



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
NEW JERSEY SYNOD
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.
1930 Highway 33, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

*Goodness is stronger than evil,
Love is stronger than hate.
Light is stronger than darkness,
Life is stronger than death.
Victory is ours through God who loves us.
(Desmond Tutu)*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Archbishop Desmond Tutu penned the poem cited above which was set to music by John Bell of the Iona Community and has since become a favorite song of mine. Listening to the news and being aware of so much brokenness in our world, I find myself reciting these words often – as a reminder, as a defiant declaration, and as a plea that I might see evidence of this truth. Goodness, love, light, and life do have the last word in Jesus Christ; and in our congregations, we live this out for the sake of our neighbors. Thank you for the ways you proclaim this truth of the gospel in your setting.

I am writing to update you on news from across our synod and to remind you of some helpful resources we share in the ELCA for addressing current realities in our society.

Some staff news...

On September 1, we will welcome Pastor Dean Brown onto the synod staff as an assistant to the bishop. Pastor Brown has served as pastor of Holy Trinity, Red Bank for the past 17 years, as well as serving on the board of Cross Roads Camp, on the NJ Synod Council, and as a member of the Fiscal Management, Administration, and Property Committee. In addition to general and broad responsibilities of walking with congregations and leaders, Pastor Brown's emphasis will be on stewardship and resource development. Welcome Pastor Brown!

Pastors Kimberly Vaughn and Maristela Freiberg continue in their roles as Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Evangelical Mission/Assistant to the Bishop respectively. Together, this pastoral staff team works closely with me as we seek to strengthen our congregations and support the leaders needed for thriving congregations.

Over the summer, I am meeting with a youth ministry leadership team to address our synod's commitment to young people and to lay out a strategy and plan for continuing youth ministry as Jason Reed's ministry comes to a close. Watch for notice of a celebration of Jason's 20 years of faithful youth ministry as the synod's youth ministry specialist.

Pastor Mark David Johnson has been serving as the supply coordinator, scheduling supply preachers for congregations in transition. Pastor Johnson is currently on medical leave and will not be attending to this responsibility. Have patience during this time of transition and continue using the same email for scheduling supply pastors supply@njsynod.org. Prayers for Pastor Johnson and Emanuel, New Brunswick are appreciated.

Mark your calendars...

I am holding a ministerium day (for rostered leaders) on Wednesday, November 13 (with an optional pre-event the night before) to gather the roster around expectations I have of serving in pastoral ministry and to explore ways we can promote communities which engage in crucial conversations. Pastor Gregg Kauffman, former pastor in the NJ Synod and now with the Kettering Foundation, will be with us to teach about deliberative dialogue. This is a follow-up to a 2018 assembly resolution calling for us to foster such conversations in our congregations.

ELCA Churchwide Assembly...

Fourteen members of the NJ Synod will join with almost 1000 other members from across the ELCA in assembly beginning August 5 in Milwaukee. During our time together, we will elect a new secretary, a presiding bishop, vote on the proposed social statement: *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, adopt a policy statement on Inter-religious Dialogue, approve a spending plan, debate memorials and resolutions, and elect people to the church council and various committees. Each day will provide opportunity for worship, fellowship, and networking as well. You can follow along at elca.org/churchwideassembly. Prayers for our time together as church are appreciated.

Resources for such a time as this...

We are living in a time when instant communication can serve to enhance our communities or to tear down and divide us. Fear is a powerful weapon used to bring out the worst in each other. At the heart of our faith is the confidence to “fear not” – because no matter what, God in Jesus Christ holds us and loves us into abundant life. Succumbing to fearmongering about our neighbors is something for which we need to beg forgiveness.

In regard to issues of immigrants and refugees, we have congregations which are providing information sessions for immigrants in their communities, pastors who have opened their homes as safe spaces, congregation members signing guardianship papers so children of those who may be deported will not be put into foster care with someone they don't know, and people gathered for prayer vigils. Many of those working on the ground are not part of photo ops but are quietly assisting our siblings in Christ.

This synod has been clear, as disciples of Jesus Christ: we stand for welcome of refugees and asylum seekers, we work to eradicate racism in all its forms, we are a church of immigrants and keep our doors open to the newest immigrants in our communities, we are a synod of inclusion for LGBTQ+ people, we have a responsibility to care for God's creation, and we speak out for just policies that make our state better for all people. These commitments are long-standing and continue to be lived out. The gospel is clear – loving God and loving our neighbors go hand in hand. This cross-shaped way of life defines who we are as Lutheran Christians.

Our church has resources to help speak a word of love, work for justice, and build up our communities. Here are just a sampling:

ELCA Social statements, especially: [Race, ethnicity and culture](#) / [Raza, etnicidad y cultura](#) and [Caring for creation](#) / [Medio ambiente](#)

Social messages on [Human Rights](#) / [Los derechos humans](#) and [Immigration](#) / [Inmigración](#)

[Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey](#)
[Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services](#)

Finally...

I will continue to pray and sing the Desmond Tutu poem and in that praying, I will continue to believe and trust that the Holy Spirit breathes life into this church daily. I am thankful to be serving in this synod as we follow Jesus into the world, confident that together we are doing the holy work of proclaiming the gospel. Your partnership in this work brings me great joy.

Blessings as we move through this summer,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracie L. Bartholomew". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew