



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

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. (Philippians 2:1-4 NIV)

Dear Friends in Christ,

The quote from Philippians at the top of this page is from the beginning of chapter 2. The chapter goes on, with an ancient hymn, describing the mindset of Jesus, which Paul holds up as the mindset to which he hopes the newborn church in Philippi will adhere.

Our synod staff has been dwelling in this passage from Philippians at noon on the Wednesdays in Lent. This passage has, therefore, been on my mind and in my heart as I go about my days in this season. It was particularly on my mind and heart as our synod council met this past Saturday. As usual, we received reports of work done, recommended an agenda and spending plan for the upcoming assembly, celebrated the mission we share, and prayed together for personal and communal thanksgivings. As part of this work, the council also received and approved recommendations made by an ad hoc committee, which has been meeting monthly since October, on synod priorities.

The report from the ad hoc committee can be found in its entirety [here](#), but I want to highlight two of the recommendations. First, the committee affirmed that our synod staffing should reflect the priorities of waking with our congregations and accompanying our leaders (rostered and lay) so together our witness to the love of Jesus Christ is strengthened. To do that, the council affirmed the need to add one full-time assistant to the bishop to our current and future spending plans, which will keep the number of full-time assistants at two following Pastor Scott Schantzenbach's retirement at the end of June.

Let me remind you that Pastor Schantzenbach is currently funded outside the spending plan with money for the EMU initiative from a Lily grant and money set aside from an undesignated bequest received three years ago. That off-line funding was put in place when we had two other full-time assistants in the spending plan because we knew of Pastor Schantzenbach's plans to retire in 2019. When one of those other two assistants left the staff, the decline in mission support meant money needed to keep that position was not available. Consequently, we now have only one full-time assistant to the bishop in the spending plan (Pastor Vaughn). Council affirmed the need to add a second full-time assistant back into the spending plan and onto the staff.

Second, the council approved the recommendation to replace the full-time specialized youth ministry position with a small amount of money for contracted youth ministry coordination. This means the position Jason Reed holds will end beginning with the 2020 spending plan (February 1). The timing of this recommendation means we will have seven months to put together a robust plan for how we will do youth ministry in our synod, including working with ministry partners such as Cross Roads Camp. When the time comes, we will certainly celebrate Jason and the work he has done on this staff since 1999.

These two recommendations are just a part of the report from the ad hoc team and are a continuation of the changes we have seen over the years in the way we serve our mission as a synod. Reducing staff has been happening over the years as our mission support has continued to decline. The support staff of three is doing the work of six. LEAMNJ was born out of financial necessity when funds to sustain our own

full-time advocacy staff were no longer available. Two full-time assistants to the bishop are doing the work of what was once done by four assistants. Our mission district deans and cluster counselors are stepping up to assist the staff where possible. Thankfully, ELCA churchwide continues to provide a Director for Evangelical Mission for our synod.

Let me draw your attention back to the Bible verses from Philippians. The work we do together, in whatever form our staffing takes, is done so we can be united in sharing our love of Jesus Christ with our neighbors. Our core values of faithfulness, respect, generosity, change, diversity, and interdependence guide how we do that. I give thanks for your partnership in mission and for the many ways we strengthen and accompany one another.

As we prepare for the synod assembly and the work we will do there (which includes electing a bishop, vice-president, and secretary) I pray we will take Paul's words to heart as we continue to serve the people of the New Jersey Synod.

Your sister in Christ,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew