



**OFFICE OF THE BISHOP**  
**NEW JERSEY SYNOD**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
*God's work. Our hands.*

Week of Advent 2

*All earth is hopeful, the Savior comes at last!  
Furrows lie open for God's creative task:  
this, the labor of people who struggle to see  
how God's truth and justice set everybody free.<sup>1</sup>*

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter, the novel coronavirus doesn't seem so novel anymore. The number of people infected and affected continues to rise, along with accompanying increases in deaths. I don't need to rehearse with you all the ways this pandemic has disrupted our routines, traditions, livelihoods, and economy but we do need to be aware of what has been exposed in this time. For some, maintaining a safe place to live is a challenge that will end with eviction. For some, keeping food on the table is a dream. For some, being employed in meaningful work is no longer possible. For others, life seems to go on as usual with bonuses and paychecks getting fatter, the stock market yielding record-breaking numbers, and personal protective equipment easily purchased. These are the two ends of the spectrum of life in the United States – desperate poverty and abundant wealth. Of course, there are many in between those extremes; those for whom life is difficult right now but not impossible.

The church is present in all of these places and we are called to reach out to those on either side of us. We work to make life safer, better, and more just so these extremes are leveled out and there is enough for all. I have seen the ways you are engaged in such work – sharing and feeding and marching and housing and advocating. Thank you!

Over these last nine months, we have been engaged in serving God's mission in the world in ways big and small. Our congregations have continued to worship (mostly online), teach the faith, work for justice and peace, serve the most vulnerable, and share the love of God in Christ Jesus with neighbors. Your generosity has made a positive difference in the lives of your community, in our synod, and across the ELCA. Because of your mission support sharing, the NJ Synod looks to end the year in a good position. We have been able to fund our spending plan, including meeting our commitments to our mission partners. Thank you!

I am writing to update you following our December 5 synod council meeting on some specifics of our life together.

### ***Prayers for those affected with COVID19***

We have several rostered ministers who have tested positive for COVID19. Some of them want to be identified in the weekly prayer list in Jersey Jottings, others do not want their situation public. In addition to these deacons and pastors, we know there are many in our congregations who are sick, recovering, or who have died from this virus. While our policy is to list rostered ministers and synod leaders in the public prayer listing, we do pray for all who find themselves in need of healing.

### ***COVID19 loans to congregations***

To date, we have approved loans for 17 congregations totaling more than \$100,000. This is but a fraction of the funds designated by synod council for this purpose. Because the pandemic has lasted longer than we first imagined, the deadline to receive applications has been extended through April 2021. The reports we received on how these funds have been used tell a story of creativity and mission outreach that is laudable. You can find the criteria for the loans and the application [here](#).

### ***Ministry partners***

We continue to support our ministry partners, including Cross Roads Camp and Seafarers and International House (SIH). We have sent additional funds to both of these partners as they face drastic decreases to their revenue streams. Cross Roads has continued to provide programming online including women's retreats, youth retreats, and weekly Sunday school for congregations across the synod. This programming will continue into the new year. SIH has not been able to host people at their guesthouse in lower Manhattan, yet the port chaplains are still making visits and serving seafarers. Another ministry partner, Lutherans Engaging in Advocacy Ministry in NJ (LEAMNJ), is hosting weekly "issue tables" every Monday at 5:30pm. You can check out the schedule and join the conversation at their [website](#). We give thanks for these ministry partners and others which serve in our name.

### ***Anti-racism work***

We continue to place an emphasis on eradicating racism in all its forms and living into our core values of diversity and respect. As part of that work, the synod council has authorized a bishop's challenge to begin at our May 2021 online synod assembly. The challenge will be two-pronged: proactive education on reparations and systemic injustice

and fundraising for the next generation of leaders of color. Be prepared to join this effort when it is launched at our assembly.

### ***ELCA partnership***

Since March, we have received several grants totaling \$50,000 from the ELCA COVID19 Relief Fund and Lutheran Disaster Response for strengthening ministry in congregations working in vulnerable communities. These grants have helped with feeding ministries, outreach programs, and evangelism efforts across our synod. Our interdependence allows us to be church together for the sake of the world and we are grateful.

### ***Christmas Celebration***

The mission developers and redevelopers from across our synod are putting together a recorded worship service that can be used for either Christmas Eve or the Sunday following. It is a full service with music, scripture, a sermon, and prayers and is a gift to you. While our celebration of Christmas will be different this year, it will be no less a proclamation of the gift that is Jesus Christ. Since we can't be together to sing on Christmas Eve, there is the suggestion that Christians across the country step outside their front doors at 8:00pm local time to play and/or sing *Silent Night* while holding a candle to give witness to what we celebrate. This sounds like something we can do together, apart.

### ***2021 Synod Assembly***

Our assembly is scheduled for May 7-8, 2021 and will be held online. Dan Egan, who has been producing our assembly for years, is already onboard and working with the staff to prepare for a meaningful assembly. Gathering under the theme "Springing Forth", we will celebrate the ministries of our synod while tending to the business before us. The first order of business will be to adopt a bylaw change regarding the makeup of our synod council. You can find notice of that on the [secretary](#) section of our website. Please watch your email and Jersey Jottings for assembly announcements.

### ***Synod office re-opening***

We have made the decision to keep the synod office closed through at least April 2021. Staff will continue to work primarily from home, though individuals may come into the office to work occasionally. Your phone calls and emails will be returned promptly. Synod meetings will take place via zoom until such a time the office re-opens. My assistants and I will not be traveling to congregations for in-person gatherings or

meetings. As has been our pattern, the staff will be off from December 24 – January 1, except for emergencies.

I am sure there is more I can say, but you've probably stopped reading already! Please know how grateful I am to you and your leaders for faithful ministry. You are in my prayers and I ask that you include me and your synod staff in yours.

May God richly bless you in these remaining days of Advent,

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

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

<sup>1</sup> "All Earth is Hopeful". Author: Alberto Taulé; Translator: Madeleine Forell Marshall.  
Evangelical Lutheran Worship #243.