world—be authentic."



## Commencement Speaker Dr. Perry Bush



**Dr. Perry Bush**, emeritus professor of history, has nearly 30 years of teaching experience within Bluffton University and has authored four books, multiple academic articles and reviews.

Bush's publications include "Peace, Progress and The Professor, Rust Belt Resistance: How a Small Community Took on Big Oil and Won," "Dancing with the Kobzar: Bluffton College and Mennonite Higher Education, and Two Kingdoms," "Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America."

Bush is finishing up a manuscript on the history of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee and gives monthly commentary on national and international affairs on WLIO TV, Lima. Bush also taught U.S. history as a Fulbright Scholar in Ukraine.

Bush holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from the University of California Berkeley, and a Master of Arts and Ph.D. in history from Carnegie Mellon University.



# ALONG THE RILEY



## Keeney Peace Lecture

Dr. John Fea, distinguished professor of history, Messiah University, presented Bluffton University's annual Keeney Peace Lecture Forum on Tuesday, Feb. 4, 2025. Fea's presentation was titled, "Roads Not Taken: How Evangelicals Embraced MAGA." During the event, the author of numerous books on U.S. religious history expands how American evangelicals considered and rejected alternative paths of political witness to the current embrace of fear, power, nostalgia and culture wars.



## Dietetics pathways

Bluffton University students can now choose two specialized tracks to earning their Master of Nutrition and Dietetics (MND). Tracks for eating disorders or sports nutrition will allow Bluffton University students to gain specific knowledge in these two growing fields of nutrition and dietetics.

"At Bluffton University you can complete all coursework to become a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist in five years, obtaining both a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Nutrition and Dietetics," said Bethany Dario, director of nutrition and dietetics. "Within these degreed programs

students can elect to narrow their studies in two tracks, sports nutrition or eating disorders. This educational focus better prepares students by offering them opportunities to engage in supervised learning experiences within their specialization."



## The Lion and Lamb

The Lion and Lamb Peace Arts Center hosted a Taiko Japanese drumming workshop on Tuesday, Feb. 18, in Burcky Gym. In this workshop participants practiced the art of Taiko, an ancient tradition of drumming. The Teaching Peace to Children program also continued this semester. Bluffton University education students presented to area elementary students on cultural understanding and conflict resolution.



## Nature Preserve work

Dr. Jacob Buchanan, assistant professor of environmental science and M'Della Moon Endowed Chair in Botany and Environmental Science, hosted several events at the Bluffton University Nature Preserve during the winter and spring.

In February, Dr. Buchanan hosted a seed germination event. In March, he hosted

a spring wildflower nature walk. A spring migration birdwatching event was held in late April. Stay tuned for more updates and community events at the Nature Preserve!

## Dubenion plaque

A plaque for Elbert Dubenion '59 is being installed this spring at the entrance of Emery Sears Athletic Complex, just off the newly named Dubenion Drive. Dubenion was a standout player for the Beaver football program and played professionally for the Buffalo Bills. A dedication ceremony for Dubenion's plaque will be planned for the fall. We invite all alumni and friends to join us in celebrating Dubenion and his achievements.



## Popcorn Falls

Dr. Melissa Friesen, Mary Nord Ignat and Joseph Ignat endowed chair in theatre at Bluffton University, directed Bluffton's spring play, "Popcorn Falls." "The original version of 'Popcorn Falls' had just two actors playing all the roles, but we've taken a different approach with eight actors, allowing for even more character transformations and physical comedy," said Friesen. "The energy in the room is electric, and there's something incredibly fun about seeing actors slip into different characters, sometimes back to back, in the same scene."



## C. Henry Smith Peace Contest

Mya Vernon '27, a graphic design major from Toledo, Ohio, placed first with her speech "Protecting Immigrants Against ICE," in the annual C. Henry Smith Peace Oratorical Contest at Bluffton University on Thursday, April 11. Students are given the opportunity to compose and deliver a speech that applies Christian principles of peacemaking to contemporary social issues. The winner of the Bluffton competition advances to compete with winners from other Mennonite-related colleges and universities. Second place was awarded to Coen North '26 from Denver, Colo. A communication and media major, he spoke on "Considering the Lilies: Making Peace Through Practices of Contentment." Micah Dodson '27 from Wooster, Ohio, placed third with "Building Impossible Bridges in an Impossible World." He is a social work major.



## First class of Master of Social Work students graduate

At the May 2025 Commencement ceremony, Bluffton University and Goshen College graduated the first cohort of the collaborative Master of Social



## Athletic Awards Forum

"Life Lessons from Athletics" was the message given at the Bluffton University Athletics Award Forum on Tuesday, April 15. Michele Durand '88, head women's basketball coach at University of Findlay, was the featured Forum speaker. Justin Maurer of Springfield, Ohio, received the 2025 A.C. Burcky Award as outstanding male athlete of the year. Kiley Cline of Fostoria, Ohio, received the 2025 Kathryn E. Little Award as outstanding senior female athlete of the year. Corwin Croy '69 and Rita Dietrich received the Larry W. Jones Memorial Award. This award is presented "in recognition of interest, support and significant contributions to Bluffton University athletics" by a non-athlete.

Work (MSW) program. Eight graduated from the Bluffton-based program and four graduated from the Goshen-based program.

The Council on Social Work Education granted the MSW program a second year of candidacy status. This represents a major milestone for this new and growing program. The final big step is for the MSW program to submit their self-study in the fall and receive initial accreditation in 2026.

This online MSW, conducted in partnership with Goshen College, offers a holistic approach to the field of social work. With an emphasis on spiritual and religious integration, the program prepares social work professionals to assist clients of diverse backgrounds.

## Commitment to Learning

Bluffton University was recognized by the Higher Learning Commission as 1 of 37 institutions meeting the Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement Coalition's criteria as a Full Participation Institution. This designation underscores Bluffton's dedication to integrating civic engagement into student learning.

As a Full Participation Institution, Bluffton will be publicly recognized on Civic Learning and Democracy Engagement's website alongside a list of institutions that have already demonstrated a commitment to civic engagement as Full Participation Institutions.





# ALUMNOTES

## 1960-69

**Glenn Baughman '63**, and his wife Ann-Marie continue to worship at Des Moines Mennonite Church and volunteer at Wesley on Grand retirement home and A Mid-Iowa Organizing Strategy (AMOS).

## 1970-79

**Suzanne Lang '77** recently moved to the Southern Sierra, above Fay Creek and the South Fork Kern River after nearly 40 years living on the coast of Northern California.

**William Luginbuhl '79**, retired from 30 years of working as a case manager for people living with HIV in Chicago. William moved back to Bluffton and volunteers at Ten Thousand Villages.

## 1980-89

**Hugo Sandberg '87**, has been heavily involved in pickleball for the past six years. He helped get his city to install 12 new pickleball courts and five tennis courts and is now helping to raise money for lighting. He has also enjoyed getting back together with his old tennis doubles partner, **Peter Yost '84**, for some pickleball, both in Ohio and his new state of Tennessee.

## 1990-99

**John '91** and **Cindy (Bauman '91) King** have 10 children, half of whom joined their family through adoption and/or foster care. Dr. John King is associate professor of counseling at Liberty University and is the co-editor of two textbooks, including "Christian Integration in Counselor

Education." Cindy is a statewide trainer for Keystone Family Alliance and travels throughout Pennsylvania helping social workers, adoptive and foster parents, educators and churches care for children that are impacted by trauma.

## 2000-09

**Ericka Minger '00**, is pursuing a law degree at Arizona State University, focusing on criminal and juvenile law after more than 20 years in product development and sourcing. Her goal is to help address the legal deserts across Arizona and provide much-needed access to justice in underserved communities.

**Dr. Galina Terbova '03**, has been appointed as the Emory University Division of Cardiology Administrator.

**Yevgeniy Kovalenkov '03**, returned to Emory University as the pre-award research administration manager at the Emory National Primate Center.

**Erin Renee Wahl '05**, completed her doctorate in educational leadership and administration at New Mexico State University in December 2024. She was promoted to associate professor at New Mexico State University in April 2024.

**Jason Cox '06**, became a Bluffton Ohio State Farm Agent on Oct. 1, 2024. Jason resides in rural Bluffton with his wife Heather and sons Cameron and Emerson.

**Ryan Selhorst '07** switched schools this year from Lima and is teaching at Bluffton Middle School and **Melissa (Herron '07) Selhorst** is in her sixth year of running and teaching her own preschool in Pandora.

## 2010-19

**Ashley (Donaldson '11) Wilhelm**, was promoted to human resource manager with John's Manville over seeing HR initiatives at the Defiance, Ohio, complex.

**Karla Funk '12**, was a presenter at the Kansas Music Educators Association Conference on the topic "Utilizing Children's Literature in the Elementary Music Classroom" in 2024 and "Folk Dance" in 2025. Karla was also a guest presenter at Kansas University for juniors pursuing music education degrees on the topic "Chickadee dee dee....One Song, So Many Possibilities" in 2025. Karla also participated at Baker University's Orff-Schulwerk Masterclass with BethAnn Hepburn in summer 2024.

**Colton Steiner '18** started a new position as Esports/livestream coordinator at Bluffton University.

**Dante D'Andrea '19** and **Scarlett Purtee '21**, welcomed their first child, Evelyn Layla D'Andrea, in December 2024.

**Emily Griffioen '19**, started working as a licensed insurance agent at an insurance agency in her hometown of Belmond, Iowa.

## 2020-PRESENT

**Shannon Thiebeau '15** and **Taylor Bocka** were married in October 2024. Shannon gained her Master of Divinity at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio in 2021. She and her husband live in Ontario, Ohio, with their two dogs, Frank and Caesar.

## ALUMNI PROFILE

### David Glick

Class year: 2007

Major: Music

## A Lifelong Commitment to Service and Connection Across Generations

David Glick's journey reflects the ebb and flow of faith, growth and the powerful influence of community. Growing up in a loving Christian home, he was adopted at nine weeks old and raised with strong values of service and love for others. It wasn't until his time at Bluffton University that his faith truly became his own.

A pivotal moment came when a close friend passed away in a car accident just after their freshman year. This devastating loss prompted David to reflect deeply on the fragility of life and the importance of embracing God's calling. It was there, in the aftermath of that tragedy, that David fully committed to a life of service, deciding to "be all in" for what God had planned for him.

In the years that followed, David worked in various ministry roles, from Youth for Christ to his current position as the interim senior pastor at Ebenezer Mennonite Church. Throughout this journey, his faith was shaped not only by the challenges he faced but by the memories that anchored him, especially those memories that revealed God's presence during tough times. For example, reflecting on his adoption, David saw a parallel between his parents' unearned love for him and God's grace in his life, both gifts he didn't deserve but received freely.

Mission trips also played a key role in his spiritual formation. Trips to New York City, working with the homeless, and to Guatemala, serving its people, opened his eyes to the global work of God. These experiences taught him that no matter where people are in the world, God is at work. These trips, far from just moments of giving, became times of deep personal reflection where David often felt he was the one being blessed.

When David transitioned into his role as a pastor, he realized the importance of memory in the spiritual lives of those he served. He encouraged his congregation to recall moments when God had been present in their lives, whether in times of joy or sorrow. He stressed that reflecting on these memories could help people feel grounded in their faith, especially during times of doubt or difficulty.



In his work with youth, David emphasizes the importance of building personal relationships. Teens, often struggling with family upheaval or uncertainty about their place in the world, need to know they are valued. Through personal connections, David believed, youth could learn that God was always there, even in the midst of change and turmoil. He sees his role as not just a pastor but as a mentor who could help youth navigate the complexities of their lives while showing them the enduring truth of God's love.

David's approach to ministry was also deeply intergenerational. Recognizing that the younger generations often feel disconnected from the church's past, he worked to bridge this gap by fostering relationships across age groups. Older members of the church, who had experienced the church's history firsthand, became mentors for younger members, helping them understand the significance of their faith traditions. This intergenerational approach helped people not only to look to the future but also to honor the past, recognizing the sacrifices and hard work of those who had gone before.

Through all of this, David's faith journey continued to evolve, rooted in the belief that memories, both personal and collective, play a vital role in spiritual growth. Whether through the lessons learned in his own life or in the lives of those he ministered to, David saw how crucial it was to look back in order to move forward. His story was one of transformation, where the memories of loss, love and service all played a pivotal role in shaping his calling and his ministry. In the end, it was the combination of faith, memory, and community that gave David the strength to guide others toward a deeper relationship with God.





**Julia Thomas**  
Class year: 2015  
Major: TESOL and Spanish

From Lattes to Liturgies:  
The Journey of Julia Thomas

If you walked into a Starbucks a few years ago and ordered your latte with a “por favor,” chances are you might’ve met Julia Thomas behind the bar—smiling, steaming milk and effortlessly switching from English to Spanish with the grace of someone who’s lived in both worlds.

But don’t be fooled by the apron and espresso shots. Julia’s story starts not with coffee beans, but with a calling and a double major.

Back in 2015, Julia graduated from Bluffton University with a degree in TESOL and Spanish, a powerhouse combo that opened doors across languages and continents.

“Bluffton laid the groundwork for everything that came next,” said Thomas.

Right after graduation, Julia dove headfirst into teaching Spanish, inspiring middle and high school students with her love of language and culture for seven years.

“Teaching Spanish gave me a front-row seat to how powerful communication really is and how language builds bridges,” said Thomas.

But even as she graded papers and corrected conjugations, a new calling was quietly whispering in the background.

It wasn’t until she found herself working as a barista, yes, at that “small coffee shop,” a.k.a. Starbucks (her words, not ours), that things began to shift.

“You’d be surprised how often my Spanish came in handy,” Julia laughs. “I’d be handing out cappuccinos one minute, then helping someone place an order in Spanish the next. It was like the universe reminding me that no skill is ever wasted.”



These everyday moments, simple acts of hospitality, connection and conversation started to feel sacred. And as it turns out, they were the breadcrumbs leading her to her next chapter: seminary.

Today, Julia is pursuing her Master of Divinity at Indiana Wesleyan University. She’s swapped the espresso machine for theological texts, but the heart of her work remains the same: connecting with people, bridging gaps and following the call she’s heard all along.

“In some ways, everything I’ve done, teaching, serving coffee and studying at Bluffton, it’s all part of the same story,” said Thomas. “It’s about meeting people where they are, whether that’s in a classroom, at a café or in a congregation.”

So, what’s next for Julia Thomas? Only time (and maybe a few more divine nudges) will tell. But if her journey has taught us anything, it’s this: no experience is ever wasted, and every chapter prepares us for the next.

IN MEMORIAM

**Claren D. Sommer ‘49**, Independence, Ohio, passed away March 8, 2025, at the age of 99.

**Roy Gilliom ‘50**, Fort Wayne, Ind., passed away Jan. 9, 2025, at the age of 97.

**Carol Sprunger x50**, Berne, Ind., passed away Feb. 27, 2025, at the age of 96.

**Beverly (Lanning x50) Harrold**, Fostoria, Ohio, passed away Feb. 22, 2025, at the age of 95.

**E. Roderick “Rod” Deihl ‘52**, Charlottesville, Va., passed away Oct. 8, 2024, at the age of 94.

**Robert J. Sommer x52**, Greensburg, Pa., passed away Jan. 29, 2025, at the age of 95.

**Theodore “Ted” Stepleton ‘55**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Jan. 19, 2025, at the age of 95.

**Charles Earl ‘58**, Troy, Ohio, passed away Nov. 30, 2024, at the age of 93.

**Elfrieda (Landes ‘58) Ramseyer**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Jan. 24, 2025, at the age of 90.

**Marian Pfautz ‘58**, Ephrata, Pa., passed away Oct. 10, 2024, at the age of 87.

**Donald M. Schwarzentraub ‘58**, Norwalk, Ohio, passed away Feb. 6, 2025, at the age of 89.

**Harry Weibel ‘58**, Dalton, Ohio, passed away Jan. 15, 2025, at the age of 90.

**John Post ‘59**, Kenton, Ohio, passed away Sept. 27, 2024, at the age of 90.

**Delores (Schwarzentraub ‘60) Kirkwood**, Washington, Ill., passed away Oct. 18, 2024, at the age of 91.

**Carl Liechty ‘61**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Oct. 9, 2024, at the age of 85.

**Ralph Weaver ‘62**, Zanesville, Ohio, passed away Feb. 20, 2025, at the age of 93.

**Darrell Sommers x65**, Canton, Ohio, passed away Oct. 19, 2024, at the age of 81.

**John Wolfinger ‘65**, Sidney, Ohio, passed away Oct. 31, 2024, at the age of 81.

**William “Bill” J. Steiner ‘65**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Feb. 15, 2025, at the age of 81.

**Stephen Cross ‘69**, Louisville, Ky., passed away Sept. 24, 2024, at the age of 81.

**James Emmert x70**, Houston, Texas, passed away Feb. 27, 2025, at the age of 76.

**Richard Lehman ‘70**, Pandora, Ohio, passed away Dec. 7, 2024, at the age of 76.

**Mary Lou (Fretz ‘70) Roush**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Feb. 27, 2025, at the age of 76.

**Angela Hemminger ‘71**, Green Springs, Ohio, passed away Sept. 24, 2024, at the age of 75.

**John Schwartzhoff ‘72**, Kent, Ohio, passed away, Dec. 1, 2024, at the age of 76.

**William Haning x73**, Springs, Penn., passed away Jan. 22, 2025, at the age of 73.

**Rick Rolston ‘74**, Athens, Ohio, passed away Oct. 13, 2024, at the age of 71.

**Joseph Caicco ‘75**, Niles, Ohio, passed away Jan. 31, 2025, at the age of 71.

**Caron (Grimes ‘75) Vernon**, Columbus, Ohio, passed away Feb. 11, 2025, at the age of 71.

**Nancy (Yeager ‘78) Stanton**, Jupiter, Fla., passed away Jan. 1, 2024, at the age of 67.

**Sharon (Junkins ‘81) Gray**, Lima, Ohio, passed away Dec. 25, 2024, at the age of 80.

**Duncan Walker x83**, Loraine, Ohio, passed away Feb. 5, 2025, at the age of 65.

**Todd Kynard x84**, Toledo, Ohio, passed away Sept. 30, 2024, at the age of 62.

**Tami (Shetler ‘85) Hardy MAEd ‘02**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Sept. 14, 2024, at the age of 65.

**Martha Hecht ‘87**, Celina, Ohio, passed away Oct. 7, 2024, at the age of 92.

**Steve Herman ‘88**, Findlay, Ohio, passed away Dec. 26, 2024, at the age of 69.

**Betty Rethman ‘89**, Fort Loramie, Ohio, passed away Feb. 25, 2025, at the age of 79.

**Anna Fisher ‘92**, Wapakoneta, Ohio, passed away Dec. 18, 2024, at the age of 73.

**Jerome Striker x95**, Toledo, Ohio, passed away March 5, 2025, at the age of 53.

**Robert Drake ‘01**, Findlay, Ohio, passed away April 14, 2025, at the age of 65.

**Walter Queen ‘10**, Piqua, Ohio, passed away Dec. 20, 2024, at the age of 56.

**Friends**  
**Annette “Sue” Sprunger**, Bluffton, Ohio, passed away Feb. 23, 2025, at the age of 86.

**Marie Jane (Haney) Yoder**, Middlebury, Ind., passed away Dec. 18, 2024, at the age of 96.





## THEN AND NOW

In the heart of Bluffton, Ohio, two individuals, Carrie Phillips '99 and Amanda (Bartel '16) Gunnink, wove their lives into the fabric of Bluffton University, each leaving an indelible mark through their dedication to preserving history and fostering community.

Carrie Phillips, library director at Bluffton University, graduated with a degree in computer science and embarked on a journey that blended technology, faith and a deep commitment to her alma mater. While her major focused on coding, the liberal arts curriculum at Bluffton University allowed her to explore diverse fields such as accounting, graphic design, math and choir.

Her college experience extended beyond academics, encompassing concert band rehearsals, singing in the Chorale, and serving as a Peer Awareness Leader. Throughout her time at Bluffton, she worked at the campus library, unknowingly beginning a lifelong chapter.

By 2005, Carrie became Bluffton's archivist and special collections librarian. In 2020, amid a pandemic and institutional shift, she stepped in as interim director of the library—a role she continues to hold, all while safeguarding the archives she cherishes.

Carrie finds meaning in fragments of memory, such as a centuries-old "line-a-day" diary of H.J. Kraybill, a founding fundraiser for the college. Reading his words, she saw not just a historical figure but a kindred spirit, someone who, like her, was building something larger than himself, with faith as the backbone.

**"I think stories have a way of making history more alive and accessible," said Phillips. "When you hear individual stories from students, faculty, staff and alumni, it just makes thinking about the institution a much more rich experience."**

Faith, she learned, doesn't just live in scriptures or hymnals; it breathes through the institution's mission, through the stories shared by alumni, and in the papers of presidents. Her work is part vocation, part preservation, and wholly rooted in service, ensuring that Bluffton's memory lives on in the hearts of future students.

Amanda (Bartel) Gunnink, library assistant at the University of Iowa's Engineering Library, previously worked alongside Carrie in Musselman Library and the Archives and Special Collections. Amanda engaged deeply with the study of history, recognizing its significance in understanding culture and faith. Together, they cared for the history and tales of Bluffton buried deep in the archives.

**"Faith and memory come in where the stories are," said Gunnink. "I am very blessed to be in a position to be able to maintain those memories for future generations to look back on."**

Post-graduation from Bluffton University, Gunnink participated in an internship with both the Smithsonian Institution and as an archives intern with the United States Olympic Committee.

Gunnink's academic journey reflects a commitment to understanding history through the lens of faith and culture, emphasizing the interconnectedness of daily life and historical context.

Carrie Phillips and Amanda Gunnink exemplify how faith and memory can guide one's vocational path and service to community. Carrie's work in preserving Bluffton's archives ensures that the university's history, rooted in faith, is accessible to future generations. Amanda's academic pursuits demonstrate a deep engagement with history, recognizing the role of faith and culture in shaping historical narratives. Their stories underscore the importance of preserving and interpreting history through a lens of faith, ensuring that the lessons of the past continue to inform and inspire.

Together, Carrie and Amanda embody the spirit of Bluffton University, where faith, memory and service converge to create a legacy that transcends time.



CARRIE PHILLIPS '99



AMANDA (BARTEL '16) GUNNINK







# SEEDS<sup>OF</sup> SUCCESS

GROWING THE FUTURE, TOGETHER

## WHY I WORK AT BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY

SEEDS-SUCCESS  
GROWING THE FUTURE, TOGETHER



“As a first-generation college student, receiving financial aid from the university has been essential in facilitating my success at Bluffton. Without the funds provided from the Bluffton Fund, I may not have had the opportunity to continue my education. Your gift to the Bluffton Fund ensures students, like me, can continue to afford their education at Bluffton University.”

**Carter Ritchey '25** | *Communication and media major*



The academic scholarship I received from Bluffton University has helped me tremendously because it motivates me to continue working hard to better myself and strive for high academic excellence.

The scholarship not only helps my family and I financially, but it represents the dedication, perseverance and accountability I value to continue to be successful in my college career.”

**-Courtney Benton '29**  
*Sociology major*



This year marks a remarkable milestone in Bluffton University's history—our 125th graduating class. As we celebrate more than a century of transformative education, I invite you to reflect on what Bluffton has meant in your life—and to consider the impact your generosity can make for the generations to come.

Bluffton is more than a place—it's a community where lifelong friendships are formed, where values take root, and where students are shaped into thoughtful leaders and compassionate citizens. Whether you walked across the stage five years ago or fifty, you are part of a powerful legacy.

In honor of this historic year, we invited alumni and friends to join us for Seeds of Success, our Spring Day of Giving on April 28, with a special opportunity to give in recognition of the Class of 2025 and all who came before. There is still time to be part of that initiative with a gift before June 30, 2025!

Your donation to Bluffton University's Seeds of Success campaign directly supports students who are working hard to achieve their academic dreams, including:

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*Claire Kleman*

**Claire Kleman '18, MBA '20**  
*Interim vice president of advancement  
and enrollment management*

## WHY I GIVE TO BLUFFTON UNIVERSITY



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