



“Leading the Purple Church”:

New Jersey Synod candidacy retreat

Nearly a dozen candidates for ministry and their partners met at Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center for prayer, worship and workshops during New Jersey’s annual candidacy retreat.

Candidacy is the process that helps forms pastors and deacons. Rooted in Ephesians 4:15-16 (“Speaking the truth in love, we must grow every way into him who is the head, into Christ ...”), this year’s retreat was “Leading the Purple Church.”

According to a 2014 Religious Landscape study by the Pew Research Center, the ELCA is almost divided down the middle in regards to political party leanings. As partisanship increases in our neighbors and communities, what is the role of the pastor and deacon? And for this new generation of ordained church leaders, how is Jesus calling them to promote “the body’s growth in building itself up in love”?

The retreat began with food, devotions and fun-filled icebreakers. Bishop Tracie Bartholomew shepherded faith-filled conversations, inviting candidates and church leaders to reflect on their experiences. Videos, discussion groups and one-on-one interactions facilitated honest conversations. Pastors, deacons, candidates



Candidates and members of the Candidacy Committee meet at Camp Cross Roads for the annual candidacy retreat on Jan. 25.

and lay leaders from a variety of contexts and backgrounds prayed with and for each other. By getting to know each other, candidates and the Candidacy Committee learned how to build each other up for the joys and challenges ahead.

God works in the life of every person. We all have a baptismal call for ongoing discernment of God’s activity in the world, in the church and in one’s life. Are you discerning a call toward ministry? Have you thought about being at our next candidacy retreat? Visit njsynod.org/candidacy to learn more about what the process toward ordination is all about. ㄥ

Houston here we come! ELCA Youth Gathering June 27-July 1

Just a few final notes as you prepare for the ELCA Youth Gathering:

- 1. Do you still have questions you need to ask?** Post them on the NJ Houston 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering Facebook Group at [facebook.com/groups/1471723126416147](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1471723126416147).
- 2. Have you heard of the NJ Synod Day?** Each synod spends part of the Gathering worshipping, praying and studying together. Our day is Friday and the theme is “Grace Abounds.” The event will be in our synod hotel, with doors opening at

11:30 a.m. Make sure your group has a big breakfast/brunch beforehand!

- 3. There’s still time** to get your group reading with the ELCA Youth Gathering’s “Prepare” material. Visit elca.org/YouthGathering/details/get-ready to download the resource.
- 4. The in-kind offering this year is books!** We’re lifting up literacy in Houston. Our partners with the Houston Independent School District have a list of books they need. Visit elca.org/Resources/ELCA-Youth-Gathering and search for “Blast Off For Books” for the list.

We’ll see you there! ㄥ

Get involved in advocacy during the summer

Plants are growing. The days are longer and ice cream shops are open later. It's almost time for school to let out for the summer and everything seems to be winding down, including Sunday school, weekly Bible studies and other regular church activities.

But the work of advocating with our neighbors for policies that alleviate hunger and promote the care of creation can't pause after Pentecost Day! There are many ways to live out your faith and stay informed about issues you care about throughout the summer months.

Dive deep into one issue

Use the summer to engage with one particular issue. One of ELCA Advocacy's top priorities this year is to encourage governmental leaders to support a strong 2018 Farm Bill. We believe that advocacy for good policies in the Farm Bill provides a means to express God's unending love in a way that will contribute to the well-being of God's people and creation and to a just world where all are fed.

Learn more about hunger in your community and throughout the United States by inviting leaders to join you for an educational gathering and asking questions about what ideal feeding programs would look like. Sara Lilja, director of Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry (LEAMNJ), or advocacy leaders in your area can lead discussions on how to get involved in effective Farm Bill advocacy and why it's important to engage as people of faith.

Get involved locally

Advocacy and community service efforts are a "both/and" combination. Often they directly relate and strengthen understandings of how to be God's hands, feet and voice in the world.

Take the time to explore opportunities with ministries serving your community, in addition to getting involved in advocacy efforts. Does your



church support a feeding program like a lunchtime ministry or pantry? Reach out to the director or volunteer coordinator and bring your family, youth group or adult ministry to get involved. Be open to learning more about the work being done and listening to others who gather in that place. Does your churchyard have space to cultivate a garden that could provide fresh fruits and vegetables for members of your community? To begin, consider specializing in just a few crops and grow from there. Send messages to community members who may be interested, including students, scouts, retirees and agricultural workers, and organize efforts to garden and grow together!

Most importantly, take time to reflect on experiences of direct and indirect service and how they motivate or inform your faith and advocacy efforts. Community reflection and prayer remind us that a day's work is greater than just those hours of weeding, washing dishes or cooking a meal.

Engage all ages

As we saw with the youth-led marches for gun reform earlier this year, young adults and children

can be our greatest teachers and partners in advocacy. Invite youth and young leaders to take part in (and even lead!) advocacy efforts. Coordinate letter-writing campaigns, explaining how to contact legislators, write about a topic they care about, and share their knowledge with others. If you host an educational gathering, create a youth track that brings the topic to a level they will be able to engage with.

Its not too late to consider using the ELCA's "Taking Root" vacation Bible school overlay (download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Taking_Root_Curriculum_VBS_Overlay.pdf) to help children understand the causes of hunger and imagine a world where all are fed. As the introduction to the curriculum states, starting with advocacy at a young age "fosters a deep commitment to solutions for hunger."

Stay informed

Starting in February 2017, LEAMNJ (leamnj.org) began a weekly email correspondence to our partners all over the state. "Weekly Witness" begins with a short reflection connecting the lectionary reading with a justice issue and ends with an "advocacy ask," which provides information on how to get involved in urgent pieces of legislation. This is a great resource for delving into the Scripture reading from a justice angle and for keeping up on the progress of important issues. Sign up for the email at leamnj.org/weekly-witness.

Though the "Weekly Witness" primarily focuses on local issues in New Jersey, the ELCA Advocacy office in Washington, D.C., sends out advocacy alerts for federal issues. Sign up to become a member of the ELCA e-Advocacy network at elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Advocacy. You can find other resources on their website for staying up-to-date on advocacy work in your state and around the country. 

Summer at Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center

There's still time to register your child and family for an amazing experience this summer.

Children encounter God in nature, in worship and in relationships during youth camp. Cross Roads' certified staff members provide a safe and loving space for each camper. At camp:

- Faith formation is strengthened through activities, song and worship.
- Healthy, homemade, delicious food is provided.
- Weeklong experiential and active programming is offered.
- Positive adult role models are available.
- Lasting friendships and connections outside of the electronic world are made.

With weeklong camps and events designed for youth from third through 12th grades, Camp Cross Roads and Retreat Center is an amazing experience right in your backyard. Through in-depth and exciting age-appropriate activities, kids discover God's love for them firsthand. Campfires, woods, a pool, low and high rope courses, and more provide opportunities for kids to stretch their boundaries in a safe and loving environment.

Visit crossroadsretreat.com/summer-programs for more information. And make plans to visit the camp's open houses on May 19 and June 2 to see how summer camp can fuel your child's faith for life. 

CROSS  ROADS
CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

Grace abounds for us and the whole creation

Grace Abounds! Indeed it does. We will be living out this theme at our New Jersey Synod Assembly on May 11-12. As we go to press, the agenda is being finalized, worship opportunities are being put together, reports are being written, and our synod is preparing to tell again the story of how we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Part of that story involves our synod's congregations that gather faithfully and regularly to worship, witness and serve where planted. Part of the story involves the ways we work together to accomplish more than we can alone—through our Cross Roads Camp, Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry, Lutheran Social Ministries of NJ, United Lutheran Seminary at Philadelphia and Gettysburg, Seafarers and International House, and the ELCA churchwide expression. These partnerships affect the lives of people across our state, nationwide and throughout the world. Together we see and celebrate how God's abundant grace is poured out in very real ways.

During the assembly we will welcome Mikka McCracken as our churchwide representative. She is director for planning and engagement

with ELCA World Hunger and is a highly requested speaker (some of you might remember her from the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit). While with us, McCracken will help our New Jersey Synod Hunger Task Force launch an effort to get 100 percent congregational participation in ELCA World Hunger—a goal we can certainly attain.



Bishop Tracie Bartholomew

Finally, our LoveStruck team will lead us in an experience in diversity on Saturday morning. They will lead a similar experience at the ELCA Youth Gathering in Houston this summer. Under the leadership of youth and adults from some of our urban congregations, the LoveStruck team will show us how wildly God is in love with each and every one of us—in our glorious diversity.

Grace Abounds! is not only our theme for the assembly, but the reality of our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. Join us as we bask in that priceless grace together at our 31st assembly. 

