



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

August 24, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

As you read this letter, I am on vacation through Labor Day. For those who have been in the synod for some time, this is not a surprise, as my habit has been to take off these last two weeks of August into early September. My vacation will end with an annual gathering of Region 7 bishops and spouses over the long Labor Day weekend. I hope you have had a chance for vacation this summer or at least a time of a less intense work schedule.

I am writing to provide my reflection on the 2022 Churchwide Assembly (CWA) and to provide updates on some synod wide ministries. Reflections from the other voting members to the CWA will be shared through Jersey Jottings in the coming weeks.

CWA 2022

I am thankful to those who made themselves available to serve as voting members and those who allowed their names to appear on ballots for church council, churchwide committees, and boards of separately incorporated ministries – even if you were not elected, your willingness to participate in the wider church is a positive sign of our being church together.

Jamie Bruesehoff (St. Michael, Cherry Hill) was elected to serve on the ELCA church council and Michael Fallon, Jr. (Our Savior, Haddonfield) was elected to serve on the board of the Mission Investment Fund. Congratulations to both of you!

Please join me in thanking the voting members who served at CWA: Pastor Wendy Abrahamson (Our Saviour, Pompton Plains), Pastor Brett Ballenger (Prince of Peace, Marlton), LuAnn Barnes (Holy Trinity, Manasquan), Arundel Clarke (Prince of Peace, Princeton Junction), Pastor Ramon Collazo (Santa Isabel, Elizabeth), Pam Donovan (St. Paul, Beachwood), Alexandra Mack (Holy Trinity, Red Bank), Wayne Olsen (St. Paul, Ridgefield), Lynn Perry (Grace, Mendham), Ayla Richardson (Holy Trinity, Jersey City), Willie Richardson (Holy Trinity, Jersey City), and Pastor Blake Scalet (St. John, Summit). Several of these were replacements for people who were elected but could not attend – LuAnn on the day the assembly began.

The assembly was a holy time of being church. The spirit of joy and unity in the room was palpable in our worship, deliberations, and informal conversations. This is not to say there was uniformity of opinion on everything.

Worship each day provided time to be grounded in God's word. We experienced a variety of Lutheran worship services including a time of lament and confession, a liturgy using elements of Indigenous practices, a service of Holy Communion, and a service of Word and Prayer. We sang, clapped, danced, and kept silence. We learned some new songs and sang old favorites. We heard powerful preaching, especially on the last day from Bishop Patricia Davenport, from our neighboring Southeast Pennsylvania Synod. You can view the worship services from each day [here](#).

At the end of the first business day, Bishop Eaton issued an [apology](#) to Iglesia Santa María Peregrina, the congregation in Stockton, California that was hurt by actions of the former bishop and synod council of the Sierra Pacific Synod. This apology is a first step in repairing relationships torn apart by actions of this church. Four members of Iglesia Santa María Peregrina were present at the assembly and responded to the apology with grace-filled words. It was a profound witness of honest confession and forgiveness.

The assembly elected a new vice-president, Mr. Imran Siddiqui, from the Southeastern Synod. He will begin his six-year term on November 1. It was an exciting election as we listened to the candidates share their faith stories and hopes for the ELCA. Many of us from NJ commented on how difficult the decision was because the top three candidates all were excellent. In the end, we rejoiced with Mr. Siddiqui's election and promised to pray for him in this new role.

While we passed many memorials, resolutions, and constitutional amendments, among the most significant was one that directs the church council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church that will reconsider the statement of purpose, organizational structure, and our shared commitment to end racism within each expression of this church. The commission will report to the 2025 CWA with the potential for a reconstituting convention to be called. It has been 35 years since the ELCA began so it seems time to examine whether what served us well then still holds. I'm excited to participate in this work, especially since change is one of our synod's core values.

I could say a lot more about CWA, and probably will over the next several months. For now, it is enough to say that I am hopeful for us as the ELCA – our congregations, synods, and churchwide. The work we do together in Jesus' name is significant: worshiping God, making disciples, loving our neighbors, working for justice, serving the world. I am proud to be part of this church with you.

Synod News

Our calendars are filled with opportunities for lay leaders and rostered ministers to come together for work and play.

NJ Synod Day at Great Adventure on September 10 is sold out! When we began planning, we hoped maybe 100-150 people would attend. We sold 550 tickets before the deadline – wow! I'm looking forward to a day of fun, learning, and worship together. If you purchased tickets but won't be using all of them, please contact Dawn Roberts immediately (droberts@njsynod.org).

God's Work. Our Hands Day is September 11. Please submit pictures and stories of how your congregation observed this churchwide day of service. You can send them to communications@njsynod.org so we can include them in a future Jersey Jottings.

On the last Thursday of every month, you are invited to join others to explore evangelism faith practices with Go and...!. Pastor Maristela Freiberg hosts this online opportunity. If you haven't joined yet, you can register [here](#); if you want to view past Go and...! gatherings, they are posted [here](#).

Our anti-racism team is hosting several opportunities for learning and action using the Transforming White Privilege curriculum. Pastor Sara Lilja, and a trained team of facilitators, are the leaders. Each online opportunity is a three-session event; an in-person retreat is also being offered. Check [here](#) to sign up for the sessions that work best for you.

Excellence in Ministry Unleashed (EMU), continues to offer opportunities for congregational teams to become better stewards of their financial resources while encouraging generosity and innovation. One such offering is *Six Weeks on Money*. Congregations that complete this course are eligible for grants for new ministries. Sign up [here](#).

The Youth Ministry Mission Team is busy planning for The Synod Youth Retreat to be held November 18-20 at The Sheraton, Edison. This event is for middle and high school aged youth and their adult leaders. If you are interested in helping with the planning, contact Debra Porowski (youthmin@njsynod.org).

But wait, there's more – summer program grants totaling \$4,895 supported seven congregations in their creative outreach to children, youth, and families in their communities; a cohort of six congregations is participating in Faithful Journey to strengthen their outreach and deepen their spiritual practices; mission support is strong thanks to your ongoing generosity; the synod council will be gathering in retreat September 16-17 at Cross Roads; and Menzi Nkambule will be ordained and installed at St. Matthew, Jersey City on September 18 at 3:00 pm.

If you've made it this far in this long letter, please take a minute to offer a prayer of thanksgiving for all God is doing through this church. We have many challenges, to be sure, and it is easy to focus on those. But we belong to a God of abundance who provides more than we could ever ask or imagine. While we tend to our challenges, let us not lose sight of the amazing and abundant ways God in Christ is leading this church.

Blessings to you in these last days of August. I'll see you after Labor Day.

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tracie L. Bartholomew".

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew