



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

June 29, 2022

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am writing, as summer begins, to give some highlights about our life together and to give a preview of a couple of activities. As you read this, I am in Chicago for New Bishops' Formation, an almost week-long time for those newly elected to this office to learn what the Spirit, and their synods, have gotten them into. I get to be a part of this week every year because I am on the committee that is responsible for planning and hosting it; and I find it an important reminder of what I am called to do as a synod bishop. At the nine-year mark, I can still feel the same excitement of being called to this office as I did at my first formation event in 2013.

### Thank You!

Let's begin with good news and a word of thanks. Thanks to you, receipts for Mission Support have come in ahead of where we thought we'd be at this point in the year. This means that your generosity has surpassed what we expected – thank you! Expenses for the year have been less than planned, which means we are in good financial shape moving into the summer. My hope is that this trend will continue as we move through the year so we can imagine expanded ministries in the NJ Synod. Pastor Dean Brown and our EMU team stand ready to assist any congregation looking to strengthen their stewardship practices.

### Congregation transitions and pastoral vacancies

We currently have 28 congregations actively engaged in some step of the pastoral call process with an additional 18 being served by interim or transitional pastors so therefore not actively in the process of looking for a new pastor. These numbers keep me up at night, especially knowing some of these congregations have been in this process for several years. The reality of our situation is repeated across the ELCA. Together, we will continue exploring how God is calling us to be the church at this time. In some cases, this means a traditional call will happen; in other cases, this will mean collaborating with a neighboring congregation to share staff; in other cases, this will mean relying on ecumenical partners; and for a few, this will mean making the difficult decision to bring ministry to a close.

With all these pastoral vacancies, congregations are needing to be more creative with worship simply because we don't have enough supply pastors available. Our supply coordinator tries to ensure every congregation has an ordained supply at least once per month – which is not nearly enough for most. I appreciate those who supply on a regular basis, and I also have a plea and a prayer: if you are an ordained pastor who can offer a Sunday or two each month or quarter to supply, please contact Beth ([supply@njsynod.org](mailto:supply@njsynod.org)). If you are a congregation near a congregation without a pastor, reach out to see how you might worship together occasionally. And, if you are or know someone who is called to ordained ministry (pastor or deacon), let's talk.

## Living our faith out loud

On June 11, our synod sponsored two buses to join the March for Our Lives 2 in Washington, DC. It was a day to stand with others working to reduce gun violence in our country. Reducing gun violence is but one social issue we care about as disciples of Jesus living in the world. The ELCA has a long history of speaking a theological word to issues affecting our every day lives. You can find this church's teachings on these issues in Social Statements, Social Teachings, and Social Messages at the ELCA [website](#). Summer is a perfect time to study these documents as a congregation. As people who affirm that we are called to "strive for justice and peace in all the earth"<sup>1</sup>, these statements help us do just that.

Last week, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling on abortion which has generated strong emotions across this country and within our church; Bishop Eaton issued a [pastoral message](#) to the church in the wake of this decision. In 1991, I was serving a congregation in Lexington, VA when our social statement, *Abortion*, was adopted. Coming out of church, I had two parishioners express the opposite sentiment about that statement: I may not be able to stay in the ELCA because this statement is so liberal, said the first; I may not be able to stay in the ELCA because this statement is so conservative, said the other. Both were still members when I left to come to NJ in 1993.

I appreciate our teaching on abortion which is nuanced and recognizes there are complexities to this issue that sound bites don't convey. It takes seriously the agency of a woman to decide about ending a pregnancy and encourages that decision not to be made in isolation from a partner (when possible), a pastor, and medical personnel. While the statement may need updating to reflect the changing medical landscape, it still speaks to the reality that abortions will not be ended by any law banning them, and in fact, such laws will cause greater suffering for many. We are called to care for the most vulnerable among us, which includes those for whom this decision will have devastating consequences. Women who decide to have abortions and those who decide to carry a pregnancy to term all need our love and support.

Our Justice and Peace Mission Team provides opportunities for us to live our faith out loud by addressing social issues. We are in the process of updating that team and the work groups nested within the team. Now is your time to weigh in on what specific areas of our common life you are most interested in addressing. Please click [here](#) to watch a brief video and take a short survey that will help shape our work in the coming months.

## Looking ahead

People say that things slowdown in the church in the summer. I haven't found that to be true! The schedule may change but ministry is just as vibrant and vital in the summer as it is at any time. Congregations will host summer programs, Vacation Bible Schools, outdoor worship services, Bible studies, etc. Cross Roads Camp will provide summer camping experiences to deepen the faith of kids of all ages. Our synod staff continues to walk with congregations and their leaders. Summer is a great time to invite a friend or neighbor to join you at church.

This summer, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly will be held in Columbus, Ohio. We have a group of 12 who will join me as voting members August 8-12. Please pray for them and for the work we will do together at assembly. Visit the Churchwide Assembly [website](#) to find out more and watch the livestream.

Our voting members are: The Rev. Wendy Abrahamson (Our Savior, Pompton Plains), The Rev. Brett Ballenger (Prince of Peace, Marlton), Arundel Clarke (Prince of Peace, Princeton Junction), The Rev. Ramon Collazo (Santa Isabel, Elizabeth), Pam Donovan (St. Paul, Beachwood), Riley Jakubowski (St. Mark, Oaklyn), Alexandra Mack (Holy Trinity, Red Bank), Wayne Olsen (St. Paul's, Ridgefield), Lynn Perry

(Grace, Mendham), Willie Richardson, Jr (Trinity, Jersey City), Ayla Richardson (youth, Trinity, Jersey City), The Rev. Blake Scalet (St. John, Summit).

Mark your calendars for Saturday, September 10, and plan to join us for Synod Day! We will gather at Six Flags Great Adventure for a day of celebrating being church together – interactive displays, music, worship, and lunch. Registration is \$10/person before August 15, \$25 after. Click [here](#) to learn more. Wear your best church swag and join us -- I can't wait to see you there!

It's clear that the Spirit is up to something good in our synod. I give thanks to God for the many ways we live out our calling to be the church for the sake of the world. I give thanks to God for you.

Your sister in Christ,

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

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

<sup>1</sup> Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Affirmation of Baptism