



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

Dear NJ Synod family,

What a great time we had last Friday and Saturday gathered in assembly. Our pre-assembly workshops were well attended by folks from across the synod – thank you to those who led them. Our assembly attendance stayed strong throughout, including for our closing prayer and sending for mission. We observed our theme, ***Springing Forth***, with a variety of stories and reports about the new things God is doing in our midst. It was a joy to be together with you, even as I anticipate being together in person next May.

I am writing to recap some of the assembly highlights, address our current COVID19 situation in regard to re-gathering in person, and to invite you to celebrate the ministry of Pastor Kimberly Vaughn as she leaves the staff.

Assembly Highlights

312 voting members were logged in to the assembly. A number of visitors watched the YouTube livestream, which you can view anytime on our [YouTube channel](#). In assembly business, we elected members of the synod to a number of positions listed below:

Synod Council:

Carol Dorn, Holy Cross, Toms River (Shore Mission District)
Carla Hoenigmann, Christ, Woodcliff Lake (Northern Mission District)
The Rev. Em Johnson, St. Matthew, Jersey City (at-large)
The Rev. Gary LeCroy, St. Matthew-Trinity, Hoboken (Gateway Mission District)
The Rev. Nancy Nardi, St. Steven, South Plainfield (at-large)
Karina Payanzo, St. Luke, Willingboro (youth)
Wannetta R. Phillips, Prince of Peace, Denville (Western Mission District)
Aretha (Tina) Richardson, Trinity, Jersey City (Gateway Mission District)
Maurice Willoughby, Good Shepherd, Glen Rock (Northern Mission District)

2022 Churchwide Assembly Voting Members:

The Rev. Wendy Abrahamson, Our Savior, Pompton Plains (Northern Mission District)
The Rev. Brett Ballenger, Prince of Peace, Marlton (Delaware Mission District)
Pamela Donovan, St. Paul, Beachwood (Shore Mission District)
Jeannie Elmuccio, Calvary Cranford (Western Mission District)
Sophia Howard, Our Savior, Haddonfield (Delaware Mission District – Youth)
The Rev. Jessica Lambert, St. Paul, Jersey City (Gateway Mission District)
The Rev. Carol Lindsay, Calvary Cranford (Western Mission District)
Alexandra Mack, Holy Trinity, Red Bank (Middle Mission District – young adult)
Wayne Olsen, St. Paul, Teaneck (Northern Mission District)
Willie Richardson, Trinity, Jersey City (Gateway Mission District)

ELCA Church Council Nominees:

Jamie Bruesehoff, St. Michael, Cherry Hill
Sandy Matsen, Zion, Oldwick

Consultation Committee:

Debbie Burd, Abiding Presence, Ewing
Deacon Karen Kelly, Grace, Phillipsburg
The Rev. Beate Storck, Trinity, Tenafly
Anthony Trump, St. Paul, Beachwood
The Rev. Jay I. Unzaga, Good Shepherd, Glen Rock

Committee on Discipline:

The Rev. John Anderson, St. Thomas, Brick and Holy Trinity, Brant Beach
The Rev. Brett Ballenger, Prince of Peace, Marlton
Judy Bumpus, Zion, Long Valley
Kurt Gahan, St. Andrew, Parsippany
Deacon Susan Gerrard, Nativity, East Brunswick

We launched **The Bishop's Challenge: The Jehu Jones Mission**, a year-long emphasis during which we will study together how institutional slavery impacts the lives of people of African descent. The story of Pastor Jehu Jones serves as an illustration of the harm done by the church to this Black pastor in the 1800s. In addition to our year-long learning events, we are asking congregations to contribute at least \$375 to the Bishop's Challenge to be used as scholarships for emerging Black leaders for educational opportunities – our goal is to raise \$50,000. Congregations that participate in the challenge will receive a quilt square to decorate and add to a synod quilt. A packet of information, with the quilt square, is being sent to every congregation the week of May 24. You can also find more information on our [website](#).

We worshiped, spent time in Scripture, welcomed rostered ministers new to the synod and honored those with significant anniversaries and retirements. We adopted a \$2.1 million spending plan for 2022, almost unanimously – which means your generosity in supporting it is assumed and critical. You can review the assembly on our synod's [YouTube channel](#) and find the reports on our [website](#). The assembly was a reminder of how God connects us in Jesus Christ, even through Zoom.

Regathering Protocols

For over a year, you have found new ways of proclaiming the gospel, worshiping together apart, and carrying on with your learning and serving ministries. Thank you for the ways you have observed safety protocols while still being church in your community. Now, as numbers of new cases of COVID19 are decreasing, more people are getting vaccinated, and limitations on gathering are being expanded, it is time to consider how you will regather in your buildings.

Beginning May 19, New Jersey guidelines will allow outdoor gatherings without limitation on size and indoor religious services at 100% capacity, up to 250 people, provided that physical distancing of 6 feet can be maintained between families. Masks are still required for indoor gatherings. As I write this, daily new cases across the state are at 10/100,000; in some counties the number is below 5. This is all good news!

Can we sing in church when we come back inside? Dr. Anthony Fauci has said singing without masks can probably resume in the Fall if we've reached 70% immunity. A recent [document](#) from the Minnesota health department spells out specific considerations for singing and the use of wind instruments.

As I have throughout this time, I urge you to consider the theological questions before the logistical ones. What does it say about who we are as God's people when we make decisions to open our buildings? Who is included or excluded by our decisions? Are we giving witness to the mercy and grace of God for the least of these in our community? What place will our online community have in our ministry into the future? I am confident in your leadership to make the right decisions for your congregation.

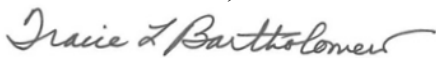
Saying Farewell to Pastor Kimberly Vaughn

As you know, Pastor Vaughn will be leaving the NJ Synod Staff at the end of May to become the Senior Director of Christian Community and Leadership with the ELCA Churchwide Organization. We will celebrate her five years as an Assistant to the Bishop with a zoom party on **Wednesday, May 26 at 7:00pm**. The link for the party will be posted on the synod [website](#) 24 hours in advance. You may send cards and well wishes for her to the synod office. All are welcome!

While I am writing about these hopeful things, the news of the world is heartbreaking. India is facing devastating consequences from the COVID19 virus. Displacement of the Palestinian people from their homes continues by the Israeli government; retaliation, in the form of rockets, takes innocent lives. The political situation in the Holy Land is complex and there is no easy solution. In our own country, gun violence continues to plague cities and towns, devastate families, and harm communities. We continue to mourn, pray, and work for peace, trusting in the Risen Christ who loves us deeply. Even in our grief and worry, we cling to the promises of life. Together, we continue to be church for the sake of the world.

Thank you for the partnership we share as the New Jersey Synod.

Your sister in Christ,



Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew