



Office of the Bishop
New Jersey Synod, ELCA
God's work. Our hands.

January 24, 2025

Dear Friends,

“To love is to will the good of the other.”¹

On January 28 the church commemorates Thomas Aquinas – Italian philosopher, theologian, and teacher of the church. Born into a wealthy family, he joined an order of poor Dominicans and lived an ascetic life. His teachings, especially those bringing together philosophy and religion (reason and faith), are required reading for college and seminary students to this day.

The Aquinas quote above caught my attention as I was digging into his writings. It seems an apt sentiment as we continue to be the church Christ calls us to be across our synod. Guided by our core values of faithfulness, respect, diversity, generosity, change, and interdependence, we love God by loving our neighbor and doing that which builds up the body of Christ. Let me be clear, our call to love our neighbor does not depend on our neighbor's immigration status, sexual orientation or gender identity, economic status, education level, race or ethnicity, ability or disability, political party, or anything else that could divide us. Rather, we see each other as reflections of the face of God and labeled only as beloved.

Your sister in Christ,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

What follows are some updates about our life together:

Synod Assembly – June 5-7, 2025

The first notice with details of assembly went out in a letter to rostered ministers and congregations on January 22. You should note the cost for each voting member is \$25. Synod council designated funds to cover the majority of costs so that congregations would send their full contingent of voting members. This means the pastors, deacons, and at least two lay people from every congregation. If you send at least one person under the age of 30, you can send an additional lay person. Remember, all your lay members could be youth or young adults!

Again, this year, pre-assembly workshops on a variety of topics pertaining to our work will take place via zoom earlier in the week of assembly.

Please pay attention to registration deadlines and check the [website](#) for updates

Mission District Meetings

Every mission district will be meeting in March. Please check the [website](#) for your specific date, time, and location. These meetings are open to anyone but especially to those who will be voting members at assembly. Part of the agenda for the district meetings will be spending time in prayer and Bible study in preparation for the election of a bishop. Your prayers and your input are important parts of this process, so I hope you'll make every effort to attend.

Namibia Trip

I will be traveling to our companion synods in Namibia on February 10 for 10 days. Accompanying me will be Deacon Linda Walker and my spouse, Pastor Dan Whitener along with a small delegation from across the ELCA. We will be in Namibia for the historic installation of Bishop Hilja Ndatale-Eenyofi Nghaangulwa, the first woman elected to serve in this role. She will serve as bishop of the Eastern Diocese in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN).

We will also meet with the newly installed bishop of the Western Diocese of ELCIN, Dr Gideon Niitenge. This new leadership has expressed the desire to renew our relationships which have been on hiatus for the past number of years. It is our hope that this trip will be a catalyst for strengthening our connections to our siblings in Namibia. Please pray for our trip and the new bishops of ELCIN. Watch Jersey Jottings for a prayer petition to be used on Sunday, February 16, the day of the installation for Bishop Hilja.

Thank You!

For the calendar year 2024, mission support received was 99.34% of what was pledged – thank you! Thirty-one congregations remitted mission support above what they pledged – thank you! This demonstration of generosity allows us to do what we are called to do – love God and love our neighbors. I pray we will continue our strong commitment to being in ministry together as we move into 2025.