



Office of the Bishop
New Jersey Synod, ELCA

Keeping in Touch

November 24, 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As you prepare to join family members, friends, neighbors or strangers and other sojourners this Thanksgiving, I pray that you will experience gratitude for the abundant life that God in Jesus Christ has given you and in that spirit of gratitude, will know the deep joy of being connected to one another through the Holy Spirit. Below are a few updates about our life together.

Gratitude and Joy for New Leaders and Seasoned Ones

I am tremendously grateful for each of you and the ways we are connected throughout this synod. On Sunday, many of you came to St. Paul, East Windsor, to celebrate the ordinations of Rachel Zarnke, Jay Berry, and Tristan Shin. With joy we welcomed these newest leaders into the NJ Synod. People from across this church came from near and far to be a part of the celebration. Dr. David Lose, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia served as the preacher, local musician Michael Schmidt accompanied the fine singing, while family members, mentors, colleagues, and parishioners offered support to the newly ordained. It was a visual reminder of the many ways we are connected to one another.

Some of you sent me notes of regret that you couldn't be at the ordination service because you were involved with your local interfaith Thanksgiving services. Thank you for being a part of your community and serving as a witness to the unity we are called to live out for the sake of our neighbors. It is especially important in this time of anxiety and fear mongering that we live out our call to be peacemakers with those of various faith traditions.

Gratitude and Joy for the Work of LIRS

At its meeting on Saturday, November 21, the New Jersey Synod Council designated Sunday, December 27, 2015 as Refugee Sunday. It is our hope that you will make use of material from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (lirs.org/refugeesunday) on that day to highlight the plight of those fleeing from

countries torn-up by war and violence around the world and seeking safety in the United States. Our church has a long history of helping to resettle those from a variety of places around the globe and we are committed to continuing that work. The Sunday after Christmas seems an appropriate time to talk about refugees, especially considering the holy family were refugees themselves.

Gratitude and Joy for New Projects

As you are aware, the New Jersey Synod was asked by the ELCA to partner with the Southwestern Minnesota Synod in applying for a grant to the Lilly Foundation. We just found out that we were, in fact, awarded the \$1 million grant! Our project, Excellence in Ministry Unleashed (EMU), is a three year venture that will focus on supporting financial literacy among our pastors and congregations, providing resources and retreats for pastors at critical junctures in ministry (candidacy, first call, mid-career, retirement), positively impacting student debt and incentivizing retirement savings, and working with congregations to build capacity for ministry. Pastor Scott Schantzenbach will serve as director of EMU-NJ, which will begin early in 2016. As the project gets underway, you will hear more about this work and the impact that it will have on the current staffing of our synod.

Gratitude and Joy in Walking Together

In an effort to help our leaders get and remain healthier, we are sponsoring a "Walk to Bethlehem" during the Advent season. It is our goal that 100 people will commit to walking 2.2 miles per day (that will take us the distance from the synod office to Bethlehem). Along the way we will be praying together, getting and giving encouragement to each other, and celebrating the season. You can sign up [here](#) and join the [Facebook](#) group as well. If enough people sign-up and walk, we could even get to Bethlehem and back! Who knows, we may find that we like this adventure so much that we will do something similar in Lent!

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Gratitude and Joy in Jesus

The author of 1 Thessalonians puts it this way: ***Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*** (1 Thess. 5:16 NIV) I can't say it any better than that. Happy Thanksgiving!

Your sister in Christ,

Tracie

The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew

Bishop

