

## 2025 2026 PARISH AND ROSTER EVENTS

### **ENTERED THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT**

The Rev. Thomas E. Dorsey	June 6, 1940 – May 5, 2025	
The Rev. Randall J. Steinman	December 29, 1955 – January 10, 2026	

### **RETIREMENT**

The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew		10/01/2025
The Rev. Karen W. Bernhardt		12/31/2025

### **ORDINATION**

The Rev. Emily F. Fatica	Prince of Peace, Princeton Junction	10/11/2025
The Rev. Jaymie R. Kosa	Prince of Peace, Princeton Junction	10/11/2025

### **ELCA CALL**

The Rev. Christa M. Compton	Bishop, New Jersey Synod, ELCA	09/01/2025
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### **CONGREGATION CALL**

The Rev. Kimberly A. Vaughn	Prince of Peace, Marlton	08/01/2025
Deacon Susan Gerrard	Abiding Love, Kendall Park	08/03/2025
The Rev. Erin Kinahan	St. John, Jersey City	08/11/2025
The Rev. Dale Newton	St. Stephen, South Plainfield	09/01/2025
The Rev. Jaymie R. Kosa	Abiding Presence, Ewing	10/12/2025
The Rev. Wendy L. Abrahamson	Atonement, Asbury Park	01/05/2026
Daniel Marrone	Holy Spirit, Manahawkin	03/01/2026

(Ordination/Installation Scheduled for 06/13/2026)

### **CONGREGATION CALL RESTRUCTURE**

The Rev. Susan Nelson-Colaneri (Part-Time)	Holy Trinity, Hasbrouck Heights	11/23/2025
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### **SYNOD COUNCIL CALL**

Emily Schreiber Fatico	Chaplain, Serenity Hospice	06/15/2025
The Rev. Sara E. Lilja	Director, NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders	07/01/2025
The Rev. Dean R. Brown	Assistant to the Bishop, NJ Synod	09/01/2025
The Rev. José Escalera (Interim Pastor)	St. John, Passaic	10/15/2025
	Good Shepherd, Weehawken	10/15/2025

### **EXTENDED SERVICE PASTORAL MINISTRY IN ACCORD**

#### **WITH THE ORDERLY EXCHANGE OF MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT**

The Rev. Gieun Lee (Presbyterian Church, USA)	Advent, Wyckoff	07/01/2025
The Rev. Adrian Deepak (Church of South India)	Abiding Love, Kendall Park	10/01/2025
The Rev. Samuel Han (Presbyterian Church, USA)	Grace, Bayonne	04/01/2026

### **END OF CALL**

The Rev. Sara E. Lilja	Assistant to the Bishop, New Jersey Synod	06/30/2025
The Rev. Christa M. Compton	Gloria Dei, Chatham	07/31/2025
The Rev. Young Kyu (Tristan) Shin	St. Luke Episcopal, Montclair	07/28/2025
The Rev. Sarah Fryman	Grace, Bayonne	08/10/2025
The Rev. Dwight Mason	St. Ambrose, Pennsville	09/28/2025
Juan Manuel Arias Perea	Good Shepherd, Weehawken	08/27/2025
The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew	Bishop, New Jersey Synod, ELCA	08/31/2025

The Rev. Dwight Mason	St. Ambrose, Pennsville	09/28/2025
The Rev. Martin Malzahn	Church of St. Paul and Incarnation, Jersey City, Episcopal Diocese of Newark	11/25/2025
The Rev. Wendy L. Abrahamson	Our Saviour, Pompton Plains	12/31/2025
The Rev. Karen W. Bernhardt	St. Paul, Millville	12/31/2025
The Rev. Jonathan Westerlund	Christ, Paramus	12/31/2025
The Rev. M. Danielle McCleary	St. Matthew, Secaucus	02/15/2026
The Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund	Messiah, Oakland	05/18/2026

**ON LEAVE**

The Rev. Dwight Mason	09/30/2025
The Rev. M. Danielle McCleary	02/16/2026

**ON LEAVE CONTINUATION**

The Rev. Laura Esposito  
The Rev. Eunyoung Kim  
The Rev. Gomes Pedro  
The Rev. Wendolyn Trozzo  
The Rev. Christine Ruth

**TRANSFER TO ANOTHER ELCA SYNOD**

The Rev. Dwight Mason	Florida Bahamas Synod, ELCA	10/30/2025
The Rev. Jonathan Westerlund	Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA	01/01/2026
The Rev. M. Danielle McCleary	Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA	04/14/2026

**TRANSFER FROM ANOTHER ELCA SYNOD**

The Rev. Dale Newton	Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA	09/01/2025
The Rev. José Escalera	Texas Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, ELCA	10/15/2025
The Rev. Christopher Mietlowski	Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA	11/03/2025
The Rev. G. Frederick Schott III	Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA	04/08/2026

**RESIGNED FROM THE CLERGY ROSTER OF THE ELCA**

Juan Manuel Arias Perea	08/27/2025
The Rev. Martin Malzahn	11/25/2025

**REMOVED FROM THE CLERGY ROSTER OF THE ELCA**

Sarah E. Fryman	09/13/2025
Young Kyu (Tristan) Shin	09/13/2025

**VICE PASTOR AND INTERIM MINISTRY**

The Rev. Moacir Weirich	Grace, Bayonne	08/11/2025
The Rev. Andrew Gordon	St. Ambrose, Pennsville	10/01/2025
The Rev. Samuel Han (Presbyterian Church, USA)	Grace, Bayonne	11/01/2025
The Rev. Paul Miller	Christ, Paramus	01/01/2026
The Rev. Charles Romanowski	Christ, Bridgeton	01/01/2026
The Rev. Kimberly Cooper	Our Saviour, Pompton Plains	01/01/2026
The Rev. Matthew Cimorelli	Redeemer, Neptune	01/22/2026
The Rev. José Escalera	Holy Trinity, East Orange	02/01/2026
The Rev. Samuel Han	Grace, Bayonne	02/01/2026
The Rev. Heather Sugden	St. Paul, Millville	02/09/2026
The Rev. J. Ignaki Unzaga	St. Matthew, Secaucus	02/16/2026
The Rev. Timothy Wengert	Our Saviour, Pompton Plains	03/09/2026

The Rev. David Stoner	King of Kings, Middletown	04/01/2026
The Rev. Kimberly Cooper	Messiah, Oakland	05/18/2026
<b>INSTALLATION</b>		
The Rev. Dr. Christa M. Compton	Bishop, New Jersey Synod, ELCA	08/23/2025
The Rev. Dale Newton	St. Stephen, South Plainfield	11/09/2025
The Rev. Kimberly A. Vaughn	Prince of Peace, Marlton	11/09/2025
The Rev. Erin Kinahan	St. John, Jersey City	11/16/2025
The Rev. Jaymie R. Kosa	Abiding Presence, Ewing	01/17/2026
The Rev. Wendy L. Abrahamson	Atonement, Asbury Park	05/07/2026
<b>SERVICE OF RECEPTION</b>		
The Rev. Gieun Lee	Advent, Wyckoff	09/21/2025
The Rev. Adrian Deepak	Abiding Love, Kendall Park	10/01/2025
<b>MISSION INITIATIVES</b>		
Summit, Camino de Vida	The Rev. Haydée Colón-Hernández	
Elizabeth, Immigrants in Detention	The Rev. Ramon A. Collazo	
Pennsauken, Casa Unida Luterana	Vicar Jason Reed/Carmen Acevedo	
Montclair, Tapestry Collective	The Rev. Margaret Ouji	
<b>HOLY CLOSURE</b>		
Union City, St. Matthew		05/10/2026

**ROSTERED LEADERS NEW TO THE SYNOD**

**Ordained for First Call in New Jersey**

Emily Fatica, Jaymie Kosa

**Received By Transfer From Another Synod**

José Escalera, Christopher Mietlowski, Dale Newton, G. Frederick Schott

**Extended Service Pastoral Ministry in Accord**

**With the Orderly Exchange of Ministers of Word and Sacrament**

Gieun Lee, Adrian Deepak, Samuel Han

**2026 ROSTERED MINISTER ANNIVERSARY REPORT**

We are blessed with many faithful servants. We rejoice with them in their many achievements through the years, and assure them of our prayers that God will continue to bless them richly with many more years of fruitful service.

**ANNIVERSARIES OF WORD AND SERVICE MINISTRY**

**Fifty-eight Years**

Robert Federwitz

**Twenty-fifth Anniversary of Ordination**

Lynne M. Rogers

**Forty Years**

George Moser, Linda Walker

**ANNIVERSARIES OF WORD AND SACRAMENT MINISTRY**

**Seventy-one Years**

Paul Strockbine, Robert Wilson

**Sixty-eight Years**

Otto Jacobson

**Sixty-seven Years**

Harvey Peters, Joseph Molnar

**Sixty-six Years**

Burton Vincent

**Sixty-five Years**

George Brand, Gordon Huff

**Sixty-three Years**

Peter DeRuiter, John Elstad, Walter Wiklund

**Sixty-two Years**

David Burke

**Sixty-one Years**

Louis Dunkle, William Hanson, Robert Kriesat

Russell McIntyre, Rudolph Schneider

**Sixty Years**

Ulrich Columbus, Richard Kitz

**Fifty-eight Years**

Jesse Houck, Daniel Leslie

**Fifty-seven Years**

Stanley Ellison, Carl Joecks,

James McKinley, Fred Schott

**Fifty-six Years**

Robert Zimmermann

**Fifty-four Years**

Richard Brunsell, Jeffrey Eaton,

Arden Krych, Frederick Schoenfeld

**Fifty-three Years**

James Egan, Margaret Krych, John Larson,

Jeffrey Rickards, David Vikner

**Fifty-two Years**

Gunnar Anderson, Richard Overcash,

E. Roy Riley

**Fifty-one Years**

Raymond Elberson, Glenn Englehardt,

Neil Jaggie, Ronald Miller

**Fiftieth Anniversary of Ordination**

D. Randolph Etwaroo, John Fischer, William McGowan, Larry McCormick, Patricia Medley

**Forty-five Years**

Jerold Nugent, Paul Rorem, Robert Mountenay

**Forty Years**

Russell Haab, Karina Ramins,

David Stoner, Pamela Werner

**Thirty-five Years**

Michael Edwards-Ronning, Cynthia Fazzini,

Robert Fritch, Julia Haspel, Linda-Sue Larson,

Gary C. LeCroy, Tiina Nummela

**Thirty Years**

J. David Knecht, Damaris E. Porsch-Ortega,

Ingrid Wengert, Linda Wood

**Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Ordination**  
Patt Kauffman, Thomas Kildea, Kent Klophaus

**Twenty Years**  
Giselle Coutinho, James Krombholz, Gomes Pedro,  
Eric Trozzo, Wendolyn Trozzo

**Fifteen Years**  
Laura Esposito, Christopher Halverson,  
Susan Jones, Beau Nelson

**Ten Years**  
Joseph Graumann, Tammy Harmer, Kathryn Irwin,  
Raymond Kolison, Katherine Steinly

**Five Years**  
Haydée Colón-Hernández, Kimberly Cooper,  
Mary Simpson-Keelan

**RETIRED MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT AND MINISTERS OF WORD AND SERVICE**

The following rostered leaders retired since our 2025 Assembly:  
The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew and The Rev. Karen W. Bernhardt

**Roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament with Retirement Status in the ELCA**

Forty-five pastors have been ordained fifty years or more (indicated by \*)

The Rev. Gunnar L. Anderson	1974 *	The Rev. Robert O. Kriesat	1965 *
The Rev. Hans Arnesen	1992	The Rev. Arden L. Krych	1972 *
The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew	1989	The Rev. Margaret A. Krych	1973 *
The Rev. David Bennett	1978	The Rev. John D. Larson	1973 *
The Rev. Barry N. Benson	1977	The Rev. Frederick L. Lentz	1984
The Rev. Karen W. Bernhardt	2014	The Rev. Daniel R. Leslie	1968 *
The Rev. George H. Brand	1961 *	The Rev. Carol A. Lindsay	1988
The Rev. Mark P. Bruesehoff	1977	The Rev. Margaret M. Marks	1985
The Rev. Richard C. Brunzell	1972 *	The Rev. William F. McGowan	1976 *
The Rev. David G. Burke	1964 *	The Rev. Russell L. McIntyre	1965 *
The Rev. Ulrich C. Columbus	1966 *	The Rev. Michael McKillip	2007
The Rev. David F. Confer	1977	The Rev. James H. McKinley	1969 *
The Rev. Daniel Congleton	1979	The Rev. Patricia S. Medley	1976 *
The Rev. Peter J. DeRuitter	1963 *	The Rev. Christopher Mietlowski	1994
The Rev. Louis W. Dunkle	1965 *	The Rev. Ronald R. Miller	1975 *
The Rev. Jeffrey C. Eaton	1972 *	The Rev. Joseph Molnar III	1959 *
The Rev. James R. Egan	1973 *	The Rev. Gladys G. Moore	1984
The Rev. Raymond J. Elbersen	1975 *	The Rev. Robert M. Mountenay	1981
The Rev. Stanley E. Ellison	1969 *	The Rev. Nancy Nardi	1998
The Rev. John M. Elstad	1963 *	The Rev. Jaye S. Newbold	2013
The Rev. Glenn Englehardt	1975 *	The Rev. Jerold L. Nugent	1981
The Rev. D. Randolph Etwaroo	1976 *	The Rev. Tiina H. Nummela	1991
The Rev. Cynthia Fazzini	1991	The Rev. Patricia P. Olausen	1988
The Rev. Triffel L. Felske	1977	The Rev. Dennis T. Olson	1984
The Rev. Charles A. Ferreri	2004	The Rev. Richard W. Overcash	1974 *
The Rev. John C. Fischer	1976 *	The Rev. Harvey S. Peters, Jr.	1959 *
The Rev. Mona Fitch-Elliott	1992	The Rev. Penelope Pusateri-Stechmann	1992
The Rev. Mary Forell-Davis	1978	The Rev. J. Paul Rajashekar	1983
The Rev. Robert W. Fritch	1991	The Rev. Karina Ramins	1986
The Rev. Janet Gasbarro	1999	The Rev. Christine R. Regan	1990
The Rev. Michael C. Gebhart	1989	The Rev. Kenneth Regan	1983
The Rev. Russell Haab	1986	The Rev. Jeffrey H. Rickards	1973 *
The Rev. William A. Hanson	1965 *	The Rev. E. Roy Riley, Jr.	1974 *
The Rev. Kathleen J. Harris	2015	The Rev. Charles Romanowski	1980
The Rev. Mary Jane Hastings	2002	The Rev. Paul E. Rorem	1981
The Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf	1979	The Rev. Nancy L. Ruckert	1992
The Rev. Jesse G. Houck III	1968 *	The Rev. Jose Israel Sanchez	1993
The Rev. Gordon L. Huff	1961 *	The Rev. Scott C. Schantzenbach	1978
The Rev. Peter Hutchinson	1999	The Rev. Rudolph M. Schneider	1965 *
The Rev. Otto W. Jacobson, Jr.	1958 *	The Rev. Glenn Schoenberger	1977
The Rev. Neil Jaggie	1975 *	The Rev. G. Frederick Schott	1969 *
The Rev. Carl E. Joecks	1969 *	The Rev. Jack Slotterback	1979
The Rev. David W. Jones	1978	The Rev. Birgit R. Solano	1994
The Rev. Richard W. Kitz	1966 *	The Rev. Christine A. Stiger	1980
The Rev. Kent R. Klophaus	2001	The Rev. Donald Stiger	1979

The Rev. David L. Stoner	1986	The Rev. Timothy J. Wengert	1977
The Rev. C. Paul Strockbine	1955 *	The Rev. Walter Wiklund	1963 *
The Rev. Mark Summer	1977	The Rev. Robert H. J. Wilms	1990
The Rev. Thomas Tomlinson	1980	The Rev. Robert H. Wilson, Jr.	1955 *
The Rev. David W. Vikner	1973 *	The Rev. Linda F. Wood	1996
The Rev. Burton H. Vincent	1960 *	The Rev. Robert Zimmermann	1970 *
The Rev. Jeffrey L. Walters	1979		
The Rev. Glenn A. Waskow	1998		

### **Retired Ministers of Word and Service with Retirement Status in the ELCA**

One deacon has been ordained fifty years or more (indicated by \*)

Deacon Eleanor Federwitz	1977
Deacon Robert Federwitz	1968 *
Deacon Carol Kasabach	1985
Deacon William A. Lawrence	2008
Deacon George W. Moser	1986
Deacon Kathryn A. Prinz	2004
Deacon Lynne M. Rogers	2001
Deacon Lindsay Shopland	1987
Deacon Linda K. Walker	1986

## NECROLOGY REPORT

Since our last Synod Assembly, the following beloved saints of this Synod have entered the Church Triumphant.

### **THE REV. THOMAS EDWARD DORSEY**

**June 6, 1940 – May 5, 2025**

**Ordained: September 29, 2002**

**Pastor: Trinity, Fairview**

**Retired: September 19, 2022**

**The Rev. Dr. Thomas Edward Dorsey** entered ordained ministry at the age of 62 following a long and distinguished career as a scientist in the pharmaceutical industry. He served 20 years as pastor of Trinity, Fairview, from September 2002 until his retirement in October 2022. While he was a New Yorker through and through – born and raised in the faith in New York City, educated in NY, receiving an MS from Queens College, a PhD from the City University of NY, and an MDiv from Union Theological Seminary, and serving a career of almost 30 years in the city – nevertheless, when God called him to serve in NJ, he served faithfully and well in the NJ Synod.



Tom was encouraged by his candidacy committee to find ways to combine his science background with his calling as pastor. And he did, in his teaching and preaching. He was proud to add his voice to the conversations in the ELCA about the blessing of same sex marriages and the full participation of partnered LGBTQ+ pastors which led to the adoption of the 2009 social statement on human sexuality. Tom was an outspoken proponent of congregations becoming Reconciling in Christ so that all people would know they are loved and welcomed in the church.

During his 20 years at Trinity, Tom served as vice pastor at more than 5 neighboring congregations when the need arose. He also served on the synod's investment committee and on the board of trustees of Lutheran Social Ministries, NJ.



### **THE REV. RANDALL JOHN STEINMAN**

**December 29, 1955– January 10, 2026**

**Ordained: July 9, 1983**

**Pastor: Redeemer, Neptune**

Pastor Steinman, born in Buffalo, NY, was a graduate of Medaille College in Buffalo, with a B.S. in Elementary Education. Before entering seminary, he was a teacher at the Longview School in NY. As a student at Trinity Seminary, Columbus, OH, Randy spent junior year as vicar at St. Peter Lutheran Church, Baltimore, MD, and earned an M. Div. from Trinity in 1983.

The congregation of Redeemer, Neptune, called Randy as their pastor and he was ordained a minister of Word and Sacrament on July 9, 1983 at St. Peter in Baltimore. Randy served his entire ministry of more than forty years at Redeemer.

In addition to parish ministry at Redeemer, Randy served as an early member of the NJ Synod LGBTQ+ Task Group, the Evangelism Resource Team Committee and was a founding partner of The Center, a support system for persons living with HIV, in Asbury Park.

Along with the congregation of Redeemer, he is survived by his sister Cindy Smith, two nephews Nathan and Mark, and one niece Natalie.



**Gloria Marie Jacobson**, spouse of The Rev. Otto Jacobson  
August 4, 1936 – June 9, 2025



**Judith K. Acer**, spouse of The late Rev. Alfred Acer  
March 26, 1947 – November 8, 2025



**Nansi Krauss**, Abiding Love, Kendall Park, and member of the Synod Council  
May 20, 1964 – November 26, 2025

**Elizabeth Peroni**, St. Bartholomew, Trenton, supply pastor coordinator and  
retired Synod bookkeeper  
December 30, 1949 – February 6, 2026



## Report of the Treasurer to the 2026 New Jersey Synod Assembly

This report summarizes the New Jersey Synod financial results for 2025. Details are available in the **2025 Financial Statements and Independent Auditor’s Report** and the **Proposed 2027 Spending Plan**.

The New Jersey Synod is 143 congregations that share the ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the state of New Jersey. Synod programs and staff are supported primarily through monetary gifts from the synod congregations. The synod staff supports the work of Lutheran congregations and missions across New Jersey. All of us together are the New Jersey Synod.

**The 2025 Spending Plan** was approved at our 2024 Synod Assembly. The spending plan supported:

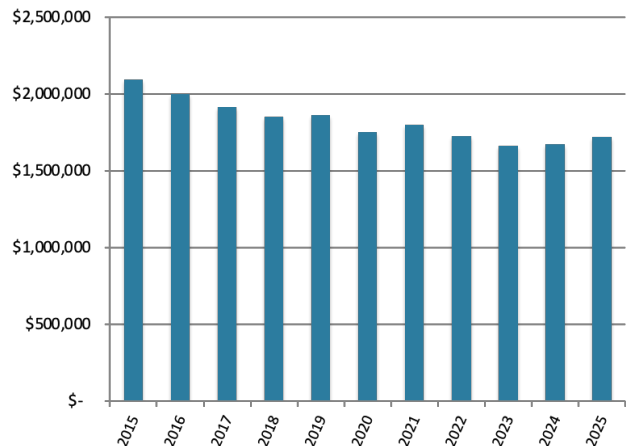
- Our synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in New Jersey
- Our ministry partners, particularly Cross Roads Camp and the United Lutheran Seminary
- Congregations and mission groups within our synod
- Candidacy, pastoral vacancy, congregational call and other synodical processes
- Youth Ministry, Continuing Education and synod action teams
- ELCA Churchwide ministries

Total 2025 spending plan revenues were \$2.03 million including \$1.72 million in Mission Support. Expenses were \$2.03 million. We ended the year with a balanced budget.

### Mission Support

Mission Support provided 85% of the money for running synod programs and office. 2025 giving totaled \$1.72 million, a \$47 thousand increase compared to the previous year. It was a \$373 thousand decrease compared to 2015, 10 years ago.

50% of Mission Support received by the synod is sent directly to ELCA Churchwide.



### Restricted Funds

In addition to the spending plan, the synod administers money designated for specific purposes such as the Fund for Mission, the Wurffel Fund, the Candidacy Endowment, the Brueckner Outdoor Ministry fund and the Our Savior Edison endowment. Each fund has a defined purpose that restricts how the money can be spent.

The money associated with these restricted funds was invested and managed by a volunteer committee that reports to the Synod Council. All fund disbursements were approved by the Synod Council and reviewed by our outside auditors. From restricted funds, the synod spent \$1.38 million during 2025.

Total restricted funds totaled \$19.82 million at the end of fiscal year 2025 compared to \$17.88 million at the beginning of the year. This 1.94 million increase was investment income, donations into the funds, and sale proceeds from Trinity Lutheran in Fairview (yet to be disbursed) minus funds spending.

The synod office also received designated gifts for World Hunger and other mission causes. During the year we received and forwarded on \$149 thousand in restricted gifts to ELCA World Hunger and other ELCA programs.

### **Balance Sheet**

The balance sheet summarizes the synod's financial condition. At the end of fiscal year 2025:

- Total Assets were \$23.40 million compared to \$22.87 at the end of the previous year.
- Fixed Assets totaled \$3.23 million.
- Total Liabilities were \$96 thousand. Of this, \$90 thousand was related to legal defense in active lawsuits.

The synod balance sheet demonstrates that the NJ Synod was financially healthy.

### **Financial Audit**

The synod retained Tait Weller & Baker, LLP certified public accountants to examine our 2025 financial transactions and to create our annual financial reports. At the conclusion of their examination the auditors expressed the opinion that the Synod's financial statements were complete and accurate. The synod Audit Committee planned the audit calendar with the goal of providing the final audit report to this Synod Assembly.

### **Governance Committees**

Thanks to the members of

- The Audit Committee,
- The Investment Committee, and
- The Fiscal Management, Administration and Property Committee

who gave generously of their time and talents to oversee the administration of Synod financial assets, resources, and properties. These committees were a key part in enabling the New Jersey Synod to advance the goals and mission of our Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Thanks to Lois Parrett who, along with other many other duties, conscientiously and faithfully executed financial processes, reconciled accounts and maintained records for our synod. The synod staff and programs would be unable to function without her dedicated efforts.

Respectfully submitted by your treasurer,

James C. Harris

### Spending Plan - Summary

New Jersey Synod of the ELCA

		Fiscal Year ended Jan 2025		Fiscal Year ended Jan 2026	
		Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget
<b>Revenues</b>					
Mission Support	\$	1,676,875	\$ 1,700,000	\$ 1,723,597	\$ 1,600,000
Restricted Fund draws		189,305	355,800	209,947	380,600
Other Income		158,907	17,000	98,367	91,200
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>2,025,087</b>	<b>\$ 2,072,800</b>	<b>\$ 2,031,910</b>	<b>\$ 2,071,800</b>
<b>Expenses</b>					
Churchwide and Ministry Partners	\$	977,041	\$ 986,500	\$ 1,004,798	\$ 943,000
Strengthening Congregations		361,427	372,427	303,337	379,742
Outreach for Congregations		72,250	142,500	115,071	142,500
Office of the Bishop		299,508	287,454	315,495	314,875
Oversight of the Mission Plan		283,388	283,136	293,209	290,910
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>1,993,615</b>	<b>\$ 2,072,017</b>	<b>\$ 2,031,910</b>	<b>\$ 2,071,027</b>
<b>Net Total</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>31,472</b>	<b>\$ 783</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 773</b>

### Balance Sheet Comparison

New Jersey Synod of the ELCA

		Balance Jan 31, 2025	Balance Jan 31, 2026
<b>Assets</b>			
<b>Current Assets</b>			
Cash	\$	3,016,413	\$ 2,832,207
Investments		16,331,705	17,070,958
Receivables		138,398	188,505
Other Current Assets		67,736	51,527
<b>Total Current Assets</b>		\$19,554,252	\$20,143,198
Fixed Assets		3,282,303	3,229,133
Mortgages and Liens		34,755	28,755
<b>Total Assets</b>		\$22,871,310	\$23,401,086
<b>Liabilities, Fund Principal, &amp; Restricted Funds</b>			
<b>Liabilities</b>			
<b>Current Liabilities</b>		\$ 1,460,817	\$ 95,899
<b>Total Liabilities</b>		\$ 1,460,817	\$ 95,899
<b>Fund Principal</b>			
290000 - Beginning Balance - Operating	\$	220,411	\$ 251,883
291000 - Net Investment In Fixed Assets		3,282,303	3,229,133
Excess Cash Received		31,472	-
<b>Total Fund Principal and Excess Cash Received</b>		3,534,185	3,481,016
<b>Restricted Funds</b>			
Total Unrestricted Funds	\$	11,042,242	\$12,877,405
Total Donor Restricted		6,834,065	6,946,766
<b>Total Restricted Funds</b>		17,876,307	19,824,171
<b>Total Liabilities, Fund Principal, &amp; Restricted Funds</b>		\$22,871,310	\$23,401,086

## REPORT OF THE SYNOD COUNCIL

This report gives account of the work of the New Jersey Synod Council at its regular meetings since the 2025 Synod Assembly (September 13, and December 4, 2025, January 31, March 21, and May 28, 2026). We give thanks to God for the leadership and faithful service of members of the Synod Council.

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Wannetta Phillips, having received sufficient number of votes, was declared elected as Member-at-Large to the Executive Committee for 2025-2026.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

#### REORGANIZATION

It was moved and seconded:

THAT the Reorganization of Synod Council Committees be adopted as presented.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

#### ROSTER CONCERN

It was moved and seconded:

The Rev. M. Danielle McCleary, who has written to the Bishop regarding roster status, be placed in the roster category of "Minister of Word and Sacrament On Leave". On Leave status began February 16, 2026.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED by email vote on 03/25/2026.)**

#### ST. MATTHEW UNION CITY

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod accepts the closing resolution of The German Evangelical Church of St Matthew in Union City and accepts responsibility for the assets and property of The German Evangelical Church of St Matthew in Union City.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED by email vote on 04/21/2026.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod may spend up to \$50,000 of synod funds toward maintaining and securing the property of The German Evangelical Church of St Matthew in Union City, these funds to be repaid from sale proceeds of this property.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED by email vote on 03/25/2026.)**

### REPORT OF THE BISHOP

#### CERTIFICATE OF INSURANCE

It was moved and seconded:

THAT the Synod Council affirm the certificates of insurance for 02/01/2025 through 02/01/2026 with Brotherhood Mutual, brokered by the American Church Group NJ.

Property and Liability: Policy number: 29M9A506115; Period: 02/01/2025 – 02/01/2026

Commercial Auto: Policy number: 29A9A505845; Period: 02/01/2025 – 02/01/2026

Work Comp: Policy Number: 29W9A0505991; Period: 02/01/2025 – 02/01/2026

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 09/13/2025.)**

## **2026 COMPENSATION GUIDELINES FOR ROSTERED LEADERS**

It was moved and seconded:

That the synod council approve the 2026 Clergy Compensation Guidelines.

It was moved and seconded to amend the section on Continuing Education as follows:

~~A pooled education fund of \$900 from the congregation and \$400 from the rostered minister will be gathered annually. The congregation will use this pooled resource to reimburse continuing education costs. Unused portions of this fund may be carried forward each year. When a rostered minister completes service to the congregation, 30% of the unused pooled fund will be returned to the rostered leader.~~

An education fund of \$1,300 from the congregation with a commensurate contribution from the rostered minister expectation.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded to further amend the section on Continuing Education:

That unused portions of this fund may be carried forward each year.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

**(The AMENDED MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

## **SUPPLY PASTOR COMPENSATION**

It was moved and seconded:

That the NJ Synod Compensation Guidelines for Supply Pastors as presented effective July 1, 2026 be adopted.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 3/21/2026.)**

## **SYNOD COUNCIL MEETING DATES**

It was moved and seconded:

That the 2025 through 2026 Synod Council (regular) meeting dates be as follows:

- Thursday, December 4, 2025, 7:00 PM (Zoom)
- Saturday, January 31, 2026, 9:00 AM (Zoom)
- Saturday, March 21, 2026, 9:00 AM (Zoom) Spending Plan
- Thursday, Pre-Synod Assembly, May 28, 2026, 7:00 PM (Zoom)
- Thursday, June 11, 2026, 7:00 PM (Zoom)
- Friday/Saturday, September 18 & 19, 2026- Retreat Cross Roads Camp and Retreat (tentative)

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 09/13/2025.)**

## **ROSTER CONCERNS**

### **ON LEAVE**

It was moved and seconded:

That The Rev. Sarah E. Fryman, who resigned her call as pastor Grace, Bayonne, be placed in the roster category of "Minister of Word and Sacrament on Leave," effective 08/11/2025, with conditions.

Espejo and States-Codding abstains

**(The MOTION FAILS 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded

That The Rev. Sarah E. Fryman, who resigned her call as pastor Grace, Bayonne, be denied the roster category of "Minister of Word and Sacrament on Leave."

Espejo, Sanchez, States-Codding, and Werner abstains

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That The Rev. Young Kyu (Tristan) Shin, who resigned as pastor of St. Luke Episcopal Church, Montclair, be denied the roster category of “Minister of Word and Sacrament on Leave.”

Espejo, Sanchez, States-Codding, and Werner abstains  
**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That The Rev. Dwight Mason, who resigned his call as pastor St. Ambrose, Pennsville, and is relocating to the Florida Bahamas Synod, be placed in the roster category of “Minister of Word and Sacrament on Leave,” effective 09/29/2025.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

The Rev. Laura Esposito, who has written a letter to the Bishop regarding roster status, be continued in the roster category of “Minister of Word and Sacrament On Leave.” On Leave status began September 18, 2020.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

The Rev. Gomes Pedro, who has written a letter to the Bishop regarding roster status, be continued in the roster category of “Minister of Word and Sacrament On Leave.” On Leave status began June 1, 2022.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

I was moved and seconded:

The Rev. Eunyong Kim, who has written a letter to the Bishop regarding roster status, be continued in the roster category of “Minister of Word and Sacrament On Leave.” On Leave status began June 1, 2023.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

The Rev. Wendolyn Trozzo, who has written a letter to the Bishop regarding roster status, be continued in the roster category of “Minister of Word and Sacrament On Leave.” On Leave status began January 8, 2024.

Trozzo abstains.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

## **RETIREMENT**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council approve the retirement of The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew, Minister of Word and Sacrament, whose term as Bishop of the New Jersey Synod ended on August 31, 2025 and has indicated her intent to seek retirement status as of 10/01/2025 as required by ELCA Constitution provision 7.41.07.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council approve the retirement of The Rev. Karen W. Bernhardt, minister of Word and Sacrament, whose is retiring as pastor of St. Paul, Millville, on December 31, 2025 and has indicated intent to seek retirement status as of January 1, 2026, as required by ELCA Constitution provision 7.41.07.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

## **SPECIALIZED MINISTRY**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council extend a call for Specialized Ministry to The Rev. Dean R. Brown to serve as Assistant to the Bishop, New Jersey Synod, ELCA, effective September 1, 2025.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council extend a call for Specialized Ministry to The Rev. José L. Escalera, to serve as Interim Pastor at St. John, Passaic, and Good Shepherd, Weehawken, effective October 15, 2025.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council affirm the following rostered leaders called to specialized ministry: Calls to Pastoral, Congregation, and Interim Parish Ministry (terms stipulated by letter of agreement)

The Rev. Glenn Boisclair, Grace, North Arlington

The Rev. Jesse W. Brown, Jr., Christus, Camden

Deacon Lawrence DePasquale, St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, Chews Landing

The Rev. J. David Knecht, Community Church, UCC, Short Hills

The Rev. B. Daniel Whitener, St. Paul, East Windsor

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council renew the call of the following rostered minister serving in specialized ministry: Calls to Chaplaincy, Hospice Care, Ministry Partner (renewed annually)

The Rev. Arnd Braun-Storck, Port Chaplain, Seafarers and International House

The Rev. Emily F. Fatica, Chaplain, Serenity Hospice

The Rev. Sara E. Lilja, Executive Director, NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders

Deacon Shirley Talluro, Chaplain, Hackensack Meridan Health Hospice

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the Synod Council formally supports the work of Bishops Bartholomew and Compton in their recent handling of roster minister disciplinary concerns on the guidance of ELCA Definitions and Guidelines.

Compton abstains

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

#### **HOUSING ALLOWANCES FOR CLERGY ON SYNOD STAFF**

It was moved and seconded:

That the synod council approve the following housing allowance designations for 2026:

Christa Compton                      \$33,000.00

Dean Brown                              \$52,000.00

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/04/2025.)**

#### **APPOINTMENT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council appoint the Mission District Deans to serve in this role. The Synod Bishop and Synod Secretary shall serve ex-officio with voice, but not vote.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/04/2025.)**

#### **FUNDS TO BE DESIGNATED**

That the Synod Council approve designating \$10,000 from the 369900 To Be Designated by Synod Council to the 325800 Camden Lutheran Ministries to support disbursement through the end of this fiscal year.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

## REPORTS OF THE ASSISTANTS TO THE BISHOP

### STRATEGIC MINISTRIES

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council authorize the following ministries that are continuing as Synod Authorized Worshiping Communities in 2026:

Casa Unida Luterana, Pennsauken led by Vicar Jason Reed as mission developer.

Santa Isabel Ministry to Immigrants in Detention, Elizabeth led by Pastor Ramon Collazo as mission developer.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council authorize the following ministries as Synod Approved Outreach Ministries in 2026:

Camino de Vida, Summit led by Pastor Haydée Colón-Hernández as mission developer.

Tapestry Collective, Montclair led by Pastor Margarette Oují as mission developer.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the New Jersey Synod Council designate the following ministries that are continuing as Strategic Ministries in 2026:

Abiding Love Lutheran Church, Kendall Park led by Pastor Adrian Deepak.

Bridge of Peace Community Church, Camden led by Pastor Giselle Coutinho.

Christus Evangelical Lutheran Church, Camden led by Pastor Jesse Brown Jr.

Emanuel Lutheran Church, New Brunswick led by Pastor Scott Rush.

Santa Isabel Lutheran Church, Elizabeth led by Pastor Ramon Collazo.

St. Bartholomew Lutheran Church, Trenton led by Pastor Erich Kussman.

St. John Lutheran Church, Passaic led by Pastor Jose Escalera.

St. Stephan's Grace Community, Newark led by Pastor Moacir Weirich.

Trinity Lutheran Church, Jersey City led by Pastor Dianne Lewis.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the Synod Council approve synodical partnership funding for the following mission initiatives in 2026:

- Bridge of Peace Community Church, Camden - \$20,000 (Camden Ministries Fund)
- Christus Evangelical Lutheran Church, Camden - \$18,000 (Camden Ministries Fund)

Sanchez abstained.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

### RECOMMENDATION (from The Mission Advocacy Table):

It was moved and seconded:

That the Synod Council approve the grant application and designate En Comunidad - Mobile Latine Ministry as a SAOM (Synod Approved Outreach Mission - New Ministry Development and Evangelism in the ELCA Christian Community and Leadership) to start when a mission developer is identified for the implementation of this initiative.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 03/21/2026.)**

**RECOMMENDATION (from The Mission Advocacy Table):**

That the New Jersey Synod Council approve funding for En Comunidad - Mobile Latine Ministry of \$55,000 for 3 years - \$40,000 from Mission on the MOVE and \$15,000 Comp Aid.

It was moved and seconded:

To amend the recommendation as follows: That the New Jersey Synod Council approve funding for En Comunidad - Mobile Latine Ministry of \$55,000 per year for 3 years - \$40,000 from Mission on the MOVE and \$15,000 Comp Aid.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 03/21/2026.)**

**(The AMENDED MOTION was ADOPTED 03/21/2026.)**

**REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

**CONSTITUTION**

It was moved and seconded:

That all required and recommended constitution provisions as presented in Exhibit C-2 be adopted and recommended to the New Synod Assembly in 2026 for adoption into the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the New Jersey Synod.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

**REPORT OF THE TREASURER**

**2025 AND 2026 SPENDING PLANS**

It was moved and seconded:

That the 2025 Spending Plan approved by the Synod Assembly be amended:

- Increase 730700 Bishop from \$141,590 to \$159,090
- Increase 615200 OSEF support for Bishop’s Office from \$105,000 to \$122,500

Rinderer and Compton Abstains

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the 2026 Spending Plan approved by the Synod Assembly be amended:

- Increase 730700 Bishop from \$144,726 to \$191,829
- Increase 615200 OSEF support for Bishop’s Office from \$135,000 to \$180,000

Compton abstains

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

**TO BE DESIGNATED FUND**

It was moved and seconded:

That the Synod Council set aside \$3000 from 369900 To Be Designated by Synod Council into the 300210 Churchwide Assembly reserve.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the Synod Council authorize the transfer \$44,000 from the 369900 To Be Designated Fund into the 325800 Camden Lutheran Ministries Fund for support of NJ Synod congregations in Camden.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 1/31/2026.)**

**AUTHORIZATION OF TREASURER JAMES HARRIS**

It was moved and seconded:

It is resolved that James C. Harris was elected treasurer of the New Jersey Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and is authorized to enter orders to purchase, sell, or short securities or other assets of every kind and description and execute all transactions for and on behalf of this Entity, and to sell, assign, and endorse for transfer certificates representing stocks, bonds or other securities now registered or hereafter registered in the name of the New Jersey Synod of the ELCA.

Rinderer abstains  
**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

**UBS CORPORATE RESOLUTION**

It was moved and seconded:

That the UBS Corporate Resolution be adopted.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 9/13/2025.)**

**2027 SPENDING PLAN FOR THE NEW JERSEY SYNOD**

It was moved and seconded:

**THAT the Proposed 2027 Spending Plan be recommended to the Synod Assembly.**

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 3/21/2026.)**

*The 2027 Spending Plan can be found Section I, Part 1 in the Bulletin of Reports.*

**NEW BUSINESS**

**RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AMAZON SYNOD, OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSION IN BRAZIL (IECLB)**

It was moved and seconded:

That the Synod Council approve designating \$25,000 from the 369900 To Be Designated by Synod Council to establish a new fund to support our companion relationship with the Amazon Synod, IECLB.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 1/31/2026.)**

**LEAMNJ MERGER WITH COALITION OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS**

It was moved and seconded:

THAT the Synod Council approve the merger of LEAMNJ with the NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders. It is expected the NJ Synod will contribute annually to support this interfaith ministry.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 03/15/2025.)**

**2026 NJ SYNOD ASSEMBLY**

It was moved and seconded:

THAT the 2026 NJ Synod Assembly be held on Saturday, May 30, 2026, at DoubleTree by Hilton Somerset Hotel and Conference Center, located at 200 Atrium Drive, Somerset.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED by an email vote 04/22/2025.)**

REPORT OF SYNOD COUNCIL COMMITTEES/TASK GROUPS

**ASSEMBLY PLANNING  
REGISTRATION FEES**

It was moved and seconded:

That the registration fees of the 2026 Synod Assembly will be set at: Voting members \$125 on-time, \$175 late; Visitors \$100 on time, \$125 late; and retired rostered ministers not serving a congregation \$65 on-time, \$80 late.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

**2026 ASSEMBLY THEME**

It was moved and seconded:

That the 2026 Synod Assembly theme be “Water and Witness” and other planning guidelines as presented.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025.)**

**AGENDA FOR THE 38<sup>TH</sup> SYNOD ASSEMBLY**

It was moved and seconded:

That the Agenda for the 38<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Synod Assembly be recommended to the Synod Assembly.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 03/21/2026.)**

*The Agenda for the 38<sup>th</sup> Synod Assembly are found in Section I, Part 1 in the Bulletin of Reports.*

**RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE 38<sup>TH</sup> SYNOD ASSEMBLY**

It was moved and seconded:

That the Rules of Procedure for the 38<sup>th</sup> New Jersey Synod Assembly be recommended to the Synod Assembly.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 03/21/2026.)**

*The Rules of Procedure for the 38<sup>th</sup> Synod Assembly are found in Section I, Part 1 in the Bulletin of Reports.*

**FUND FOR MISSION MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

It was moved and seconded:

THAT the Synod Council designate Fund for Mission grants totaling \$160,000.00 be approved for distribution.

Cari States-Codding abstains.

**(The MOTION was ADOPTED 12/4/2025)**

## NJ Synod of the ELCA: Stewardship 2026

*Stewardship is about giving to God. It is about turning total control of our lives over to God. It is about taking seriously the words that we so easily pray: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.” When we pray, “Thy kingdom come,” we ask God to rule our lives. When we pray, “Thy will be done,” we ask for what God wants to happen in our lives to take place – already, now, on earth as in heaven. ~ Mark Allan Powell, Giving to God, p. xii*

### **Living Generously Together**

Generosity and interdependence are two of our Synod’s six core values. We live out our faith in many ways – including how we offer, “...ourselves, our time and our possessions... (ELW, *Offertory Prayer*, p.107).” These acts are not only inherent to God’s grace, but they also become a blessed, powerful, and tangible witness in the world.

This is a Synod that confesses that all we know and believe is rooted in God’s merciful action in and through Jesus Christ. It also means that we are invited into that same life, and what it means to give. Thank you, NJ Synod congregations and leaders, for your commitment and your witness!

### **Stewardship as a Way of Life**

As we continue to navigate our way into God’s future, we are learning that stewardship is more than a program or pledge card – it’s a season of spiritual renewal and a way of life. It invites us to:

- Pray, plan, and inspire one another
- Encourage one another to live out of God’s abundance
- See Christ in our neighbors –and allow them to see Christ in us.

To support this, your NJ Synod encourages the following practices (a non-exhaustive list):

- **Annual Appeals:** Plan and carry out yearly appeals that not only grow financial giving, but also celebrate God’s ministry across the congregation, Synod, and wider Church.
- **Year-Round Communication:** Share stories of generosity and service through announcements, sermon illustrations and social media to show how giving makes a difference in the community.
- **Planned Giving:** Collaborate with partners like the ELCA Foundation to explore planned giving and equip congregational leadership to knowledgeably invite members and friends to make gifts through appreciated assets or other donor-specific beneficial means.
- **Electronic Giving:** Use digital platforms to make financial offerings more accessible.
- **Property Stewardship:** Consider creative, faithful ways to use church property to support mission and ministry. *For example*, in September 2024, the Excellence in Ministry Unleashed (EMU) team hosted the ‘Funding Forward’ workshop, led by Grace Duddy Pomroy of Luther Seminary’s Stewardship Leaders Program. In 2025, the ELCA added the ‘Church Property Resource Hub’ as an information resource on its webpage (<https://www.elca.org/how-we-serve/churches-and-church-leaders/property-resources>).

### **Highlights of Generosity in the NJ Synod (2025)**

- **Together** we exceeded mission support offering intentions by over \$1,000!
- **Mission Support Intentions** - 135 of 145 congregations/strategic ministries submitted mission support intentions. That’s a 93% response rate – exceptional!

- **Mission Support Participation** - 136 congregations contributed mission support, representing 95% participation – outstanding!
- **Congregations Exceeding Intentions** – 109 of our 143 congregations met or exceeded their mission support intention! 34 congregations (24%) exceeded their original mission support goals – absolutely marvelous!
- **Looking Ahead to 2026** – 138 out of 143 congregations and 3 ‘new start’ ministries have already shared their 2025 mission support intentions totaling \$1,708,100. This positions our Synod strongly to carry out the ministry initiatives affirmed at our last assembly for this year. Half of this (50%) is shared with the ELCA as Mission Support!
- **Generosity Training and Resources:**
  - Courses such as *Cultivating Generous Congregations* (Lake Institute on Faith & Giving) and *Building a Culture of Generosity* (GSB Consulting) are available to interested congregations.
  - The NJ Synod offers financial assistance to help cover the cost of these valuable programs.

## **In Gratitude**

Thank you for your continued support, participation, and promotion of this joyful work. And thanks be to God, who sets us free to live generously and faithfully.

Respectfully submitted,  
 Rev. Dean R. Brown  
 Assistant to the Bishop

## **Report of the Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM)**

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32–33, 35, NRSV)

### **Water marks us. Witness moves us.**

The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus offers a window into the heart of God’s mission among us. Two followers walk together—confused and discouraged—when the risen Christ meets them as a fellow traveler. He draws near. He listens. He opens the Scriptures. Their hearts begin to burn. And when they recognize him in the breaking of the bread, they cannot remain still; they rise at once and return to Jerusalem to bear witness.

This holy movement—*marked by grace and moved into witness*—captures the heart of evangelical mission in the New Jersey Synod. We trust in a God who draws near, walks alongside congregations and leaders, dwells with us in Scripture and prayer, and ignites hearts through the Holy Spirit for faithful witness and bold movement into God’s future.

### **Marked by Water: Remembering Who We Are**

In baptism, we are claimed by Christ before we are ever sent into the world. Across the synod, congregations and ministries are returning again and again to this foundational truth: God’s mission begins not with what we do, but with what God has already done.

Our work has centered on walking alongside congregations and leaders in their particular contexts, listening deeply for where Christ is already present and at work. Whether through mission starts, strategic ministries, congregations in transition, learning communities, or justice initiatives, a consistent guiding question remains: *Where are hearts beginning to burn, and how might we help communities name and share that fire?*

Through relationships with mission developers, strategic ministers, and congregational leaders, we have supported ministries serving immigrant communities, multiethnic and intersectional contexts, historically marginalized neighbors, and congregations navigating fragility and change. Relationships—marked by trust, prayer, and shared discernment—have been our primary strategy, rooted in the conviction that God’s mission unfolds through presence and partnership.

Ministries such as Santa Isabel Ministry with Immigrants in Detention at the Elizabeth Detention Center, Casa Unida Luterana in Pennsauken, Camino de Vida in Summit, and Tapestry Collective in Montclair embody baptismal identity through daily practices of welcome, dignity, and neighboring love. These communities bear witness that God meets people in places of confinement and transition, weaving together diverse stories, cultures, and gifts. The waters of baptism flow outward into lived relationships of trust, hospitality, and hope among immigrants, day laborers, unhoused neighbors, and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

## **Formed Along the Road: Learning Communities That Shape Witness**

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, leaders across the synod have gathered in learning communities rooted in Scripture, spiritual practice, and shared discernment. These spaces invite leaders to slow down, pause, listen, learn, and try faithful experiments as a way of responding to where God might be leading them.

Cohorts such as *Caminando Unidos en Cristo, Go And...*, *The Multiethnic and Intersectional Ministries*, and *The Saints Go* offer formation that is relational, contextual, and grounded in lived faith. In these communities, leaders grow in confidence to speak about Jesus, engage neighbors with curiosity and compassion, and lead from trust in the Spirit's movement rather than fear.

As on the Emmaus Road, Christ is often revealed not in certainty but in conversation, not in polished answers but in shared stories and broken bread. By making room for hearts to burn again, these cohorts renew joy, courage, and engage in experimentations and new awareness of God's invitation.

## **Moved into Witness: Sent for the Sake of the World**

When the disciples recognize Jesus, they do not linger. As witnesses, they are sent back into the world at once—on the road again, returning to Jerusalem.

That same movement is unfolding across the New Jersey Synod through Strategic Ministries such as Abiding Love-Kendall Park, Bridge of Peace-Camden, Christus-Camden, Emanuel-New Brunswick, Santa Isabel-Elizabeth, St. Bartholomew-Trenton, St. John-Passaic, St. Stephan Grace-Newark, and Trinity-Jersey City. These ministries embody the gospel love in concrete ways—especially among communities navigating uncertainty.

Through immigrant accompaniment, feeding ministries, language classes, and culturally responsive leadership, these communities reflect the gospel's call to welcome the stranger and proclaim hope amid fear or brokenness. Encountering Jesus leads to mission—lived through compassion, presence, creativity, innovation, and faithful witness.

## **Gratitude and Hope**

I give thanks to God for your ongoing gospel witness and for the ways God is at work in your congregations and communities. I am grateful for Bishop Compton, the synod staff, and the many partners God has gathered on this journey—from mission leaders and working groups across the New Jersey Synod to our churchwide partners, especially the ELCA New Ministry Development and Evangelism Team.

Above all, we give thanks for the risen Christ who still meets us on the road—opening the Scriptures, kindling hope, and sending the church out again. Like the disciples, may we continue to recognize Christ among us and rise to share what we have seen.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Maristela L. Freiberg (she/her/hers)

Director for Evangelical Mission & Assistant to the Bishop New Jersey Synod – ELCA

## 2026 Report of the New Jersey Synod Archivist / Lutheran Archives Center at Philadelphia



Greetings from the Lutheran Archives Center at Philadelphia (LACAP)! LACAP is the northeastern regional archives center for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The synods of region seven of the ELCA include Northeastern Pennsylvania, Southeastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Metropolitan New York, Upstate New York, New England, and the non-geographical Slovak Zion Synod. The roots of the work of LACAP date back to 1792, when the archives of the Ministerium of Pennsylvania were collected and officially recognized as an arm of the work of the Ministerium. The Ministerium of PA archives were housed and maintained at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (now ULS) starting in 1889. LACAP was incorporated in 1979 within the former Lutheran Church in America, and was a joint venture between the synods of the region and the seminary.

The materials housed at LACAP include the Ministerium of PA collection (with the original colonial journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg), archival records of closed congregations from within the region, as well as historical records from some living congregations. In addition, we house records from Lutheran agencies and ministries, and even some significant ecumenical records from the Lutheran/Catholic dialogue. LACAP publishes the *Archives Advocate*. Digital copies of this fine publication are available online at our website, <https://www.lutheranarchives.org/home>. On our website you will find a great number of other resources, including finding guides for all of our materials, and digital copies of some of our significant historical documents. LACAP is part of the “Revolutionary City” project, which is a digital portal offering examples of significant documents for the celebration of the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States. Please keep the work of our regional archives in your prayers, and we hope that you may pay a visit!

Along with other Synod Archivists (and with eight Directors at Large), I serve on the Board of LACAP. In addition, I have served as president of the LACAP board since 2011. Synod Archivists collect materials from closed congregations, and act as resource persons for congregations and individuals looking for information from closed (and occasionally, living) congregations. Personally, I have assisted a number of individuals this past year who have needed baptismal and marriage records for a variety of reasons (from those seeking “real ID” cards, to providing proof of birth for Social Security benefits, and, several years ago, we even had a case where an individual living abroad needed proof of baptism in order to inherit a hereditary title!).

This year we rejoice with six New Jersey Synod congregations that are celebrating significant anniversaries. As we have done for many years now, we will have a video celebration of the NJ Synod congregations celebrating anniversaries this year during our Assembly. I invite the congregations of the New Jersey Synod gathered in Assembly to give thanks to the Triune God for the anniversaries of the following congregations that are celebrating significant anniversaries:

**175**

First Lutheran Church, Stewartville, NJ

**100**

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lakewood, NJ

St. John Lutheran Church, Rutherford, NJ

St. Mark Lutheran Church, Oaklyn, NJ

Trinity Lutheran Church, Runnemede, NJ

**75**

Lutheran Church of the Savior, Paramus, NJ

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. Francis Watson".

The Rev. J. Francis Watson, Ph.D.

NJ Synod Archivist, and President of the Board, Lutheran Archives Center at Philadelphia

Go And...!  
Discipleship and Witness Mission Team

The Go And team works to equip congregations with tools and resources for rediscovering what it means to do evangelism in our current age. Over the last year the team has been in a place of discernment as we figure out what our next steps are and how we can best educate ourselves and others on this topic.

As a team we have been reading, reflecting on, and discussing the 2025 ELCA publication “Good News from the Margins” edited by Rev. Violet Cucciniello Little and Rev. Dr. Ruben Duran with contributions from many pastors in the New Jersey Synod. The book can be downloaded on the ELCA website <https://resources.elca.org/economic-justice/good-news-from-the-margins/> or hard copies are available through the ELCA Resource Store.

In March the Go And...! Team had the opportunity to join with Growing in Faith (Diakonia) to host their spring retreat. We had a wonderful gathering to talk about the work of our team and practice doing evangelism in tangible and accessible ways. The three workshops focused on:

- Go and Listen: focusing on the importance of listening to our neighbors as part of the work of evangelism
- Go and Pray: giving participants an opportunity to ground themselves in prayer as the foundation for doing evangelism
- Go And Tell: practicing telling stories both about our relationship with God and with our congregation to help invite people into relationships with God and Christian community

We look forward to hosting and joining pop up events around the Synod in the coming months as we continue spreading the Good News of God’s radical and inclusive love for all people.

For more information on our work or to view videos, resources, and minutes from our sessions visit our webpage: <https://www.njsynod.org/go-and>.

Thank you to Bishop Compton for her support and encouragement of our cohort and to the Bishop’s staff for answering our endless questions and need for tech support.

Go and... share the good news of God’s love for all people!

Go And... Team:

Rev. Maristela Freiberg, Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to Bishop

Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund, Go And...! Chair

Lois Parrett, NJ Synod Staff

Rev. Joe Graumann, Synod Council Liaison

Lynn Perry

Rev. Danielle McCleary

Rev. Dianne Lewis

Rev. Judy Anderson

Rev. Menzi Nkambule

## Mission Advocacy Table Report

The Mission Advocacy Table accompanies congregations as they participate in God's mission across the New Jersey Synod and beyond. In 2026, this work continues through supporting new mission starts, accompanying strategic ministries, and cultivating Christ-centered learning communities that equip leaders and congregations for faithful witness.

### New Mission Starts

Our work with new mission starts centers on resourcing, leadership development, and supporting congregations as they grow as faithful mission outposts. In 2026, the **Synod Authorized Worshiping Communities (SAWCs)** include:

- Santa Isabel Ministry with Immigrants in Detention, serving individuals held at the Elizabeth Detention Center, led by Pastor Ramón Collazo, Mission Developer.
- Casa Unida Luterana, a Spanish-language parallel mission start with Temple Lutheran Church in Pennsauken, led by Vicar Jason Reed, Mission Developer, and Carmen Acevedo, Lay Evangelist.

The **Synod Authorized Outreach Ministries (SAOMs)** currently include:

- Camino de Vida, housed at St. John's Lutheran Church in Summit and led by Pastor Haydée Colón-Hernández, Mission Developer
- The Tapestry Collective, housed at First Lutheran Church in Montclair and led by Pastor Margarette Oujj, Mission Developer.

### Strategic Ministries

The Mission Advocacy Table also accompanies and oversees Strategic Ministries, providing accompaniment, resources, and leadership development for contextually responsive ministries that engage communities beyond traditional congregational models in bearing Christ's love. In 2026, these ministries include: Abiding Love (Kendall Park); Bridge of Peace (Camden); Christus (Camden); Emanuel (New Brunswick); Santa Isabel (Elizabeth); St. Bartholomew (Trenton); St. John (Passaic); St. Stephen's Grace (Newark); and Trinity (Jersey City).

### Learning Communities

Grounded in accompaniment and shared discernment, the Mission Advocacy Table nurtures spaces where leaders and congregations are formed and transformed for the sake of the world. These learning communities gather leaders in cohorts that support congregational vitality through theological reflection, leadership formation, and shared spiritual practices, renewing the church for faithful engagement in God's mission amid changing contexts. Supported in part through the Cultivating Congregational Vitality Grant, these opportunities include:

- **Caminando Unidos en Cristo**, an online Spanish-language lay leadership

formation community for faithful witness

- **The Saints Go**, a collaborative cohort connecting Abiding Presence (Ewing), Bethany-Trinity (Jersey City), Calvary (Cranford), Grace (Mendham), and St. Matthew (Jersey City) for grow in faith, spiritual practices, and leadership development for participation in God’s mission
- **Go And...**, provides gathering spaces for relational evangelism and outreach
- **Coaching opportunities** provided through ELCA Coaches

Together, these ministries bear witness to our synod’s shared commitment to nurturing Christ-centered communities rooted in their contexts and engaged in God’s mission for the sake of the world.

### **Giving Thanks**

We give thanks to God for our mission developers, strategic ministers, and the facilitators and coaches who equip and encourage congregational vitality and leadership formation across the New Jersey Synod.

We are especially grateful for Bishop Compton’s steadfast support of mission starts, strategic ministries, and cohort work, and for the Bishop’s staff, whose excellent year-round work and support are invaluable.

We also give deep thanks to God for the Rev. Maristela Freiberg, Director for Evangelical Mission, whose leadership and passion energize our new mission starts, strategic ministries, and vitality strategies, while faithfully accompanying congregations through times of transition.

We are thankful as well for those who serve on the Mission Advocacy Table:

Pastor Judy Anderson; Pastor Chris Bruesehoff (Chair); Pastor Linnéa K. Clark (Synod Council Liaison); Pastor Haydée Colón-Hernández; William Emerson; Pastor Maristela Freiberg (Staff); Pastor Joseph Graumann Jr. (Synod Council Liaison); Willie Richardson; Pastor Heather Sugden; and Emily Thomsen.

Respectfully submitted,  
Pastor Chris Bruesehoff  
St. Michael’s Lutheran Church, Cherry Hill

## **Youth Ministry Mission Team Report 2025-26**

The Youth Ministry Mission Team (YMMT) of the New Jersey Synod continues to support youth, adult leaders, and congregations across our synod through dynamic events, faithful partnerships, and strong leadership development. This past year was full of opportunities to connect, grow, and serve together in Christ.

### **2025–2026 Youth Ministry Events**

- **Cross Roads Summer Camp** – June, July & August 2025
- **Jersey Shore Beach Day** – August 9, 2025
- **ELCA Gathering Expedition** – September 26-28, 2025
- **Rally for Cross Roads** – October 4, 2025
- **Gotham FC Soccer Game** – October 19, 2025
- **Service Project at the Farminary** – November 1, 2025
- **Synod Youth Retreat** – November 21-23, 2025
- **Cross Roads Shepherds' Gathering** – December 4-7, 2025
- **Cross Roads Young Adult Retreat** – January 2-4, 2026
- **Cross Roads Elementary School Retreat** – February 6-8, 2026
- **Youth Ministry Mission Team Retreat** – February 27-28, 2026
- **Cross Roads Middle/High School Retreat** – March 6-8, 2026
- **Faith, Hope, and Love** – April 25, 2026

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### **Jersey Shore Beach Day** – August 9, 2025

This new event was a huge success! Several churches joined us at Island Beach State Park for a beautiful day at the Jersey Shore, enjoying fellowship and sunshine together. Looking ahead, we hope to run a similar event this year that includes a service project and connection to the local community.

### **ELCA Gathering Expedition** – September 26-28, 2025

The ELCA Gathering Expedition was a regional retreat at Cross Roads designed to connect youth and adult leaders through the theme of "Faith in Motion." It served as a local bridge to the national ELCA Youth Gathering, offering a weekend of worship, small-group reflection, and leadership development. The event focused on building community and reigniting a passion for ministry within the New Jersey region.

### **Gotham FC Soccer Game** – October 19, 2025

Our outing to a Gotham FC women's professional soccer game was an absolute blast, with 40 participants gathering at Sports Illustrated Stadium to cheer on the team! The day featured a pre-game tailgate and discounted tickets provided by the YMMT, topped off with an exclusive group photo on the field after the match.

### **Service Project at the Farminary – November 1, 2025**

Our service project at the Farminary was an incredible experience, with 19 high school and adult participants gathering at Princeton Theological Seminary's 21-acre farm to explore the intersection of faith, food justice, and sustainable agriculture. It was a meaningful day of service and fellowship that allowed our youth to "dig deep" into theology and community.

### **Synod Youth Retreat – November 21-23, 2025**

The Synod Youth Retreat was held at Cross Roads, welcoming 100 participants, including youth in grades 6–12 and their adult leaders, for a weekend of worship, study, and fellowship under the theme "Embrace." We are incredibly grateful to everyone who helped plan this event and to all the participants who joined us to make this first year at camp so memorable.

### **Faith, Hope, and Love – April 25, 2026**

This year, we were excited to bring back Faith, Hope, and Love, an intergenerational event hosted in partnership with the New Jersey Synod and the YMMT. The day invited people of all ages to explore how faith calls us to respond to marginalization with active hope and compassion. Through plenary sessions and small group conversations, participants engaged deeply with critical topics including immigration, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and racial justice.

### **Cross Roads Youth Ministry Partnership**

The YMMT continued its close partnership with Cross Roads through several key events this year. We moved our annual Synod Youth Retreat to camp—a huge hit with our participants—and collaborated on the Shepherd's Gathering, the Rally for Cross Roads, and various age-specific retreats. YMMT members served in vital leadership roles for these programs and gathered at Cross Roads to plan our upcoming 2026 events. We are deeply grateful for Cross Roads' support and dedication in making our youth programming top-notch and for welcoming us to camp throughout the year.

Additionally, Anthony Briggs continues to represent Region 7 on the SYMBOL board (Synod Youth Ministry Band of Leaders) which connects what we do with the greater church.

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### **2026 Youth Ministry Mission Team Members:**

Alyssa Dan, Debra Porowski, Jess Clarke, Anthony Briggs, Helen Payanzo, Kathia Tuagben, Laura Poethke, Andi Gerard, Julia Koch, Sam Cook, Pastor Jim Kromholz, Nancy Reynolds, Jeremy Sporn, Jen Fischer, Julie Marie Seibert, Jacy & Carly Gruskowski, and Jeffrey Blanford

Look out for our **2026–2027 Youth Events Calendar**, which you can pick up at our table at Synod Assembly or find on our website! We are excited to continue to support congregational youth ministries with resources, guidance, and connection. Please reach out to us; we'd love to connect!

**Respectfully submitted,**

Alyssa Dan

Youth Ministry Mission Team

## ANNUAL REPORT OF THE N.J. SYNOD CANDIDACY COMMITTEE 2025-26

Good news is a rare commodity these days and yet I'm thrilled so many people continue to respond to the good news of Jesus Christ by discerning if ordained leadership is God's calling for their lives. Thank you for encouraging, mentoring, and supporting our candidates for Word and Sacrament (pastors) and Word and Service (deacons). Through our mutual uplifting and intentional discernment, we bear witness to the multitude of ways the good news of Jesus Christ is making love, grace, welcome, justice, reconciliation, and peace real in our world.

The members of the NJ Synod Candidacy Committee are currently: Bishop Christa Compton, Mr. Anthony Briggs, Pastor Maristela Freiberg, Pastor Haydee Colon Hernandez, Dr. Dennis Olsen, Dr. Nelson Rivera (our faculty representative from United Lutheran Seminary), Ms. Bonnie Stanley, Pastor Marc A. Stutzel (NJ Synod Candidacy Coordinator), Pastor Matt Thiringer, and Ms. Chyrl Wreh.

Bishop Compton was the chair of this committee but assumed a new role when she was elected Bishop at last year's synod assembly. As the NJ Synod Candidacy Coordinator, I (Pastor Marc A. Stutzel) am also serving as the acting chair-person. I'm also the person you should contact if you are feeling God's call towards ordained leadership or if you've recognized this gift in someone else. You can reach me at [candidacy@njsynod.org](mailto:candidacy@njsynod.org). You can also track me down during the assembly and we'll get a meeting on the calendar.

We could not do our work without the wisdom of Pastor Becky Resch in her role as Candidacy and Leadership Manager for Regions 7 and 8. There is no "one" way to do candidacy. Pastor Resch help us design the most appropriate path for each candidate.

In January of 2026 we held our annual Candidacy Retreat at Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center. This time away gives committee members and candidates and opportunity to know each other better and to learn, worship, and have fun together. This year we focused on the theme "Theological Decision Making in Times of Chaos." Drawing on our focus passage from Matthew 16:13-15, we worked on asking faithful questions during real-life scenarios congregations are facing right now.

We continue to follow the ideas emerging from the ELCA Candidacy Working Group as they work on reimagining the candidacy process. Several synods were recently identified as locations where this new process will be tried. There is currently a pause in this work as they make some faithful adjustments to what they have come up with.

Please pray for the candidates currently in the process (see attached list). It is an honor to journey with them through this process and their faithfulness, courage, honesty, and commitment to being people grounded in Good News is an incredible blessing.

Respectfully submitted,  
The Rev. Marc A. Stutzel, NJ Synod Candidacy Coordinator

N.J. Synod Candidacy Committee

**NEW JERSEY SYNOD CANDIDATES FOR ROSTERED LEADERSHIP – 2026**  
**As of January 31, 2026**

**Entranced (Word and Sacrament)**

Susan Chin  
United Lutheran Seminary  
Holy Spirit, Manahawkin

Christopher Dennis  
Grace, Somners Points

Kathleen Jacinto  
United Lutheran Seminary  
Santa Isabel, Elizabeth

Jeremy Lambson  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Georgia Salvaryn  
United Lutheran Seminary  
Redeemer, Vineland

Mark Singleton  
United Lutheran Seminary  
St. Matthew Trinity, Hoboken

Cari States-Codding  
Living Waters, Ringoes

Claudia Thompson  
Prince of Peace, Princeton Junction

Breanne Tomlinson  
United Lutheran Seminary  
Lord of Life, Tabernacle

Ronleigh Watson  
Holy Trinity, Easter Orange

**Entranced (Word and Service)**

None at this time.

**Endorsed (Word and Sacrament – not on internship)**

Sydney Mastropasqua  
Princeton Theological Seminary  
Grace, River Edge

Kim Syvertsen  
United Lutheran Seminary

Prince of Peace, Marlton  
*Internship site: Holy Communion, Berlin*

Wayne Olsen  
Wartburg Theological Seminary  
St. Paul's, Ridgefield

**Endorsed (Word and Service – not on internship)**

None at this time.

**Currently on Internship (Word and Sacrament)**

**Currently on Internship (Word and Service)**

[None at this time.]

**Approved for Ordination (Word and Sacrament)**

Daniel Marrone  
Princeton Theological Seminary  
Good Shepherd, Holmdel  
*Internship Site: St. Paul's, Glenside, PA*

Jaymie Kosa  
United Lutheran Seminary  
St. Paul, East Windsor  
*Internship Site: Trinity, Robeson, PA*  
*Accepted a call: Abiding Presence, Ewing*

Jason Reed  
Wartburg Theological Seminary  
St. Paul's, Hainesport  
*Internship site: Temple, Pennsauken, NJ*

**Approved for Ordination (Word and Service)**

[None at this time.]

**Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM)**

Kenneth Bassett  
United Lutheran Seminary  
*Site: Holy Trinity, Wildwood*

Vincent Piekarski  
United Lutheran Seminary  
*Site: Holy Spirit, Villas*

Philip Scherzer  
United Lutheran Seminary  
*Site: Prince of Peace, Rockaway*

**Pastors Ordained in Another Lutheran/Christian Church Body (OTTR)**

Rev. Kasana Akridge  
St. Paul, Ridgefield

Rev. Ann Weinberg  
Trinity Church, Livingston

**Reinstatement to the Rolls**

None at this time.

Respectfully submitted by The Rev. Marc A. Stutzel, NJ Synod Candidacy Coordinator

## Coaching Ministry

The New Jersey Synod has an active coaching roster of coaches available to support rostered leaders, lay leaders, congregation councils and/or specific teams. Our coaches are trained in discipleship, mission and end of life specialties.

Coaching is an intentional relationship where you work on what you want to accomplish. Coaches help individuals and groups to discern their goals, grow in leadership, and experience transformation as they listen and ask the deep questions.

Coaching is built on the belief that you already have what you need to get started. Coaches assist in keeping you focused on what is important as you work toward your goals with measurable steps.

You are invited to learn more on our page on the New Jersey Synod website. Check out our posted video! Learn more about specific coaches as you view their individual videos of introduction.

The New Jersey Synod has a roster of 17 trained coaches.

In 2025

- Two coaches went on official status of in-active
- Seven coaches maintained coaching relationships
- 18 individuals were served
- 1 team and 2 congregation councils were served
- 182 hours of coaching were received

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Dr. Wendy L. Abrahamson  
Synod Coordinator for Coach Ministry

## Communication

### Sharing Jesus one reel at a time

The good news of Jesus Christ is a story designed to be shared. Your experience of Jesus might be exactly what your neighbor needs to hear. The NJ Synod is committed to helping you be the body of Christ in the world by sharing Jesus with everyone in your neighborhood.

*Jersey Jottings* is the weekly newsletter prepared by the Synod Office. Get the latest news from the synod and discover how congregations all over New Jersey are making a difference. Hundreds of people receive this email every week. Visit <https://www.njsynod.org/stay-connected>

Are you using Social Media? Don't leave the synod assembly without following the New Jersey Synod. You can find us on:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NJSynodELCA>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/njsynodelca/>
- Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/NJSynodELCA>.

### Looking to enhance your congregation's communication?

Here are some of the tools we recommend you use for your own ministry. If there is another service you are having great success with, please let us know!

- 1) You are creating content every week. Share it via a weekly email newsletter using MailChimp (<https://mailchimp.com/>). If people on your email list are opening your email anywhere in the 40%-50% range, you're doing great.
- 2) Looking to create graphics for social media? Think about using Canva (<https://www.canva.com>). Canva provides free pro-accounts to non-profits (including churches!) To get a pro-account for your church, you will need your tax status documentation. You can get that by sending an email to [501c3@elca.org](mailto:501c3@elca.org) with your church's legal name, full street address and 9-digit Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN). The ELCA's office of the Secretary will send you back 3 pdfs. Combine those pdfs into 1 file and use that document to apply for a Canva pro account at <https://support.canva.com/account-basics/nonprofit-program/apply-for-nonprofit/>.
- 3) Make sure to reach out to your local community newspapers. Regularly send them photos and press releases about what's happening at your church three weeks in advance.
- 4) Use the sign on your building and regularly update your message.
- 5) Create a robust permission form to let children be in your photos. Ask permission and let folks opt in or opt out.
- 6) Think through how people are communicating with you. Your weekly email newsletter will be viewed on a smartphone so focus on upcoming events and bite-sized ways to build someone's faith. Your monthly printed newsletter should contain long-term plans and longer faith formation materials. Social media posts should encourage engagement in ways specific to your community (i.e. making worship last throughout the week, enhancing your prayer ministry, food pantry, why Jesus, etc).

- 7) Be mindful not everyone is online. You can use Zoom to create a conference call so people can listen to your worship each Sunday. Mail a bulletin and sermon to someone at home, they are worshiping with their entire faith community!
- 8) Shortform video content is important. Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, and TikTok are driving the conversation across all ages. Short videos can showcase the content you're already doing. Clip part of the sermon, a selection from the choir, and a prayer you share you're already showing on livestream. Partner with folks within the congregation to create 60 second videos that are funny or faithful or descriptive of what you're doing. A short video about why you run a food pantry, knit prayer shawls, make hygiene kits, visit those in prison, or why different groups are in your building can make a big impact. Don't worry about going viral. Do your part to share the story of why we get to do what we do (i.e. Jesus, grace, and faith).
- 9) Social Media algorithms are constantly changing as the big businesses behind them reinforce whatever their corporate and political goals happen to be that week. Don't chase the algorithm. Instead always be faithfully authentically yourselves. Feel free to embrace the block and delete button for comments that are harmful. Shake the dust off your feet and move on.
- 10) All your communication should sound like you. Don't chase trends or trust AI as a magical fix. Make sure all your communications (livestream, TikTok, Instagram, website, emails, and branding) sound like you. If you're looking for a church that does this well, check out St. Stephen's Woodbury: <https://www.ststephenselca.org/>.

**Looking to upgrade your communications game? You don't have to figure these things out on your own!**

- Faith-Lead (by Luther Seminary): <https://faithlead.luthersem.edu/>
- Digivangelism: <https://digivangelism.org/>
- Virginia Synod: <https://vasynod.org/resources/digital-ministry-toolbox/>
- Church Communications: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/churchcomm>

**Need some inspiration? Check out what these communities and people are doing:**

- Instagram: Messiah in Oakland <https://www.instagram.com/messiahOaklandnj/>; Holy Trinity, Manasquan [https://www.instagram.com/HolyTrinity\\_Squan](https://www.instagram.com/HolyTrinity_Squan); St. Stephen's, Woodbury <https://www.instagram.com/ststephensnj/>
- Facebook: St. Bartholomew, Trenton <https://www.facebook.com/stbartholomewlutheran>; Camp Cross Roads <https://www.facebook.com/CrossRoadsRetreat>; St. Michael's Cherry Hill <https://www.facebook.com/SMLCCH>; Good Shepherd, Glen Rock <https://www.facebook.com/GoodShepherdGR>
- Church website: St. John's, Summit <https://www.stjohnssummit.org/>; St. Mark's Oaklyn <https://www.stmarksoaklyn.com>; Holy Cross, Toms River <https://holycrosslutherannj.com/>; St. Paul's, Jersey City <https://www.stpaulsjerseycity.org/>

Need help with your congregation's communication? Contact Rev. Marc A. Stutzel at [pastormarc@clc4u.com](mailto:pastormarc@clc4u.com).

Submitted by Rev. Marc A. Stutzel

## **COMPENSATION AID TASK FORCE REPORT FOR 2025**

Since its establishment at the 1994 Synod Assembly, the Compensation Aid Task Force has received \$1,622,103.05 from legacy gifts, congregations, and individuals of the NJ Synod. In addition, there was \$47,046.73 of net investment gains for the year.

2025 Receipts: A total of \$5,712.96 was received. This includes contributions from one pastor and 8 congregations.

2025 Disbursements: \$29,583.25 in grant money was given to three congregations.

2025 Balance: \$549,529.40

This fund was established to supplement the compensation of pastors receiving a salary of 20% or more below Synod guidelines and assist retired pastors whose pension income is inadequate. Over the years, it has also been used to help first-call pastors reduce student loan debt.

Along with processing applications for grants and consulting with congregations that apply, the Task Force encourages congregations to contribute to the Compensation Aid Fund an amount equal to 1% of their pastor's "Defined Compensation" as determined by the ELCA's pension and health plan. Eligible congregations and pastors are invited to contact the office of the Bishop or Pastor James Egan for more information. Thanks to Lois Parrett, Synod bookkeeper, for assisting the Task Force by recording receipts and disbursements.

Thanks to the congregations of the Synod and individuals who have contributed over the years and to congregations that have directed a legacy gift to the fund. Your generous sharing has made it possible to lessen the financial stress of those in the ordained ministry.

Respectfully Submitted,  
*The Rev. James R. Egan*  
Chairperson

## Section 1: Amendments to Required Provisions

### Chapter 6. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

†S6.04.02. It is the goal of this synod that at least 10 percent of the voting members of the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, committees, and organizational units of this synod be members of historically underrepresented groups, in addition to the 10 percent representation of persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in †S6.04. The Synod Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal.

### Chapter 7. SYNOD ASSEMBLY

†S7.21. The membership of the Synod Assembly, of which at least 60 percent of the voting membership shall be composed of laypersons, shall be constituted as follows:

- .....
- b. Lay voting members shall be elected by each congregation or its council as follows: A minimum of one lay member elected ~~by~~ ~~from~~ each congregation with fewer than 175 baptized members and a minimum of two lay members elected ~~by~~ ~~from~~ each congregation with 175 or more baptized members ~~related to this synod~~, typically one of whom shall be a man and one of whom shall be a woman, ~~shall be voting members~~. The Synod Council shall establish a formula to provide additional lay representation from congregations on the basis of the number of baptized members in the congregation. The Synod Council shall seek to ensure that, as nearly as possible, at least 45 percent of the lay members of the assembly shall be women and, as nearly as possible, at least 45 percent shall be men.

†S7.21.02. If a special Synod Assembly is called and voting members at the previous assembly are unable to serve as voting members, where permitted by state law, the congregation ~~through the Congregation Council~~ ~~or its council~~ may elect new members who shall continue to serve until the next regular Synod Assembly.

†S7.25. Except as otherwise provided in this constitution or in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, each voting member of the Synod Assembly shall be a voting member of a congregation ~~or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community of this synod~~.

### Chapter 8. OFFICERS

†S8.21. The vice president shall be elected by the Synod Assembly. The vice president shall be a layperson. The vice president shall be a voting member of a congregation ~~or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community~~ of this synod. The vice president shall not receive a salary for the performance of the duties of the office.

†S8.31. The secretary shall be elected by the Synod Assembly. The secretary shall be a voting member of a congregation ~~or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community~~ of this synod. The secretary may be either a layperson or a rostered minister.

†S8.41. The treasurer may be elected by the Synod Assembly or may be appointed by the Synod Council. The treasurer shall be a voting member of a congregation ~~or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community~~ of this synod. The treasurer may be either a layperson or a rostered minister.

- †S8.51. The terms of office of the officers of this synod shall be as follows:
- .....
- c. The treasurer of this synod shall be [elected] [appointed] **[elected or appointed]** to a term of \_\_\_\_\_ years and may be [re-elected] [reappointed] **[re-elected or reappointed]**. The treasurer shall serve until a successor takes office.
- †S8.52. The terms of the officers shall begin on the first day of **[ (name of month) ]** [the **(ordinal number)** month] following election or, in special circumstances, at a time designated by the Synod Council.
- †S8.53. Each officer shall be a voting member in a congregation **or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community** of this synod, except that the bishop need not be a member of a congregation of this synod at the time of election.

**Chapter 10.**  
**SYNOD COUNCIL**

- †S10.01. The Synod Council, consisting of the four officers of the synod, **and** 10 to 24 other members, **and** at least one **young adult youth** ~~and~~ **with a goal of** at least one **young adult youth**, shall be elected by the Synod Assembly.
- a. Each person elected to the Synod Council shall be a voting member of a congregation **or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community** of this synod, with the exception of ministers on a roster of this synod who reside outside the territory of this synod. The process for election and the term of office when not otherwise provided shall be specified in the bylaws. A member of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, unless otherwise elected as a voting member of the Synod Council, may serve as an advisory member of the Synod Council with voice but not vote.

**Chapter 11.**  
**COMMITTEES**  
**(names of other organizational units)**

- †S11.11. This synod shall in its bylaws or by continuing resolution establish a process to ensure that the members of its committees and other organizational units will be persons possessing the necessary knowledge and competence to be effective members of such units, and to meet the requirements of †S6.04. With the exception of ministers on the rosters of this synod who reside outside the territory of this synod, each member of a committee of this synod, or any other organizational unit created by this synod, shall be a voting member of a congregation **or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community** of this synod.

**Chapter 13.**  
**CONGREGATIONS**

- †S13.01. Each congregation, except those certified as congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by the uniting churches, prior to being listed in the roster of congregations of this synod, shall adopt the *Model Constitution for Congregations* or one acceptable to this synod that is not in contradiction to the constitution and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- .....
- c. **Recognition and reception.** Recognition and reception **of additional congregations** into this church ~~of transferring or independent congregations by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is based upon the judgment of the synod that the congregations satisfy the criteria of 9.21. and 9.25. is based on the judgment of the synod and action by the synod through the Synod Council and Synod Assembly.~~ The synod bishop shall provide for prompt reporting of such additions to the secretary of this church for addition to the roster of congregations.
- 1) **Recognition and reception of congregations newly formed by this church is accomplished by action of the Synod Council.**
  - 2) **Recognition and reception of transferring or independent congregations is accomplished by the action of the Synod Assembly upon the recommendation of the Synod Council.**
    - a. **If a congregation is a member of another church body, the leadership of the congregation first should consult with the appropriate authorities of that church body before taking action**

- to leave its current church body. After such consultation, leaders of the congregation should contact the synod bishop or synod staff in this church where the congregation is located.
- b. The synod bishop or synod staff where the transferring or independent congregation is located shall confer with the congregation to assure its understanding and acceptance of commitment to and affiliation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**Chapter 14.**  
**ROSTERED MINISTERS**

- †S14.12. Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
- a. Every minister of Word and Sacrament shall:
- ....
- 8) speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, proclaiming God's love for the world, advocating dignity, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, and embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations.
- †S14.18. The provisions for termination of the mutual relationship between a minister of Word and Sacrament and a congregation shall be as follows:
- ....
- d. In the case of alleged local difficulties that imperil the effective functioning of the congregation under paragraph a.3) above, the bishop's committee shall endeavor to hear from all concerned persons, after which the bishop together with the committee shall present their recommendations first to the pastor and then to the congregation. In the bishop's sole discretion, the bishop's committee may also present, as may be appropriate, either a report or report summary to the pastor and to the congregation together with the recommendations. The recommendations of the bishop's committee must address whether the pastor's call should come to an end and, if so, may suggest appropriate severance arrangements. The committee may also propose other actions that should be undertaken by the congregation and by the pastor, if appropriate. If the pastor and congregation agree to carry out such recommendations, no further action need be taken by the synod.
- †S14.32. Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, every minister of Word and Service shall:
- ....
- c. Speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, proclaiming God's love for the world, advocating dignity, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, and embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations;

**Chapter 17.**  
**CONSULTATION AND ADJUDICATION**

- †S17.02. The synod bishop and the Executive Committee of the Synod Council shall receive expressions of concern from rostered ministers of this church, congregations, and organizations within this synod; provide a forum in which the parties concerned can seek to work out matters causing distress or conflict; and make appropriate recommendations for their resolution. When a concern relates directly to the synod bishop, the synod vice president will lead the Executive Committee's efforts at resolving the matter. When the matter at issue cannot be resolved in this manner, applicable procedures for investigation, decision, appeal, and adjudication shall be followed. Allegations or charges that could lead to the discipline of a rostered minister of this church shall not be addressed by the Executive Committee but shall be resolved through the disciplinary process set forth in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.

**Chapter 18.**  
**AMENDMENTS, BYLAWS, AND CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS**

- †S18.12. Whenever the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America officially informs this synod that the Churchwide Assembly has amended any non-required provision of the Constitution for Synods, this constitution may be amended to reflect any such amendment by a majority vote at any subsequent meeting of the Synod Assembly without presentation at a prior Synod Assembly. An amendment that is identical to a provision of the *Constitution for Synods* shall be deemed to have been ratified upon its adoption by this synod. The Church Council, through the secretary of this church, shall be given prompt notification of its adoption.
- †S18.13. Other amendments to this constitution may be adopted by this synod through either of the following procedures:
- a. Introduced with the support of at least \_\_\_\_\_ voting members and having been approved by a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting at a regular meeting of the Synod Assembly, an amendment may be adopted-ratified unchanged by a two-thirds vote at the next regular meeting of the Synod Assembly.

**Section 2: Provision Reclassified from Non-Required to Required**

**Chapter 10.**  
**SYNOD COUNCIL**

- †S10.0809.01. To the extent permitted by state law, meetings of the Synod Council and its committees may be held through electronic means such as the Internet or by telephone, as long as there is an opportunity for simultaneous aural communication or its equivalent, electronically or by telephone conference, and To the extent permitted by state law. ~~Notice of all meetings may be provided electronically.~~

**Section 3: Provisions Reclassified from Required to Non-Required**

**Chapter 1.**  
**NAME AND INCORPORATION**

- ‡S1.21. The seal of this synod is *(describe)*.

**Chapter 9.**  
**NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS**

- ‡S9.02. In all elections by the Synod Assembly, other than for the bishop, a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election.

**Chapter 11.**  
**COMMITTEES**  
**(names of other organizational units)**

- ‡S11.04. The ~~A~~ Mutual Ministry Committee shall be appointed by the Executive Committee of the Synod Council to provide support and counsel to the bishop.

## Section 4: Amendments to Non-Required Provisions

### Chapter 7. SYNOD ASSEMBLY

S7.26. This synod may establish processes through the Synod Council that permit persons currently serving as synod-authorized ministers and/or lay representatives of authorized worshiping communities and/or outreach ministries of the synod, which have been authorized under ELCA bylaw 10.01.04., to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with †S7.21.

### Chapter 9. NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

S9.04. The bishop shall be elected by the Synod Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot. If no one is elected, the first ballot shall be considered the nominating ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election. The third ballot shall be limited to the seven persons ~~(plus ties)~~ who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the second ballot, and two-thirds of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the three persons ~~(plus ties)~~ who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the third ballot, and 60 percent of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. These ballots shall be limited to the two persons ~~(plus ties)~~ who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the previous ballot.

### Chapter 10. SYNOD COUNCIL

S10.05. ~~No e~~lected members of the Synod Council shall not receive compensation solely for ~~such their~~ service as council members.

~~S10.06.~~ No person related to a synod staff member shall be eligible for nomination to or membership on the Synod Council [or the following synod committees: \_\_\_\_\_]. For this purpose, a related individual is one who, with respect to the synod employee, is a spouse, parent, son, daughter, sibling, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, including corresponding members of blended families and in-laws (parent, son, daughter, or sibling of a spouse, spouse of a sibling, or the parent or sibling of the spouse of a sibling).

~~S10.0607.~~ If a member of the Synod Council ceases to meet . . . .

~~S10.0708.~~ The composition of the Synod Council . . . .

~~S10.0809.~~ *Robert's Rules of Order*, latest edition, shall govern . . . .

### Chapter 13. CONGREGATIONS

S13.40. **Synod-authorized Worshiping Communities and Outreach Ministries**

S13.41. ~~Authorized worshiping~~ **Worshiping** communities and outreach ministries, authorized by the synod and acknowledged under criteria, policies, and procedures approved by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, shall accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose of this church, shall be served by leadership under the criteria of this church, and shall be subject to the discipline of this church.

## **2025 REPORT OF THE FISCAL MANAGEMENT, ADMINISTRATION, AND PROPERTY COMMITTEE (FMAP)**

NJ Synod's Constitution provides a guiding principle for the mission of FMAP: *"Since the congregations, synods, and churchwide organization are interdependent expressions that share in God's mission, all share in the responsibility to develop, implement, and strengthen the financial support of the whole church. The gifts and offerings of the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are given to support all parts of this church, the unity in this church should be evidenced in determining each part's share of the gifts and offerings."*

The core values of our individual members, congregations, the NJ Synod, the ELCA and the church worldwide are dependent on the physical and financial resources necessary to carry out our missions and ministries. FMAP's responsibility as a committee reporting directly to the NJ Synod Council is to carefully monitor and manage our financial resources and assets to help optimize the success of the Synod's and its individual congregations' ministries while adhering to the values to which we all ascribe.

A critical function of the FMAP Committee each year is to develop and recommend a spending plan for the upcoming fiscal year. On March 6, 2025 the committee met to discuss and approve an initial 2027 spending plan to be submitted to Synod Council and ultimately to be presented at Synod Assembly for approval. Jim Harris, Treasurer (Faith, Hillsborough), with input from Synod staff, was instrumental in developing the initial plan. Recent history over the last several years indicates that the spending plans recommended by the FMAP Committee have accurately forecasted the financial results and needs of the individual ministries and needs of the Synod.

A total of 4 FMAP regular quarterly meetings were also held via Zoom in 2025 (March 6, May 22, September 4 and November 20) to monitor and manage financial and property issues throughout the year. *The specific actions undertaken by FMAP and approved by Synod Council are detailed in the consolidated minutes of the NJ Synod Council meetings found in the Bulletin of Reports.*

The duties of the committee extend beyond the fiscal responsibility of monitoring and managing the finances and creating a spending plan for the following year. In fact, some of the most important tasks of the committee are working with individual congregations in need of support. Examples include:

- Manage the Transformational Ministry Loan program to help congregations meet needs for improvements to their facilities and grow their ministries (managed by Jill Weidner, Good Shepherd, Somerville). During 2025, loans were approved to Holy Counselor Lutheran in Sussex and Faith Lutheran in Hillsborough.
- Provide consultation for physical improvements required by individual congregations that need assistance. Glenn Rentschler, St. Paul, East Windsor is Property Director who manages the North and South Property Managers. Congregations are generally responsible for cost of improvements.
- Manage the properties of congregations that have closed and facilitate their sale. Manage the distribution of sale proceeds according to the wishes of congregations. Jim Harris, Synod Treasurer, manages the sale of church buildings in addition to his financial management responsibilities.

A significant number of volunteer and staff hours are required for the financial management of the NJ Synod and the above related tasks. Much gratitude is due to the committee members and the synod staff who, through the work of the FMAP committee, serve and support our Synod through the faithful management of the synod's finances and property matters (see list of Committee members below). We especially want to acknowledge Lois

Parrett (Financial Accounting & Office Manager) who works closely with our Treasurer, and we welcome our new Bishop, The Rev. Dr. Christa Compton for her leadership and insights.

Committee Members:

The Rev. Dr. Christa Compton (Bishop), The Rev. Dean Brown (Asst. to Bishop), Jim Harris (Synod Treasurer, Faith, Hillsborough), Lois Parrett (Director of Synod Operations and Accounting, Abiding Presence, Ewing), Steve Hernandez (Faith, Lavallette), Gerry Lauro (Advent, Wyckoff), Rev. Gary LeCroy (St. Matthew Trinity, Hoboken), Jill Weidner (Good Shepherd, Somerville), Wannetta Phillips (Prince of Peace, Rockaway), Rev. Jim Krombholz (St. Paul, Edison), Jamie Howie (Zion, Egg Harbor City ), Glenn Rentschler, (Property Director, St. Paul, East Windsor), Phil Greene (Property Manager North, St. Paul, East Windsor), Matt McDevitt (Property Manager South, Temple, Pennsauken)

Respectfully submitted,  
Skip Cox, FMAP Chair (St. Paul, East Windsor)

## **Report of the New Jersey Synod Fund for Mission**

The New Jersey Synod Fund for Mission is an endowment fund providing resources for mission-related projects of the New Jersey Synod that might otherwise go unmet. Begun with proceeds from the sale of former LCA church properties, it continues gratefully to receive and faithfully to invest funds granted to it from bequests to the Synod. Grants are made, ranging from 3% to 6% of the corpus annually (4.6% in 2025). The Fund's Management Committee receives and evaluates proposals from Synod program units, mission clusters, congregations, officers and Synod Council and makes recommendations to the Synod Council for funding. Special categories in the fund are reserved for Music Grants in support of the development of church musicians and for Handicap Accessibility.

These criteria guide us: (proposals need not meet every criterion):

1. The proposed program shall be one that could not normally be funded by the operating budget of the Synod or ELCA Churchwide Ministries, or by the agency for whom the grant is sought. (Frequently the committee responds to the need represented by finding other appropriate funding sources.) One grant application per ministry will be considered annually. In support of our core value of interdependence, applicants are expected to share some mission support during the year.
2. Preference is given for:
  - initiating new mission ventures: providing seed money and/or leveraging other funds for mission.
  - projects having a direct relationship to the urban character of the Synod.
  - projects that are inclusive with regard to color, language, ages, and sex of persons.
  - projects that address the needs of the disadvantaged, especially the poor, mentally and physically challenged, and the powerless.
  - projects that enable the Synod to develop new ministries to meet needs occasioned by societal change.

Grants approved for 2025/2026 projects totaled \$160,000 and were in support of applications for Synod Council Mission Initiatives, Advocacy/Social Justice, Discipleship and Evangelism, Hunger Ministries/Outreach, Music Ministry, Property/Renovation/Technology Upgrades and Youth/Family Ministry-Related Applications.

Management Committee members can assist those interested in preparing a grant application. The submission deadline is September 30th. Payment is made following Synod Council approval. Grant recipients are requested to evaluate their respective projects for report to the Fund for Mission Management Committee by June 1 of the year following receipt of the funds.

Thanks to all the members of the Management Committee for their wise guidance in the stewardship of this Fund. We are indebted to Bishop Christa Compton for her leadership, Treasurer James Harris for his invaluable work and report of it, and to LuAnn Barnes, Administrative Assistant and Confidential Secretary to the Bishop for her excellent assistance in preparing our minutes and correspondence!

Respectfully Submitted,  
The Rev. Dr. Patricia S. Medley, CHAIR

The Rev. Gunnar L. Anderson (Living Waters, Ringoes)  
The Rev. Haydee Colon-Hernandez (St. John, Summit)  
The Rev. Daniel Fields (Grace, Perth Amboy)  
Eric Kim (Holy Trinity, Red Bank)  
The Rev. Jane McCready (Faith, New Providence)  
The Rev. Patricia S. Medley (Good Shepherd, Holmdel), LEADER  
Joan L. New (Prince of Peace, Princeton Junction)  
LuAnn Barnes, Recorder, Staff  
The Rev. Dr. Christa Compton, Bishop  
James Harris, Treasurer, Ex-Officio  
The Rev. Maristela L. Freiberg, ELCA Director of Evangelical Mission, Advisor

## **Cross Roads 2025 Annual Report to the New Jersey Synod of the ELCA**

**OVERVIEW:** Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center is a ministry of the New Jersey Lutheran Synod and the Episcopal Diocese of Newark. It is, in essence, *your* camp, though its hospitality extends beyond the Synod and the Diocese, welcoming campers and retreatants of all ages and from diverse communities, including church and unchurched. We are celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and are thrilled to celebrate 25 years of helping people of all ages grow deeper in their faith and broader in their understanding of what it means to be beloved of God.

**PROGRAM:** Cross Roads' programming is one of its greatest strengths. There are summer camps for children and youth of all ages, day camps, and family camps. All of the camps encourage exploring faith and relationship with God in ways that are fun and exciting and meaningful. There are retreats, some offered by Cross Roads, such as the Women's Retreat and the Confirmation Retreats, and others hosted but the programming is done by the guest congregation or group. There are events, such as the monthly Wednesdays Away, a themed day of spiritual renewal for anyone who's interested, and The Shape of Leadership, a leadership development program for clergy. For parishes that need some support with children and youth formation, there's FaithSource, a collaboration with Luther Crest, an ELCA camp in Minnesota.

**FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT:** As is true with many parishes and other organizations we rely heavily on your generosity to fund our ministries. We are grateful to all who provide financial support, including the gifts we receive from the New Jersey Synod and the Diocese, from the Bishops' offices, parishes and congregations, and the members of those parishes and congregations. We rely heavily on grants and the fundraising events organized by our Development council. It is this combination of sources and the prudent fiscal management of our Executive Director, Anthony Briggs, and his staff that enables us to keep tuition and fees affordable, scholarships available, and our aging building and grounds in good shape. We were excited to complete renovation of one of our shower houses in time for the 2025 camp season, though perhaps not as excited as the campers were to use it!

**STAFF:** The staff, under Anthony's leadership, is key to the success of the ministry. There is a small year-round staff and a larger summer staff, all of whom are passionate about Cross Roads' mission and share their love of God in all that they do. A major focus of Anthony's leadership is to develop the leaders of the future, both for Cross Roads and the wider Church. One of our goals for 2026 is to find ways to increase the pay scale so that we can continue to attract the same level of staff excellence into the future.

**BOARD:** The Board meets regularly, with a combination of in-person and online meetings. In addition to the full Board meetings, a number of standing and ad hoc committees meet to work on specific program areas and projects. We continue to be challenged in identifying new Board members and would appreciate your prayers and willingness to serve, if you feel called to this ministry.

Cross Roads is YOUR camp. We invite you to visit the campus and the website: [crossroadsretreat.com](http://crossroadsretreat.com) for more information about how a deep and abiding faith in God is lived in this ministry. And as always, we are grateful for your support in prayer, in service, and in faithful giving.

Submitted by The Rev. Paula J. Toland, Board President

*Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey;  
I'll tell everybody about you wherever I go:  
you alone are our life and our peace and our love.*

*Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.*  
Les Petites Soeurs de Jésus and L'Arche Community. "Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song."  
Evangelical Lutheran Worship, 2006, #808, v. 1

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace to you and peace as you meet in synod assembly. I write to you with greetings from my Candidacy Team Colleagues on Churchwide Staff and my home synod of New Jersey.

The ministry of Candidacy is one of accompanying, evaluating, and assessing the readiness of people who discern a call to pastoral or diaconal ministry. Each synod has a committee that does this confidential and prayerful work on behalf of the whole church. The committee includes clergy and lay members, a seminary representative, and synod staff or Bishop. Your synod has a committee that has met in the past year to do this work. You can read more about their ministry elsewhere in this bulletin of reports. I have the honor of working with these committees in the northeast and mid-Atlantic as they listen to candidates, ask questions, and consider how God is calling people to serve.

In 2022, a Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group (CLDWG) was convened to start reenvisioning candidacy ministry in the ELCA. Since my report to you a year ago, the work of this group has changed. After years of surveys, planning, and dreaming, the work has shifted from the CLDWG to churchwide staff to begin the rollout of a launch for a new candidacy process. Of the 65 synods in the ELCA, 10 are "candidacy launch synods" who will be working with applicants and candidates in these next few years under a newly proposed candidacy process. These launch synods will also provide valuable feedback so that a new candidacy process can be finalized for the whole church.

**Main elements of this new candidacy process include:**



Accompanier with candidates throughout the process



Discernment as a more intentional and robust time prior to meeting for an Entrance Interview



Annual Reviews with candidates instead of an Endorsement



Competency based emphasis for meeting milestones throughout candidacy



Continuing to honor both MDiv and Certificate pathways for candidates

Synods that are not "candidacy launch synods" will continue with the current candidacy process until 2028 or 2029 when we anticipate a rollout of the new candidacy process across the ELCA.

While we continue in the ministry of accompanying and assessing potential deacons or pastors in the ELCA, we appreciate your prayers. The church needs leaders who are equipped, called, and prepared to serve the church. If *you* are sensing a call to serve as a deacon or pastor in the ELCA, please contact your synod staff person for candidacy for further conversation.

In Christ,

The Rev. A. Rebecca Resch (she/her)  
Candidacy and Leadership Manager, Regions 7 & 8  
becky.resch@elca.org

Region 7: ~ New Jersey Synod ~ New England Synod ~ Metropolitan New York Synod ~ Upstate New York Synod ~  
~ Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod ~ Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod ~ Slovak Zion Synod ~

Region 8: ~ Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod ~ Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod ~ Allegheny Synod ~  
~ Lower Susquehanna Synod ~ Upper Susquehanna Synod ~ Delaware-Maryland Synod ~  
~ Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod ~ West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod ~



# CHURCH PROPERTY RESOURCE HUB

Resourcing Faith-driven Church Property Stewardship

A project of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the **Church Property Resource Hub** was built in response to requests from synod and local church leaders, to support them in navigating the challenges and opportunities that buildings and land represent for both congregational vitality and the wider mission of the church.



## COURSES & RESOURCES

Find **resources** and expand your knowledge of church property management through templates, guides, explainers and **courses**.



## SUPPORT FORUM

Share advice and get support from colleagues with experience answering property management questions, all on our digital **forum** (forthcoming).



## SUCCESS STORIES

Be inspired by **success stories** of faith communities using underutilized space in exciting new ways to fulfill their mission.

## Why Is the Church Property Resource Hub Being Developed?

The Church Property Resource Hub (CPRH) was created **in response to questions and needs voiced by synods and congregations** regarding the use, management and support of church-held property. Our congregations find themselves with buildings and land that no longer fit their need for programming or their capacity to manage them. This has spurred urgent conversations at local and synod levels about the future of church property. There was no centralized hub collecting the information and wisdom congregations need to **faithfully steward buildings and land** for both congregational vitality and mission impact. The ELCA churchwide organization is addressing this need by equipping congregation and synod leaders with the expertise that will empower congregations to continue to steward their buildings and land as a witness to the gospel through the Church Property Resource Hub.

Sign up for **“Church Property Resource Hub Newsletter”** for the latest news and resources.



## The Church Property Resource Hub is ...

... an online platform that connects congregations and synod leaders to information, organizations and guidance on effective, faith-driven management of church property. It includes how-to lessons for the many aspects of property stewardship, stories of congregations that have found creative solutions to property challenges, and a network of professionals who can answer questions and partner with congregations and synods.

The resource hub is **built for synod and local church leaders, to help them navigate the challenges and opportunities that buildings and land represent.** The hub offers advice and experience for churches in a variety of contexts across the United States, from urban centers to suburban areas to rural and small-town communities. The Church Property Resource Hub is a growing initiative that will be completed by 2028, though the first, most basic version was launched in August 2025.

## The Church Property Resource Hub is NOT ...

... an attempt by the churchwide organization to take control of congregations' property. Local churches hold the title and deed to their property; their right to make independent decisions about the use, management and future of their property is codified in the ELCA constitution and churches' individual constitutions.

... an attempt by the churchwide organization to bypass synods' relationships with their congregations. The resource hub is being built **in collaboration with synod leaders** and equips them to **assist and guide congregations** that approach the synod with ideas, questions or concerns about property stewardship.

## Who leads the Church Property Resource Hub?

The Church Property Resource Hub is led by the **Rev. Sarah Jones** (program director), **Deacon Sarah Kretschmann** (digital communications manager) and the **Rev. Tim Brown** (director of congregational stewardship). This team is reaching out across the ELCA, our sibling denominations and the many organizations and businesses that focus on church property, to collect, curate and disseminate information that synods and congregations need. Please reach out with your questions!



## ELCA Federal Credit Union

Faithful financial services for ELCA members and ministries



The ELCA Federal Credit Union (ELCA FCU) provides a full range of financial products and services to members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA. **As the first of the ELCA's financial ministries to offer loans to individuals**, the Credit Union offers savings and checking accounts, CDs, loans and lines of credit, credit cards, home mortgage loans for purchases or refinances, as well as home equity loans and lines of credit.

**The ELCA FCU serves ministries** through federally insured deposit accounts, a flexible corporate credit card program, auto loans and unsecured ministry loans up to \$100,000 to support smaller projects such as building repairs and purchases. In addition, the Workplace Banking program allows ministry organizations and congregations to offer ELCA FCU Credit Union products and services, along with other exclusive perks, to their employees.

A new cohort joined the ELCA's Resourceful Servants program, **designed to improve financial wellness and assist rostered leaders in building emergency savings funds**. Through this matching program, ELCA rostered leaders make ongoing deposits to their Credit Union emergency savings accounts. The Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA matches those deposits up to an established amount. Together, more **than 700 rostered ministers** have been served, collectively depositing more than \$1 million in emergency savings.

A **strong online presence** means members have access to funds with an ELCA Federal Credit Union Mastercard Debit Card at more than 30,000 surcharge-free ATMs. The ELCA FCU also offers account-to-account (A2A) transfers, person-to-person (P2P) payments (similar to Venmo and Zelle), remote deposit, bill pay and more.

### Why choose the ELCA Federal Credit Union?

- **The ELCA Federal Credit Union supports the ELCA's mission of good stewardship.** We provide full services to all ELCA members, congregations and related ministries.
- **As a not-for-profit financial cooperative chartered to serve our church, we offer socially responsible banking solutions often priced more competitively** than traditional banks. We have demonstrated success in providing savings to our members.
- **With the church as our sponsor, we operate in ways that are consistent with the church's values.**

**Membership is open to every ELCA member, synod, congregation and ministry—and their employees.**

**For more information about the products and services of the ELCA Federal Credit Union, please visit our website, [elcafcu.org](http://elcafcu.org) or call us toll-free at 877-715-1111.**

## Growing in Faith: The diakonia Program

This year has been another exciting one for Growing in Faith Program. The national board of Growing in Faith is working on continuing education classes for graduates and current students. We are hoping to offer Introductory Greek, Living Out Our Baptismal Promise, Living in a Multi-Religious World, First Testament Prophets and Gospel and Letters of John and Other Early Gospels this summer via Zoom. These classes will include students from across the country

Our local steering committee held our annual Gathering on March 7, 2026. This year's program featured the Synod Go And team. The team showed us how we can live our baptismal promise by being Equipped, Ignited, and Empowered. We would like to thank Rev. Maristella Freiberg and her team for a fascinating and informative day. In addition, we would like to thank the congregation of Good Shepherd, Somerville for hosting our program.

Our local committee continues to work on getting all of our new materials translated into Spanish so that all of our groups across the country can offer classes in Spanish. We would like to thank Rev. Damaris Porsche-Ortega for helping us with the translations.

As a non-profit, self-supporting organization, we continue to try to balance the desire to expand our offerings while attempting to keep our programs affordable for the most students. We would also like to thank all of the instructors and volunteers who help make our lay education program a success. Anyone seeking more information about Growing in Faith may visit our booth at the assembly or email us at [ellen.lindemann@raritanval.edu](mailto:ellen.lindemann@raritanval.edu).



## **Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey 2025 Report New Jersey Synod 38<sup>th</sup> Assembly**

LSMNJ's diverse programs served more than 2,400 individuals through senior living, affordable housing, hospice, and home care. The organization is compelled by grace to serve those who hurt, who are in need, and who have limited choices.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS**

**Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey** assists people of all ages, backgrounds, and faiths. The organization cares for some of the most disadvantaged, indigent families and seniors, as well as seniors in need of healthcare, home care, and hospice care services. Throughout 2025, LSMNJ continued its commitment to helping those with immediate needs while also keeping a strategic eye on the future through construction projects, program advancement, and employee engagement.

#### **Crane's Mill**

- ❖ Crane's Mill maintained a steady bond rating, as reported by Fitch, solidifying its financial stability and reliability.
- ❖ Crane's Mill was distinguished by Newsweek as one of America's Best Continuing Care Retirement Communities of 2025.

#### **Lutheran Senior LIFE**

- ❖ Lutheran Senior LIFE, already well established in Jersey City and serving Hudson County, is preparing to serve Union County residents through its new Programs for the All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) site in Plainfield. The construction phase of the project is complete, and we look forward to opening in May 2026.
- ❖ Lutheran Senior LIFE at Jersey City continues to provide all services at its day center. In addition, services continue to be provided to participants in their homes, if they cannot attend the center due to their chronic medical conditions. The center continues to provide breakfast, lunch and frozen meals for our participants.
- ❖ Pastor Glenn, the LIFE Chaplain, continues to play a vital role by providing spiritual support at the center and by visiting homes and communicating through video chat.
- ❖ Lutheran Senior LIFE at Jersey City partnered with the Jersey City Division of Aging in creating and completing an "Aging in Place" Survey aimed at improving accessibility, affordability, and comfortability for seniors within Jersey City. This survey will be translated into data which will be presented to the City Council.
- ❖ Lutheran Senior LIFE at Jersey City in collaboration with the Jersey City Division of Housing donated undergarments to the division's annual back-to-school drive, in addition to school materials.

#### **Journey Hospice**

- ❖ Journey Hospice expanded its volunteer program across all locations, enhancing companionship, respite, and patient support.
- ❖ Journey Hospice strengthened community engagement through initiatives such as Veterans Café, National Healthcare Decisions Day, and Senior Center presentations.
- ❖ Journey Hospice offers counseling services by licensed therapists, guided by physician and Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) recommendations, to support patients, families, and

- caregivers through end-of-life challenges. In adherence to the new regulatory standards, qualified counseling professionals were hired and onboarded.
- ❖ In northern New Jersey, in-services on "navigating the healthcare maze" in senior centers were conducted.
  - ❖ Bereavement Support Groups have been offered in multiple areas as well as virtually by our Hospice Chaplains.
  - ❖ The **LSMNJ Foundation** reported 23 churches throughout the state and 5 affiliated church groups were supportive partners in 2025.
  - ❖ The ELCA's grant of \$75,000 came to a conclusion in 2025 helping to construct the Lutheran Senior LIFE facility serving Union County. This is a Program for the All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly.
  - ❖ LSMNJ spearheaded the Easter Dinner Drive in partnership with three congregations, collecting \$1,394 in donations to benefit residents and families in affordable housing. In addition, St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Cherry Hill provided \$900 to ensure our families in Camden enjoyed a Thanksgiving Feast.
  - ❖ LSMNJ completed the management services agreement with **SpiriTrust Lutheran**, in which LSMNJ assumed management oversight of SpiriTrust Lutheran, allowing it to continue its work in Central Pennsylvania.
  - ❖ The Great Place to Work Institute and its senior care partner, Activated Insights, have again for the sixth year in a row honored Lutheran Social Ministries of NJ with a certification as a Great Place to Work.
  - ❖ LSMNJ was named a Certified Age-Friendly Employer by the Age-Friendly Institute. This accolade holds a special place in our hearts as it is the nation's only certification program dedicated to identifying organizations that are genuinely committed to being exemplary workplaces for employees aged 50 and above. Being acknowledged in this way reinforces our ongoing dedication to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all our team members, regardless of age.

#### **PEOPLE SERVED IN 2025**

LSMNJ served 2,480 people and outreached to 6,826 individuals as part of the many programs and services it provides across the state. The lives of New Jersey residents were improved through community services such as; Immigration Legal Services – 330 served, Journey Hospice – 475 served, and SpiriCare at Home – 75 served. 1,020 qualified NJ residents lived in LSMNJ Affordable Housing properties; 471 seniors received residential and health services through Senior Healthcare and Retirement Living programs; and 9 adults with mental health needs lived in specialized long-term housing. Through the gracious efforts of 101 individual volunteers and 89 groups, 5,838 volunteer hours were provided in support of LSMNJ's mission.

#### **MORE ABOUT LSMNJ**

Learn more about us at [www.lsmnj.org](http://www.lsmnj.org). Stay connected with us through social media on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube. If you would like to sign up to receive e-newsletters and other correspondence from LSMNJ, please sign up at <https://www.lsmnj.org/stay-connected/e-newsletter>.



## The Mission Investment Fund: Helping ELCA congregations bring ministry to life



The Mission Investment Fund (MIF), a *financial services ministry of the ELCA*, has been a **steady and reliable financial partner** for congregations, ministries and individuals for more than 150 years. Through times of growth and uncertainty alike, MIF has remained committed to strengthening ELCA ministries and communities — delivering customer-first support backed by flexible financing solutions.

In 2025, MIF continued to support ministry growth across the ELCA. Your investments helped expand worship spaces, rebuild congregations after fires and natural disasters, provide spaces for people to age with dignity, start green projects and support accessibility remodeling for community spaces. Each project strengthens ELCA ministries, ensuring that they stay vibrant, inclusive and fully prepared to support the communities they serve.

### By the numbers:

- **Total Loans Outstanding:** \$614,967,000
- **Total Assets:** \$779,189,000
- **Total Investment Obligations:** \$551,452,000
- **Net Assets & Capital Ratio:** 27.4%

### What makes MIF unique?

- **Proven stability:** With more than a century and a half of experience, MIF has weathered changing economic and political landscapes, maintaining financial strength for ELCA ministries.
- **Deep expertise in church and ministry financing:** We understand the unique needs of faith communities and have longstanding experience in congregation and ministry building projects.
- **Competitive rates and terms:** Our financial offerings are structured to support ministries of all sizes.
- **A full suite of financial services:** In partnership with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, we provide a range of financial solutions for congregations, ministries and individuals.
- **Faithful stewardship:** Investments in MIF directly support loans that fund hundreds of capital projects across the church.

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MIF continues to enhance our tools and financial services to better support ELCA ministries. And even as we look ahead with fresh vision and innovation, our foundation remains the same: enduring trust, time-tested stability and commitment woven through generations. In every chapter, we journey with ELCA members and ministries, united in faith — a steadfast partner supporting God’s work in the world.

### *MIF at work in the New Jersey Synod (as of December 31, 2025):*

- 8 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$2,407,186
- \$10,340,194 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations.

**For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, [mif.elca.org](http://mif.elca.org) or contact Deacon Jerry Johnson, Regional Manager: 773-682-5954 [jerry.johnson@elca.org](mailto:jerry.johnson@elca.org)**



This has been an exciting year! The NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders has successfully merged with the Lutheran Advocacy Office. In July, I officially became the first Executive Director of the NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders (NJCLR).

We have had successes and challenges, as to be expected, in this first year.

Successes:

- We received our 501(c)3 designation as a new organization in the State of NJ
- We drafted and adopted the By-laws for the organization
- We elected the first Board of Directors and Elected officers
- We have a strong Board that is dedicated to each other and this organization
- The Coalition's committees are staffed and beginning their work
- We successfully merged data from the Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry with the NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders. We are now building our Action Network.
- Every member of the Coalition was contacted by phone during the fall and invited to the General Meeting in December
- We hosted a General Meeting that focused on Care of Creation. The Rev Dr. Laurel Kearns was the keynote speaker, and leading advocates from NJ spoke on specific issues facing our state
- We met with the new Faith Action Center Director and the Lieutenant Governor to build a strong working relationship.
- We organized an advocacy campaign partnering with Green Faith to get the Climate Super Fund bill moving through the legislature
- And we advocated for four other bills to get to the Governor's Desk during the Lame Duck Session focusing on immigration protections
- We launched the "Yes In God's Back Yard" legislation for Religious and Educational Institutions to use their land and property for Affordable Housing. We participated in a press conference and have gotten a strong champion in the Senate to be the sponsor of the legislation
- We are partnering with the Institute for Social Justice to launch a "Souls to the Polls" campaign here in NJ to support voter turnout
- We are building advocacy campaigns to increase TANF funding and raise the minimum benefit level for SNAP recipients. We are also working with the Governor's office to put funding into the 2027 budget that would permanently fund a program to support women with feminine hygiene products and diapers

#### Challenges:

- We realized that many of our members had personal relationships with the former Coordinator of the Coalition (he is now deceased), so we need to rebuild these connections
- The Chair of the Board decided to run for Governor as a write-in candidate. The Board asked him to step away from his role while he was running for office
- The Vice Chair of the Board passed away after an illness in March
- The Treasurer received significantly more responsibility at his current position because of the new Pope's election, so he asked to be replaced. We have brought a new treasurer into the position and are working through the transition
- Our website is being rebuilt and this is a considerable effort for the organization

Despite these issues, we continue to move forward in faith, with a clear commitment to the importance and necessity of the Coalition's Interfaith work in New Jersey.

Thank you for your continued support as we continue to grow this new organization!

The Rev. Sara Lilja, Executive Director  
NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders

## *Policy Priorities- 2026*

### **“Yes in God’s Backyard”**

[Senate Bill 1836](#): The "Yes in God's Backyard" (YIGBY) act in New Jersey, sponsored by State Senator Troy Singleton, is legislation designed to allow faith-based organizations and non-profits to convert underutilized land into affordable housing. The proposal aims to ease zoning restrictions and expedite approvals to address the state's housing crisis, typically requiring at least 20% of units to be affordable.

### **Minimum benefit increases for TANF and SNAP**

TANF benefits in New Jersey have fallen behind inflation, with a maximum monthly cash payment for a family of three at \$559 as of early 2026. We are advocating for this benefit to be increased. To learn more [click here](#).

New Jersey provides a minimum monthly SNAP benefit of \$95 for all eligible households, even while food prices continue to rise. Because of the federal HR1 decision, NJ has been required to implement strict work requirements, pay more of the administrative costs for SNAP and make it necessary for recipients to reapply for benefits. This life supporting program must be strengthened!

The state sponsored a pilot project in 2025 to provide a small amount of assistance to women for hygiene products and diapers (\$30 a month for diapers and \$10 a month for hygiene products). The pilot project was a huge success, we are advocating that this program be implemented statewide, and funding be made permanent.

### **Community reinvestment act**

[A5957/S4694](#)- We are working with NJ Citizen Action to move the state toward establishing a stricter state-level Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) via Bill A5957/S4694, targeting lending gaps in low- and moderate-income (LMI) communities. This proposed law would expand oversight to nonbank lenders, credit unions, and online institutions, requiring them to meet the needs of persons with low and moderate incomes. It would require all lending institutions to reinvest back into underserved communities with affordable housing and small business loans.

### **Voting Rights**

[S282/A1715](#), The “John R. Lewis Voter Empowerment Act of New Jersey” this legislation reinforces the need for voter protections by requiring that all election-related statutes, rules, and regulations favor voter participation. It also addresses critical issues such as voter suppression, intimidation and violence, and the right to pursue legal action against discrimination. Among other issues, this bill empowers voters who may feel disenfranchised and makes sure their ballots are cast and counted without unnecessary obstacles.

### **Souls to the Poles**

We are partnering with the Institute for Social Justice to promote voting and turnout in the next election.

### **Climate Justice**

[A3735/S3545](#)/ “Polluters Pay to Make New Jersey More Affordable Act,” is the primary legislation to push in NJ to hold large fossil fuel companies financially responsible for climate change adaptation, targeting \$50 billion in payments from major polluters to fund infrastructure projects and reduce costs for residents.

President Amy Palazzolo, Vice President Glynis ReidMegargel.  
Treasurer Linda Benitz, Secretary - open

The NJ Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (NJWELCA) is the women's ministry organization of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). It is separately incorporated and is not an auxiliary of the church. It is financially independent and responsible for its own financial affairs. Financial support comes from individual and group offerings and gifts.

The NJ Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America NJWELCA Business Meeting was held in person on Friday, September 26rd 11th at 7:00 p.m., with the Annual Gathering the following day on Saturday, September 27, 2025.

The NJ WELCA Business meeting were held elections for Officers and Board Members. The Board for 2026-29 is as follows; President Amy Palazzolo, Vice President Glynis ReidMegargel, Treasurer Linda Benitz, & Board Members Valerie Slack, and Wannetta Philips.

Zoom studies continues, which includes Bible Study and Workshops to be held generally on the Third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. Our Bible Study in 2025 will be lead by Linda Benitez and will follow the study in the Gather magazine. Please see our webpage [NJWELCA.NET](http://NJWELCA.NET) for details.

The following events are scheduled for 2025 and we are hoping your women's group will attend and encourage your participation.  
Please visit our webpage for more detailed information.

**Thankoffering Services were held.**

March 7, 2025 @ 10:00 A.M., followed by luncheon and workshop on "Wellness" At Calvary Lutheran Church, Cranford, NJ

April 18, 2025 @ 10:00 A.M., followed by luncheon and workshop on "Conflict resolution" at St Ambrose Lutheran Church in Pennsville, NJ

**Annual Gathering**

Our annual Gathering is Saturday, September 26, 2026... no convention business this year. Final details on our location is being finalized and will be announced shortly. Our theme is "A Future Filled With Hope" based on Jeremiah 29:11-12.

All women are invited and encouraged to attend our events. Our aim is to build fellowship and friendships among our Church's and congregational women's groups.

Please contact Amy Palazzolo on 862-284-4094 or email [Palahem1@aol.com](mailto:Palahem1@aol.com) for questions or more information.

# Your Calling + Our Benefits

## Portico Benefit Services' Report to 2026 Synod Assemblies

Your calling is to serve. Ours is to support you. As the ELCA's benefit ministry, Portico provides benefits that nurture holistic health, so you can live out your calling and serve with confidence and grace. Here's a visual recap of what our community of more than 52,000 plan members experienced in 2025.

**52K**  
Members  
Served by  
Portico



**2,829**

**Text/Virtual Health Care Visits**  
to 98point6<sup>®</sup>, with an estimated cost savings of \$263 per visit.



**205**  
Births &  
Adoptions

**11th**

**Consecutive Year**  
of our Customer Care Center being named a Center of Excellence by Benchmark Portal.



**619**  
Changes  
of Call\*

**1,702**

**Sword Health Enrollments**  
and nearly 42K total sessions in their Thrive, Move, and Bloom digital physical therapy and mobility programs.

**\$157K**  
**Debt Paid Off**  
by members via LSS of Minnesota Financial Counseling, with over \$2.6M paid off since 2008.

**16%**

**of Member Income**  
saved for retirement, on average, by members sponsored in the Traditional Benefits Program, thanks to employer and member contributions.\*

**\$232M**

**Made in Annuity Payments**  
and 533 retirements.

**4,214**

**Members Worked with a Portico Financial Planner,**  
with a cumulative 95.5% satisfaction rate.\*



**32**  
Beginning  
Disability Benefits



**Nearly 10% of Our 10K ELCA Medicare-Primary Plan Members**  
participated in the SilverSneakers fitness program.\*

**1,927**  
**Members Made Roth After-tax Contributions**  
to their retirement plans.

We design our benefits to align with the needs of the church, pooling resources through a community benefits plan to deliver stable, sustainable support that enhances everyday life and brings value to those who serve. Follow us on social media @PorticoBenefits.

\*Source: Traditional Benefits Program. All other numbers and percentages are drawn from across Portico's benefit programs.



# ReconcilingWorks

LUTHERANS FOR FULL PARTICIPATION



*Since 1974, ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation has advocated for the full welcome, inclusion, and equity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual/aromantic (LGBTQIA+) Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their Church, congregations, and community.*

## Resources to Begin your Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Journey

[reconcilingworks.org/ric/becomeric/](https://reconcilingworks.org/ric/becomeric/)

- How to Become Reconciling in Christ (RIC)
- Faith Community Assessment Survey
- Building an Inclusive Church (BIC) Toolkit
- Reconciling in Christ Frequently Asked Questions
- "We're Already Welcoming, Why Do We Need to Say So?"
- Living the Journey - RIC Video Vignettes
- Online Trainings
- ReconcilingWorks eStore



Reconciling in Christ

## Resources to Set New Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Milestones

[reconcilingworks.org/resources/](https://reconcilingworks.org/resources/)

- Resources for Liturgy, Preaching and Worship
- Deepening & Expanding Worship: A Worship Planning Supplement
- Lutheran Guide to Advocate for LGBTQIA+ People in Church and Society
- Online Trainings
- ReconcilingWorks eStore

## Preparing for PRIDE Season

[reconcilingworks.org/purchase/](https://reconcilingworks.org/purchase/)

- PRIDE Worship Service
- PRIDE Parade Guide
- Apparel and Swag
- Buttons & Pins
- Temporary RIC Tattoos
- Banners



# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

## HIGHLIGHTS Seafarers International House

### MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: A Homecoming for Prisoners of Hope

*Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.*

Zechariah 9:12

Dear friends of Seafarers International House (SIH):

In February 2024, a report released by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that refugees and asylees have generated tens of billions of dollars more in local, state, and federal tax revenues over the last 15 years than they have cost in direct government services — ultimately representing a net fiscal gain at all levels of government. (See text box for details.)\*

And yet, throughout 2025 and especially today, many refugees and asylum seekers are being threatened with deportation and imprisonment. As SIH board member Ralie Deffenbaugh reminds us, in September 2025, the Council of Churches in Namibia convened an event titled “we are prisoners of hope,” which drew parallels between Namibia’s historical struggle for liberation and the current plight of refugees and asylum seekers. The phrase is based on Zechariah 9:12 and has historically been used by leaders like Bishop Zephania Kameeta and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. What a powerful connotation.

Here at SIH, we have been charting a course toward a grand Homecoming — a return to a new home through the purchase of a property in downtown Manhattan. Just a stone’s throw from our original site in 1873, this new space will become a true home away from

home for asylum seekers and seafarers, many of whom are “prisoners of hope.” Within these walls, our guests will find safety, welcome, and the assurance that they have reached a secure harbor.

During 2026, we will begin renovating this right-sized mission building, creating 16 guest rooms and community space to accommodate both small asylum-seeking families and individuals, as well as visiting seafarers. With these improvements underway, we are looking ahead to opening our doors in early 2027, ready to offer refuge and rest to all who arrive.

Parallel, we will be launching a comprehensive campaign to pay for the renovations, reduce the burden of a loan for the new building, and strengthen our services to seafarers and asylum seekers. We will keep you posted in the months to come.

In April 2025, we had a most successful Setting the Course reception thanks to the generosity of our honorees Susan Winfree, Willie Barrere, and notably Robert Sappio, - and their friends. The boost in event support enabled us to expand our services through a partnership with the Houston International Seafarers Center with our port chaplain Pastor Tammy Sharp in that busy port in the Lone Star State.

Thus, we continued a robust port mission in now six ports with nine port chaplains and ship visitors, and a fleet of six vans that we use to visit ships and to transport seafarers. In the summer and fall, volunteers from the Propeller Club, congregations, board members,

#### MISSION

*Seafarers International House (SIH) is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants.*

**SIH offers hospitality, social assistance, and advocacy to a multi-national and multi-faith community in the Ports of Albany, Baltimore, Duluth, Houston, New Haven, and New York & New Jersey, and in New York City.**

and individuals helped us assemble satchels. These efforts paid off with 3,405 Christmas-at-Sea satchels delivered to seafarers connecting donors with seafaring “prisoners of hope” who experienced the joy of Christmas.

In 2025, we served 19,519 people including 19 asylum seekers we welcomed providing them with shelter, food, and social work assistance; a far cry from the 33 and 49 in 2024 and 2023 respectively because asylum seekers are fearful of coming out of the shadows. Obviously, the curtailment on asylum seekers has had its effect.

With these positive 2025 highlights in mind, perhaps we are all “prisoners of hope” in that as we are bound together in despair, we are also bound together in hope that will not leave us imprisoned.

*“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

Jeremiah 29:11

Peace,



*Marsh Luther Drage*  
Pastor and Executive Director

\* From 2005 to 2019, refugees and asylees paid a total of \$123.8 billion more in taxes than they cost in government services, for a net fiscal gain of \$31.5 billion to the federal government and \$92.3 billion to state and local governments combined. Refugees and asylees paid an estimated \$363 billion to the federal government through payroll, income, and excise taxes, and \$218 billion to state and local governments through income, sales, and property taxes. Even when factoring in their spouses and children under 18, many of whom are U.S. citizens, refugees and asylees still provided a net fiscal gain, costing \$723.4 billion in government services yet paying \$739.4 billion in tax revenue, for a net gain of \$16 billion.

# 2025 Program Impact

**19,519** immigrants and seafarers directly benefited from SIH's services (up from 19,066)

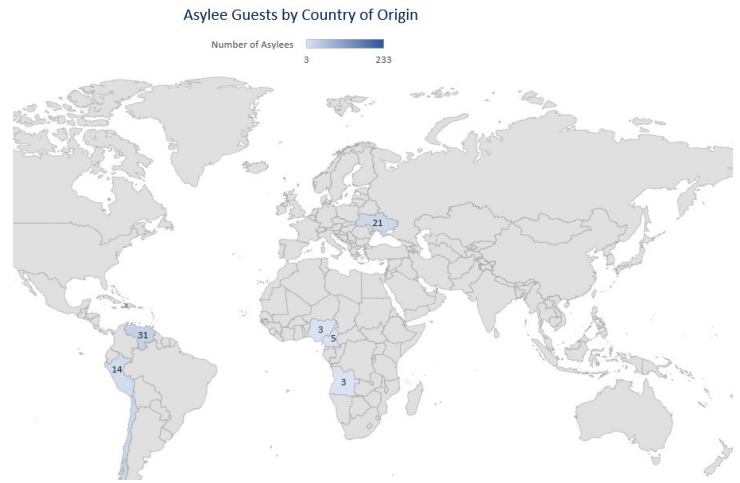
**2,351** lodging nights (up from 2,225) provided to 139 seafarers in Manhattan.

**14,078** seafarers were visited and counseled (up from 13,556) on 1,347 vessels, receiving essentials they requested.

**1,878** seafarers were transported to a mall or medical facilities.

**3,405** seafarers, regardless of faith, received Christmas-at-Sea satchels filled with warm clothing and holiday greetings to spread joy beyond borders and oceans.

**19** asylum seekers received free lodging for a total of 1,328 nights. They hailed from Angola, Cameroon, Chile, Cuba (3), Haiti (5), Nigeria, Peru, Ukraine, and Venezuela (5). See map below.



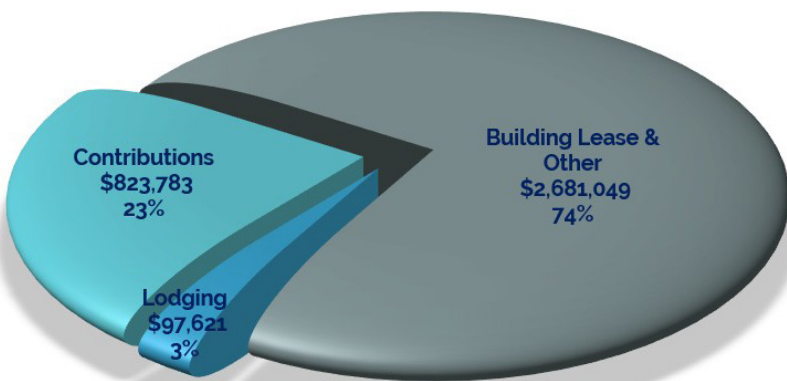
## 2025 FINANCIAL REPORT

In accordance with our 2024 - 2028 strategic plan, operating gains continued to help build reserves for the purchase of the new right-sized mission headquarters (\$1M). These gains also allow for capital repairs on the guesthouse (\$324,806), which is leased to Breaking Ground, a NYC-based non-profit which provides transitional housing to the community.

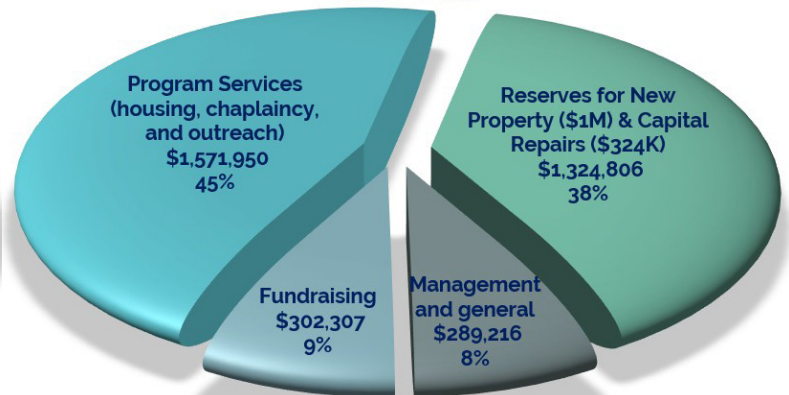
Lease revenue needs to be augmented by donations to support our services and the purchase and renovation of our new home starting in 2026. Program services and reserves accounted for 83% of expenses with only 17% spent on management and fundraising. These figures reflect unaudited revenue and expenses and are subject to change.

To request the audited 2025 financial statements please send an email to [henryk@sihny.org](mailto:henryk@sihny.org).

### Operating Revenue 2025 (pre-audit) \$3,602,453



### Operating Expenses & Reserves for New Property 2025 (pre-audit) \$3,488,279



Seafarers International House \* Mailing Address: 120 West 14th Street, New York, NY 10018 \* 212-677-4800 \* [info@sihny.org](mailto:info@sihny.org) \* [www.SIHNYC.org](http://www.SIHNYC.org)

An Affiliate of the ELCA

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## United Lutheran Seminary Synod Assembly Report 2025

### Dear Partners in Ministry,

Grace and peace be with you as you gather for your Synod Assembly. It is a joy to greet you on behalf of United Lutheran Seminary and to thank you for your ongoing partnership with ULS in forming the future leaders of Christ's Church.

At a time when many congregations are searching for pastors and deacons, ULS remains steadfast in our urgent mission: **to prepare, equip, and send out faithful, well-formed leaders who can serve the church and proclaim the Gospel in a changing world.**

This commitment guides our work in four ways:

1. **Raising new leaders**—Our recently revamped curriculum emphasizes hands-on pastoral formation so that students are fully prepared to serve congregations and ministries upon graduation. We continue to welcome students from across the country and beyond, forming them through rigorous theological education and practical ministry experiences.
2. **Making seminary accessible**—We are deeply committed to removing financial barriers that prevent people from answering the call to ministry. Through generous scholarships for qualified students and new pathways for theological education, we are working to ensure that students can pursue their vocation without the burden of debt.
3. **Equipping and sustaining leaders for the long haul**—Learning for ministry doesn't end at graduation. Through our Kindling Faith continuing education programs, we provide pastors, deacons, and lay leaders with ongoing formation, spiritual renewal, and leadership training for the challenges of today's church.
4. **Strengthening our partnership with you**—The church cannot raise up leaders alone, and neither can the seminary. We need your help in identifying, encouraging, and supporting those whom God is calling into ministry. Working together, we can raise Gospel-centered leaders for generations to come.

### Signs of Hope

ULS is thriving, with strong enrollment across our degree and certificate programs. We currently have more than 350 students, including over 100 future pastors and deacons. Our varied learning platforms include in person and hybrid classes as well as distance, or what we refer to as

“distributed learning.” Our faculty continue to develop new ways of preparing leaders for both traditional congregational ministry and emerging ministry contexts. This fall we are welcoming our second cohort of PhD students, ensuring that the church continues to have strong theological voices shaping its future.

Our mission is clear: **the church needs leaders, and we are here to prepare them.** We ask for your prayers, your support, and your encouragement of those who may be discerning a call to ministry. Who in your congregation or community might be called to serve? How can you walk alongside them on that journey?

### Looking Ahead

As we stand on the threshold of our 200th anniversary in 2026, we are not just celebrating the past—we are looking to the future. We invite you to celebrate with us, as we cross the threshold into a new century, recognizing the continuing need for strong, adaptable leaders in our challenging world. We invite you to join us in this journey, as we explore new ways to form leaders who will serve God’s people for coming generations.

Thank you for your faithful support. Thank you for lifting up future leaders. And thank you for being partners with us in this vital mission. May God bless you, your bishop, and the congregations represented here in this Assembly, and strengthen and preserve you for the journey ahead.

**Rev. R. Guy Erwin, Ph.D.**

President, United Lutheran Seminary