



New Jersey Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

January 31, 2022

*Beloved, God's chosen, put on as a garment
compassion, forgiveness, and goodness of heart.
Above all, before all, let love be your raiment
that binds into one every dissonant part.*

*Within, call forth Wisdom, to dwell in you richly,
let peace rule your hearts and that peace be of Christ.
And from the heart's chamber, beloved and holy,
let singing thanksgiving to God ever rise.*
(Susan Palo Cherwien, ELW 648)

Dear Friends in Christ,

The words quoted above, written by composer Susan Palo Cherwien, have helped me frame the time we are in. They are a prayer for how we might live together as Christians in the world. They are my prayer for how we would live together as the NJ Synod amid ongoing pandemic, political divisiveness, and public discord. Can we be the counter-cultural witnesses Jesus calls us to be and this world so desperately needs? I say yes and hope you will as well.

To that end, there are several updates I want to share with you about our synod.

Thank You!

The congregations of this synod have once again demonstrated that generosity is not just a lofty core value of our synod but a lived reality of who we are. Mission Support sharing for 2021 came in at 108% of pledged intentions. In addition, ELCA World Hunger giving through the synod was up 10% (this does not count gifts given directly to World Hunger). "Other Giving" as noted on the mission support reports and includes things like Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, mission partner support, Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center, etc., was 39% higher than in 2020. Wow! All I can say is "Thank You" – thank you for the ways you support our synod mission to walk together for the sake of the gospel. When we view life through the lens of abundance, amazing generosity becomes a reality.

Advocacy Ministry

In November, the NJ Synod Council approved a recommendation from an ad hoc committee looking at our advocacy ministry, Lutherans Engaging in Advocacy Ministry, NJ (LEAMNJ). That office has received funding to sustain ministry on a part-time basis for several years. The approved council

recommendation called for bringing our advocacy ministry into the work of the Office of the Bishop and including it in the portfolio of a full-time assistant to the bishop. This means that LEAMNJ will no longer be a separate ministry partner but become part of our work accompanying congregations and their leaders in living out their mission.

Therefore, beginning February 1, Pastor Sara Lilja's title will become Assistant to the Bishop for Advocacy and Justice Ministries. She will continue coordinating our advocacy ministry, the work of our justice teams, including racial justice efforts, and add responsibilities related to the work of the bishop's office in walking with congregations and their leaders. Pastor Lilja will be gathering a think tank of leaders to reimagine how our Justice and Peace teams can bolster support for our advocacy work. While Pastor Lilja's work will take on some new dimensions, the commitment to advocacy remains strong. You can reach Pastor Lilja at her new email address slilja@njsynod.org.

NJ Synod Secretary Transition

Cassandra Mack has served as our synod secretary since 2015 – one full four-year term and most of a second. She announced that she is stepping down from this role. Cassandra has served with joy and enthusiasm. If you have been to a synod assembly or a churchwide assembly with her, you have seen that for yourself. While she will remain as chair of our Constitution Committee, I will miss her regular presence at synod council meetings and at the dais during assembly. Please join me in thanking her for her years of service in this role. We will publicly thank Cassandra for her service as synod secretary at our assembly.

The synod council has appointed Pastor Blake Scalet (St. John, Summit) to fill this unexpired term. Beginning February 1, you can reach him at secretary@njsynod.org. He will work with Cassandra and the staff in preparing for assembly. If you have a report to submit for the Bulletin of Reports this year, please submit it to Cassandra (cmack@njsynod.org) by March 7.

2022 NJ Synod Assembly

Notice was sent out in early January announcing the 2022 Synod Assembly. Since that time, the synod council has heard the concerns of some about gathering in person for a full day and a half, including a banquet. Even with wearing masks when possible, having the required number of people together in a ballroom for that amount of time seemed unrealistic. We took a straw poll while meeting with rostered leaders and chief lay officers over the last week which revealed that over 3/4 of the those present would prefer to move the assembly to an online format this year. Given all of this, the synod assembly planning committee, with the consent of the council, has decided to move the 2022 Synod Assembly online. Details will be forthcoming; however, we will meet on the original dates of Friday, May 6 and Saturday, May 7.

I recognize the need for us to gather in person and celebrate being church together, so we have put two dates on the calendar to do just that –

Saturday, April 23 at 1:00 pm we will hold a synod-wide ordination service (place to be determined). We currently have three ordinands: Margarette Ouji (First, Montclair), Mason Hahn (St. James, Pitman), and Frantisek Janak (St. Stephen's, South Plainfield). Masks will be required for all who attend. The service will also be livestreamed.

Saturday, September 10, we will hold a NJ Synod Day (place/times to be determined) which will include worship, a bar-b-que, mission fair, and time to celebrate what God is doing among us. Plans are for this to be a primarily outdoor event.

The Bishop's Challenge: The Jehu Jones Mission

When we launched the Bishop's Challenge at last year's assembly, the goal was for congregations to engage in a year of learning, to raise \$50,000 for a fund to be used for educational opportunities for emerging leaders of African descent, and to assemble a synod quilt representing our commitment to racial justice. It was an ambitious challenge but not unattainable.

I am pleased to say that you have risen to this challenge. You have engaged in the Bible study prepared by our Bishop's Challenge team, you have watched movies, held book discussions, and donated money. Thank you! To date, 40 congregations, 6 individuals, and the synod youth retreat have all contributed or made a pledge to the educational fund such that we have already exceeded our goal. Thank you! I can't wait to see the final total when we gather for assembly. If your congregation hasn't yet participated, it's not too late. In February we have two online learning opportunities: February 16, a presentation on quilting in the African American tradition; February 22 and 24, a book discussion of Isabel Wilkerson's, *The Warmth of Other Suns*. Visit the [website](#) to see all the opportunities, complete and send in your quilt square, and join your synod siblings in this challenge.

As you can tell from these few examples, the NJ Synod is a place of robust ministry. In what we do and who we are together, we bear witness to Jesus Christ. As a counter-cultural body wearing love as our raiment, we strive to serve with kindness, compassion, and goodness of heart. I'm glad to be part of this church with you.

Your sister in Christ,


Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew