



**Thirty-Seventh New Jersey Synod Assembly
Hilton East Brunswick Hotel, East Brunswick, NJ
June 5 -7, 2025**

On Monday, June 2, 2025, the Synod was given the opportunity to attend virtual Pre-Assembly workshops, Bulletin of Reports (BR) [page 8].

**Thursday, June 5, 2025
Opening Worship**

At 6:30 PM, a liturgy of Holy Communion began in the Ballroom of the Hilton East Brunswick Hotel, East Brunswick, New Jersey. Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew, preacher and presider, extended a welcome to those present and those viewing the livestream.

Plenary Session 1

At 8:00 PM, Bishop Bartholomew once again welcomed all and declared the Thirty-seventh Assembly of the New Jersey Synod to be in session in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Bartholomew called on Pastor Maristela Freiberg, Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop, for the announcement about Spanish translation, which was provided by Carlos Peralta throughout the Assembly.

Bishop Bartholomew reminded those present that we are gathered in East Brunswick, which stands on part of the traditional territory of the Lenne-Lenape, called “Lenapehoking.” The Lenape have provided the following Land Acknowledgement for groups to use as the standard acknowledgement: *The Lenape People lived in harmony with one another upon this territory for thousands of years. During the colonial era and early federal period, many were removed west and north, but some also remain among the three continuing historical tribal communities of the region: The Nanticoke Lenne-Lenape Tribal Nation; the Ramapough Lenape Nation; and the Powhatan Renape Nation. We acknowledge the Lenne-Lenape as the original people of this land and their continuing relationship with their territory.*

A number of guests and resource people were introduced. The bishops of Region 7: Bishop Christopher DeForest, Northeastern PA; Bishop Paul Egensteiner, Metropolitan NY; Bishop Wilma Kucharek, Slovak Zion; Bishop Lee Miller, Upstate NY; Bishop Bryan Penman, Southeastern PA, and Bishop Nathan Pipho, New England.

Also introduced were Churchwide Representative, Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, ELCA Secretary; Executive Administrator, LuAnn Barnes; Synod Vice President, Arundel Clarke; Synod

Secretary, Pastor Blake Scalet; parliamentarian Mary Scout, and sound and audio technicians, Dan Egan and Dave Quinan.

Bishop Bartholomew also gave thanks for assembly musician Brian Conover, Reformation, Absecon; Synod Treasurer Jim Harris, trumpet, and Pastor Linnéa Clark, worship coordinator.

Scott Casey, developer of Vpoll the voting platform used the past several years, was introduced and the Assembly participated in a Vpoll practice session. Tech team assistance was provided by Dawn Roberts, Pastor Menzi Nkambule, Rob Rinderer, Tim Cook, and Pastor Marc Stutzel.

The concept of a Consent Agenda was explained, whereby the *Adoption of 2025 Assembly Agenda* [BR pages 5-7], *Adoption of Rules of Procedure for the Thirty-seventh Assembly* [BR pages 11-12], *Appointment of Assembly Committees* [projected on video screens] and *Adoption of 2024 Assembly Minutes* [BR Section II] would be voted on *en bloc*.

It was moved and seconded:

THAT by Consent Agenda the 2025 37th Synod Assembly Agenda, Rules of Procedure, Appointment of 2025 Assembly Committees and Adoption of 2024 Assembly Minutes be adopted en bloc. Those items follow:

Thursday, June 5, 2025

4:00 PM **Registration Opens**

6:30 PM **Opening Worship**

8:00 PM **Plenary Session One**

Welcome and Introductions

Consent Agenda

Assembly Agenda

Rules of Procedure

Appointment of Assembly Committees

Adoption of 2024 Assembly Minutes

Transition Team Report

First Ballot for Bishop

Report of Nominating Committee

Introduction of Rostered Ministers New to the Synod (video)

Recognition of Significant Anniversaries

Announcements and Closing Prayer

9:30 PM **Recess**

Youth/Young Adult Gathering - Youth Ministry Mission Team Suite

Friday, June 6, 2025

8:00 AM **Registration Opens**

9:00 AM **Plenary Session Two**

Hymn and Prayer

Report of First Ballot for Bishop (*withdraw name by 9:30 AM*)

Report of the Secretary

Report of Reference and Counsel

Report of the Treasurer

- 2026 Spending Plan Presentation
- Second Ballot for Bishop
- Recognition of EMU Initiative
- Report of ELCA Churchwide Rep
- Report of Second Ballot for Bishop (7 names forward)
- 12:01 PM **Lunch**
- 1:30 PM **Plenary Session Three**
 - Hymn and Prayer
 - Questions and Responses with 7 nominees
 - Third Ballot for Bishop
 - Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center Report
 - Report of Third Ballot for Bishop (3 names forward)
 - First Ballot Synod Council
 - Reference and Counsel
- 4:00 PM **Recess to Assigned Rooms**
- 4:30 PM **Bishop Nominee Rotation**
 - (3 venues, 20 minutes each, response to questions)
- 6:00 PM **Recess**
- 6:30 PM **Check-in -Registration**
- 7:00 PM **Banquet**
 - Bishop's Challenge Celebration
 - Holden Evening Prayer

Saturday, June 7, 2025

- 8:30 AM **Registration Opens**
- 9:00 AM **Plenary Session Four**
 - Hymn and Prayer
 - Second Ballot Synod Council
 - Fourth Ballot for Bishop (addresses by candidates)
 - Report of Fourth Ballot for Bishop (two names forward)
 - Report of the Bishop
 - Report of Advocacy Ministry
 - Third Ballot Synod Council
 - Fifth Ballot for Bishop
 - Report of Synod Council
 - Spending Plan Adoption
 - Notice of 2026 Assembly
 - Report of Fifth Ballot for Bishop
 - Bishop-Elect addresses Assembly
 - Unfinished Business
 - Report of Registration and Attendance
 - Installation of Synod Council
 - Blessing and Sending Rites
- 12:30 PM **Assembly Adjourned**

NEW JERSEY SYNOD, ELCA
RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR THE 37th SYNOD ASSEMBLY

1. One third of the members of the synod assembly shall constitute a quorum. (S7.14)
2. Two (2) lay representatives of Synodically Authorized Worshiping Communities and Synodically Authorized Outreach Ministries of the New Jersey Synod shall be given voice and vote during the Assembly.
3. Persons who are on the roster of the New Jersey Synod, ELCA, On Leave From Call or Retired, Living Out-of-State, but who are serving New Jersey Synod congregations/worshiping communities by special appointment, and those Retired Pastors Living Out-of-State who are actively engaged in the life and ministry of the New Jersey Synod shall be given voice and vote during the Assembly.
4. Persons on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in a Synod other than the New Jersey Synod, but who are serving New Jersey Synod congregations by special appointment, shall be given voice and vote, during the Assembly.
5. Persons who are not on the roster of the ELCA, but who are serving New Jersey Synod congregations/worshiping communities by special appointment, shall be given voice, not vote, during the Assembly.
6. Persons who are not on the roster of the ELCA, but who are serving New Jersey Synod congregations/worshiping communities by special appointment and are ordained ministers of another Lutheran church body that is a member of the Lutheran World Federation or of a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by a Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA shall be given voice and vote during the Assembly.
7. Chairs of Mission Teams and Committees listed by the Synod Council shall be given voice, not vote, on matters pertaining to their work during the Assembly.
8. Voting will take place in a variety of ways throughout the assembly. These may include electronic voting using Vpoll, voice votes, and voting cards. To have an abstention recorded, notify the secretary. Abstentions do not count in the vote totals.
9. Voting members need a smartphone or tablet in order to use Vpoll for voting. Unique login credentials will be provided upon registration.
10. When an item of business is opened by the chair for discussion, those voting members wishing to speak must move to a floor microphone. Before speaking, each person will indicate their name, congregation name and location. Members must specify if they are speaking for or against the item under consideration.

11. Debate shall be limited to two minutes per person per issue. Time will be kept by the Secretary. Debate will terminate when three speakers have been heard on each side, unless otherwise determined by a majority vote of the voting members present and voting.
12. Resolutions received after the April 6 deadline will be referred to the NJ Synod Council.
13. Resolutions received on time shall be reviewed by the Committee of Reference and Counsel, which, when reporting to the Assembly, may:
 1. recommend approval;
 2. recommend disapproval;
 3. recommend referral to the Synod Council; or
 4. recommend a substitute motion to the Assembly
14. Floor nominations for at-large positions may be made at the time of the Nominating Committee report and require completion of the [Nomination Form](#).
15. The process for the election of the Bishop shall follow that which is outlined in S.9.04 of the Synod Constitution and led by the ELCA Churchwide Representative.
16. All reports published in the Bulletin of Reports shall be received by the Assembly by virtue of that fact without vote.

RULES OF PROCEDURE FOR ADOPTION OF THE 2026 SPENDING PLAN

1. At the time of the introduction of the Spending Plan, discussion shall be limited to questions for clarification and information and the serving of notices of intent to move an amendment to the Spending Plan.
2. Voting Members desiring to present motions germane to the Spending Plan shall be given until **12:00 noon on Friday, June 6** to submit written notice of such intent to the Treasurer, James Harris.
3. Members of the Fiscal Management, Administration, and Property Committee shall meet with voting members proposing an amendment.
4. At the time appointed for the adoption of the Spending Plan, the Fiscal Management, Administration, and Property Committee shall report to the Assembly all proposed amendments, with the Committee's recommendations.
5. When motions germane to the Spending Plan are presented on the Floor of the Assembly, the Fiscal Management, Administration, and Property Committee shall have an opportunity to respond to the recommendations. Any Voting Member wishing to increase a line item in any area of the Spending Plan shall propose a source of funding.

APPOINTMENT OF 2025 SYNOD ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES

Reference and Council Committee

Steve Hernandez, Faith, Lavallette; The Rev. William Hodgetts, Zion, Egg Harbor City; Nicolle Krentz, St. Stephen Grace Community, Newark; Grant Lefchak, Resurrection, Hamilton Square; Kim McCleary, St. Matthew, Secaucus; The Rev. Chelsea Scholl, Good Shepherd, Somerville; Deacon Shirley Talluri, Emanuel, New Brunswick; Mary Scout, Parliamentarian, and The Rev. Sara Lilja, Staff.

Minute Review Committee

Deacon Jamie Dungey, Good Shepherd, Somerville; The Rev. Daniel Fields, Grace, Perth Amboy; Mary Hoh, St. Mark, Hamilton; LuAnn Barnes, Staff, and The Rev. Blake Scalet, Secretary

MINUTES OF THE 2024 SYNOD ASSEMBLY

The Minutes of the 36th Synod Assembly of the New Jersey Synod, ELCA, May 11, 2024, at Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton, New Jersey, adopted as our official record, appear in Section II in the Bulletin of Reports.

BISHOP ELECTION: BALLOT #1

Bishop Bartholomew called on Transition/Election Team member Dr. Dianne Browne and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer to introduce the election process for Bishop. Secretary Rothmeyer outlined the ecclesiastic ballot process beginning with the role of a Bishop in accordance with the Synod Constitution. On Ballot #1, a voting member can vote for any member of the ELCA on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament. If a nominee receives 75% of the vote an election has occurred. If that is not the case, Ballot #2 will contain all of the nominees and serve as a nominating ballot. Results will be officially reported in Plenary Session 2. The results, as soon as available, will be posted on the Synod website and app. If there is no election, nominees have until 9:30 AM, Friday, June 6, 2025, to withdraw their name.

Secretary Rothmeyer called on assembly registrar Dawn Roberts for the Report of Registration. Dawn reported 312 Voting Members present. Jose Sanchez, member of Synod Council and Bridge of Peace, Camden, led the Assembly in prayer and the Assembly sang *Breathe on Us, Oh Breath of God*. Voting Members using Vpoll proceeded with Ballot #1. Secretary Rothmeyer declared Ballot #1 closed, and returned the chair to Bishop Bartholomew.

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Bishop Bartholomew called on The Rev. Matthew Cimorelli, Reformation, West Long Branch, to present the Report of the Nominating Committee.

2025 ELECTIONS

SYNOD COUNCIL - (To be ratified by the Synod Assembly): ~ **Second Term**

Mission District Elections (Terms Ending 2028)

- Delaware Jennifer Emerson, St. Mark, Oaklyn
Jose Sanchez, Bridge of Peace, Camden ~ **Second Term**
- Gateway No election needed in 2025
- Middle Nansi Krauss, Abiding Love, Kendall Park, ~ **Second Term**
Cari L. States-Codding, Living Waters, Ringoes
- Northern No election needed in 2025
- Western The Rev. Jane McCready, Faith, New Providence ~ **Second Term**

Nominees for Synod Council from the Nominating Committee

Shore Mission District - Lay Male or Gender Nonbinary (term Ending 2028)

Robert J. Rinderer, St. Paul, Beachwood

Bishop Bartholomew asked for additional nominations from the floor. Bishop Bartholomew declared the nominations closed for the category Shore District Synod Council Lay Male or Gender Nonbinary, term ending 2028.

At-Large Synod Council- Clergy (term ending 2028, one needed to be elected)

The Rev. Linnéa K. Clark, St. Mark, Hamilton

The Rev. John M. DiMatteo, Holy Trinity, Rockaway/Shepherd of the Hills, Sparta

Bishop Bartholomew asked for additional nominations from the floor. Bishop Bartholomew declared the nominations closed for the category Synod Council Clergy, term ending 2028.

Synod Council- Youth (term ending 2027, one needed to be elected)

Agnetta Fasasi, Redeemer, Trenton

Bishop Bartholomew asked for additional nominations from the floor. Bishop Bartholomew declared the nominations closed for the category Synod Council Youth, term ending 2027.

2025 ROSTERED LEADER REPORT

A prerecorded video of those new to our roster, who wished to participate, was shown. We welcome each to our community, and offer our prayers and support for their ministry. Those persons are:

- Ordained for First Call in New Jersey
- Juan Manuel Arias Perea, Daniel Fields, Andrew Jones, Kara Song, Shirley Talluri
- Received From Another Full Communion Church Body
- Dámaris Porsch-Ortega
- Received By Transfer From Another Synod
- Robert Fritch and Martin Malzahn

Those who retired since the 2024 Assembly were recognized as well as those with significant anniversaries:

- Newly Retired Ministers
- Nancy Nardi, Dennis Olson, Jeffrey Walters

50th Ordination Anniversaries
Raymond Elberson, Glenn Englehardt, Neil Jaggie, and Ronald Miller

25th Ordination Anniversaries
Jill Collict, John Mack, Christine Ruth, Karol van Wulfen

Congregation Anniversaries
50 years – Good Shepherd, Little Egg Harbor Township
75 years – Christ, Paramus, Holy Spirit, Villas, and St. Matthew, Moorestown
100 years – St. Paul, Ridgefield
275 years – St. James, Phillipsburg

The work for the evening concluded. Following the announcements and closing prayer led by Synod Vice President Arundel Clarke, we were in recess until 9:00 am, June 6, 2025.



**Thirty-Seventh New Jersey Synod Assembly
Hilton East Brunswick Hotel**

**Friday, June 6, 2025
Plenary Session 2**

At 9:00 AM, Bishop Bartholomew once again welcomed all and the Assembly sang *Behold! I Make All Things New*. Following the hymn, Pastor Burton Vincent, celebrating 65 years of ordained ministry led the opening prayer.

BISHOP ELECTION: REPORT OF BALLOT #1

Bishop Bartholomew called on Dr. Dianne Browne and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer for the Report of Bishop Election: Ballot #1. Those wishing to remove their name from appearing on Ballot #2 must do so before 9:30 AM. Biographical information of those remaining on Ballot #2 will be available to Voting Members before Ballot #2. The report follows:

Number of Votes Cast: 285
Number of Legal Votes: 276
Number of Votes Needed for an Election: 207
Illegal Votes: 9
Election Complete: No
Number Still needed to be Elected: 1

Maristela Freiberg 59
Christa Compton 42
Frederick Becker 24
Dean Brown 22
Sara Lilja 16
Eric Trozzo 13
John Di Matteo 9
Michael Linderman 7
David Stoner 6
Joseph Graumann 5
Blake Scalet 5
Marc Stutzel 4
Jesse Brown 3
Christopher Halverson 3
Julie Haspel 3
John Mack 3
Garry Squire 3
Ingrid Fath Wengert 3

Matthew Cimorelli 2
Linnéa Clark 2
Giselle Coutinho 2
James Egan 2
John Holliday 2
Erich Kussman 2
Gary LeCroy 2
Jane McCready 2
Scott Schantzenbach 2
Heather Sugden 2
John Anderson 1
Judith Anderson 1
Tracie Bartholomew 1
Christopher Bruesehoff 1
Jill Collict 1
Annemarie Cook 1
Bruce Davidson 1
Michael Edwards-Ronning 1

Jeffrey Elliott 1
Daniel Fields 1
Sarah Fryman 1
Lura Groen 1
Jessica Hahn 1
Kathryn Irwin 1
James Krombholz 1
Karoline Lewis 1
Beau Nelson 1

Carmine Pernini 1
Levi Powers 1
Serena Rice 1
Dale Selover 1
Mary Simpson-Keelan 1
Matt Thiringer 1
Kimberly Vaughn 1
Pamela Werner 1
B. Daniel Whitener 1

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

The Rev. Blake Scalet presented the Report of the Secretary and Report of the Synod Council, [BR pages 40-50], which includes the action items of the Synod Council since our last Synod Assembly. Secretary Scalet also read a letter received from the Metropolitan DC Synod conveying their greetings and prayers for us as we gather in Assembly.

Secretary Scalet recommended the following action to S12.01.03 Mission Clusters and Mission Districts Congregation Assignments:

To strike from the Bylaws the listing of Mission District and Mission Cluster assignments, and to replace the assignment listings with appropriate Continuing Resolutions under this Bylaw provision. This allows the list of congregations to be updated regularly reflecting the actual status of all congregations in the synod by the Synod Council action rather than waiting for action of the whole Synod Assembly annually.

Bishop Bartholomew called for a vote on the recommendation using voting cards.

(The recommendation was unanimously ADOPTED June 6, 2025.)

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE AND COUNSEL

Kimberly McCleary, St. Matthew, Secaucus, reported two on-time resolutions were received. Resolution I: *Opposing Attacks on the Civil Liberties of Transgender/Nonbinary (TGNB) Adults and Children*, and Resolution II: *Gender Language in the Constitution*, as well as one on-time Memorial: *To Affirm Transgender, Nonbinary, Gender Expansive, Two-Spirit, and Genderqueer People of God*. The Reference and Counsel Committee offered a substitute for Resolution II which was available to Voting Members on the Synod website and app. The resolutions and memorial will be brought to the floor later in Plenary Session 2.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

Bishop Bartholomew called on James Harris for the Report of the Treasurer. Jim lifted up the financial reports in the Bulletin of Reports, which summarize the synod is financially sound and the monies were carefully managed and spent as the synod assembly approved.

The report of the Treasurer focused on congregational ministries here in the New Jersey Synod. There is financial support for congregational ministries in the spending plan and through varied grants and loans.

In closing, Jim shared the following: “There is a time for everything. We know some days our work will be hard, and the prospects will seem bleak. But we also know that God has tomorrow all lined up and ready to go. The world is changing. We change. Regardless of all that change, our call remains the same: to love and serve others as Jesus taught. There are bountiful resources to support our response to this call. And friends: we can change the future. We can apply those bountiful resources, we can witness to the gospel, and we can make all things new!”

Bishop Bartholomew thanked Treasurer Harris for his ministry and reminded the Assembly we are blessed with a treasurer who interprets the work he does through the lens of God’s mission.

REPORT OF THE SYNOD COUNCIL

2026 Spending Plan

Bishop Bartholomew directed the Assembly to the video screens for the 2026 Spending Plan presentation. The video featuring Pastor Dean Brown, Assistant to the Bishop, reminded the Assembly that a spending plan is much more than line items. Stories were shared from Carmen Acevedo and Vicar Jason Reed, Casa Unidas Luterana and Temple in Pennsauken; Pastor Mary Farnham, Holy Trinity, Manasquan, and Grant Lefchak, Resurrection, Hamilton Square. Each story was an example of how our mission spending plan provides learning opportunities, allows for our walking alongside one another, and share God’s caring heart with others.

The Spending Plan will be brought to the floor in Plenary Session 4.

2024 SYNOD ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS

Bishop Bartholomew gave an update related to the 2024 Assembly resolution *ELCA Prison and Re-Entry Ministry*. A task force was created and actively engaged providing resources to equip congregations in prison and re-entry ministry. Related to the resolution *Calling for Cease Fire in the Holy Land*, Bishop Bartholomew did contact the President and members of Congress to convey the resolution adopted by the Assembly.

BISHOP ELECTION: BALLOT #2

Bishop Bartholomew reminded Voting Members of the procedure for logging into VPoll and called on Transition/Election Team member Dr. Dianne Browne and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer for instructions for Ballot #2. Secretary Rothmeyer called on Assembly Registrar Dawn Roberts for the Report of Registration. Dawn reported 370 Voting Members present. Wannetta Phillips, member of Synod Council and Prince of Peace, Rockaway, led the Assembly in prayer and the Assembly sang *Breathe on Us, Oh Breath of God*. Voting Members proceeded with Ballot #2. The following names appeared on Ballot #2:

Maristela Freiberg
Christa Compton

Frederick Becker
Eric Trozzo

John DiMatteo
Michael Linderman
David Stoner
Marc Stutzel

Jesse Brown
Julie Haspel
Garry Squire
Levi Powers

Secretary Rothmeyer declared Bishop Election: Ballot #2 closed and returned the chair to Bishop Bartholomew.

EXCELLENCE IN MINISTRY UNLEASHED CELEBRATION

Bishop Bartholomew called on Pastor Fred Becker, Trinity, Dover, leader of our EMU initiative following the retirement of Pastor Scott Schantzenbach, to help us celebrate Excellence in Ministry, Unleashed. Through this Lilly grant, EMU has focused on three areas:

- Ministerial Excellence Fund
 - Non-competitive grants with education participation or matching expectations.
 - Student debt repayment grants.
 - Saving incentive.
- Financial literacy
 - Retreats for pastors and events for lay leader.
- Stewardship competency
 - Encouraged congregations to explore different leadership models.
 - Creating Generous Congregations.
 - Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising offered by the Lake Institute.

A video testimonial from Pastor Chris Halverson, Spruce Run, Glen Gardner, was included in the presentation. In closing, Pastor Becker asked for those impacted by the EMU to stand for acclamation by the Assembly. He expressed thanks for the past and current team members as well as the synod staff.

BISHOP ELECTION: REPORT OF BALLOT #2

Bishop Bartholomew called on Dr. Dianne Browne and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer for the Report of Bishop Election Ballot #2. The report follows:

Number of Votes Cast: 355
Number of Legal Votes: 355
Number of Votes Needed for an Election: 267
Illegal Votes: 0
Election Complete: No
Number Still needed to be Elected: 1

Maristela Freiberg 133
Christa Compton 93
Frederick Becker 40
Michael Linderman 24

Eric Trozzo 18
David Stoner 17
John DiMatteo 14
Marc Stutzel 6

Jesse Brown 4
Julie Haspel 3

Garry Squires 2
Levi Powers 1

The following will appear on Ballot #3: Maristela Freiberg, Christa Compton, Frederick Becker, Michael Linderman, Eric Trozzo, David Stoner, and John DiMatteo. The Bishop election process will continue after the lunch recess with questions for those on Ballot #3 prepared by the Bishop's Election Committee.

REPORT OF THE CHURCHWIDE REPRESENTATIVE

Deacon Sue Rothmeyer was elected the ELCA secretary at the churchwide assembly in 2019 in Milwaukee. Prior to her election, she served in the office of the secretary as assistant to the secretary and executive for office of the secretary administration.

Deacon Rothmeyer lifted up the ELCA initiative *God's Love Made Real*, an initiative of sharing God's grace and love for all people through our global outreach, support for congregations and holy imagination. Asking the questions, "Where have you seen God's love?" and "What ways do you serve your neighbor?"

Deacon Rothmeyer expressed thanks for our generosity as a Synod. We shared \$830,000 in mission support with the Churchwide organization in 2024, as well as \$500,000 designated to ELCA World Hunger and \$600,000 to Lutheran Disaster Response. The importance of leaders was stressed and thanks extended to Bishop Bartholomew for her leadership in the Conference of Bishop, as well as Janasia Carter, Alexandra Mack, Jamie Bruesehoff, and Arundel Clarke for serving on ELCA committees, council, or boards.

The report continued with announcement of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in Phoenix, AZ, when a new Presiding Bishop and Secretary will be elected. The report concluded with the ELCA video greeting from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. The video is available for congregation use and is posted on the NJ Synod website.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE AND COUNSEL (Cont'd.)

Bishop Bartholomew called on Kimberly McCleary, St. Matthew, Secaucus, to begin discussion of the resolutions and memorials.

Resolution I

Opposing Attacks on the Civil Liberties of Transgender/Nonbinary (TGNB) Adults and Children

WHEREAS, the Scriptures teach that all human beings are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and that humans are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14); and

WHEREAS, recent executive orders from the federal government attacking the civil liberties of TGNB persons, limit gender expression to the binary, and create a dangerous antagonist climate of TGNB oppression, disrespecting God's fearfully and wonderfully made creation, and

WHEREAS, failing to safeguard the dignity due to all children of God, TGNB children in school attempting to learn, should not have to worry about whether they will be denied access to the restroom, the locker room, or school sports, and further, **be it therefore**

RESOLVED, that the New Jersey Synod in Assembly condemn all anti-transgender legislation, demand the repeal of all such laws that are sinful, ineffectual, harmful, and dishonest. **and be it further**

RESOLVED, that the New Jersey Synod in Assembly call upon its congregations and its members to oppose these practices at the federal, state, and local school board level, **and be it further**

RESOLVED, that we recommit ourselves as a people of faith, advocating for basic human rights where they are most endangered.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that we charge ourselves and our neighbors, to protect and honor our transgender, nonbinary and gender expansive adult and youth members.

The Reference and Counsel Committee recommended adoption of the resolution.

The Rev. Levi Powers, St. James, Phillipsburg, rose to ask a question of amending any portion of the resolution.

Stephan Hernandez, Faith, Lavallette; Cari States-Codding, Living Waters, Ringoes; Matthew DiClemente, Ascension, New Brunswick; The Rev. Levi Powers, St. James, Phillipsburg, and Rene Gordon, Zion, Rahway, rose to speak in favor of the resolution.

Joseph Dans, Prince of Peace, Old Tappan, rose to question the meaning of “all anti-transgender legislation.” The Rev. Damaris Porsch-Ortega, St. Paul, Jersey City, responded.

Don Henry, Prince of Peace, Marlton, rose to amend the resolution as follows: *that the New Jersey Synod in Assembly condemn all anti-transgender legislation and demand the repeal of all such laws. All such laws are sinful, ineffectual, harmful, and dishonest.*

The Rev. Timothy Wengert, Zion, Long Valley, spoke against the amendment.

With no one rising to speak to the amendment, Bishop Bartholomew called for a vote using the voting cards.

(The amendment was DEFEATED 06/06/2025.)

The Rev. James Egan, St. Bartholomew, Trenton, rose for clarification of the resolve *that the New Jersey Synod in Assembly call upon its congregations and its members to oppose these practices at the federal, state, and local school board level.* The Rev. Sara Lilja, Assistant to the Bishop, responded.

Tim Hoh, St. Mark, Hamilton, rose to amend the resolution to read *that the New Jersey Synod in Assembly call upon its congregations and its members to oppose these practices at the federal, state, local, and school board level.*

Stephan Hernandez, Faith, Lavallette, spoke against the amendment.

Lynn Perry, Grace, Mendham, and Andrea Gerrard, St. Stephen, Woodbury, spoke in favor of the amendment.

The Rev. Jeffrey Elliott, Cape May, Cape May, rose to call the question.

(The call to end debate was ADOPTED 06/06/2025)

(The Amendment to the resolution was ADOPTED 06/06/2025)

Amended Resolution 1

RESOLVED, that the New Jersey Synod in Assembly condemn all anti-transgender legislation, demand the repeal of all such laws that are sinful, ineffectual, harmful, and dishonest. ***and be it further***

RESOLVED, that the New Jersey Synod in Assembly call upon its congregations and its members to oppose these practices at the federal, state, local, and school board level, ***and be it further***

RESOLVED, that we recommit ourselves as a people of faith, advocating for basic human rights where they are most endangered.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that we charge ourselves and our neighbors, to protect and honor our transgender, nonbinary and gender expansive adult and youth members.

(Resolution as amended was ADOPTED 06/06/2025)

RESOLUTION II

Gender Language in Constitution

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Synod to promote FAITHFULNESS to the Gospel, which means following Jesus' example of radical inclusion of all but especially those who are oppressed or marginalized

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Synod to be GENEROUS of spirit, acknowledging the divine image of all God's children but especially those whose existence is in danger of being denied

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Synod to RESPECT the imago dei of all our human siblings and to pursue justice for those on the fringes of society because of their gender, gender expression, or gender identity

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Synod to encourage DIVERSITY and the beautiful mosaic of God's creation, which includes a spectrum of expressions of gender and sexuality

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Synod to pursue transformational CHANGE that reflects the hope afforded to us by the death and resurrection of Jesus

Whereas it is the responsibility of the Synod to acknowledge the INTERDEPENDENCE of each child of God in our community of faith

Now, therefore be it resolved that the use of gendered language in our constitution is antithetical to the Core Values we uphold.

Let it further be resolved that the NJ Synod will propose a resolution at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to eliminate gendered language from the model constitution.

Our governing documents do not allow the NJ Synod to alter the ELCA Model for Constitution for Congregations. These changes can only be made at the Churchwide level. The Committee of Reference and Counsel recommends a substitute memorial for consideration of ELCA 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The substitute memorial follows:

Substitute Memorial Gender Language in Constitution

Whereas the ELCA strives to be a welcoming and inclusive church and the use of gender-based language in our governing documents is not consistent with this aspiration.

Therefore, be it resolved that the ELCA review all of its governing documents including the Constitution, By Laws, and Continuing Resolutions to remove gendered and binary language so that all persons are seen and included.

The Floor was opening for discussion of both Resolution 2 Gender Language in Constitution and Substitute Memorial Gender Language in Constitution.

James Nelson, St. Matthew, Jersey City, rose for clarification of the intent. The resolution and memorial would only apply to our governing documents.

The Rev. Matthew Cimorelli, Reformation, West Long Branch; Lauren Porsch-Ortega, St. Paul, Jersey City; The Rev. Carol Lindsay, Abiding Love, Kendall Park, and Stephan Hernandez, Faith, Lavallette, rose to speak in favor of the substitute memorial.

The Rev. Levi Powers, St. James, Phillipsburg, rose to speak against the resolution and the substitute memorial.

Christophe Moderacki, Church of the Savior, Paramus, rose to ask if gender language when referencing Jesus would also be changed. The Rev. Sara Lilja, Assistant to the Bishop, rose to clarify the change would only apply in our governing documents to the organizational principles in all three expressions of the church and not any of our creeds.

The Rev. Timothy Wengert, Zion, Long Valley, rose for a parliamentary procedure question. The Bishop responded.

The Rev. Chelsea Scholl, Good Shepherd, Somerville, and member of Reference and Council, rose to remind the Assembly this action does not change the governance documents but requests review and conversation.

The Rev. Mary Farnham, Holy Trinity, Manasquan, rose to ask if this substitute memorial would impact the gender percentages currently in place. Bishop Bartholomew responded that it potentially could.

The Rev. Levi Powers, St. James, Phillipsburg, rose to amend the substitute memorial as follows:

Therefore, be it resolved that the ELCA review its representational principles in all of its governing documents including the Constitution, By Laws, and Continuing Resolutions to remove gendered and binary language so that all persons are seen and included.

With no one speaking to the amendment to the substitute memorial, Bishop Bartholomew called for a vote.

(The amendment to the substitute memorial was DEFEATED 06/06/2025.)

The motion on the floor was to amend Resolution 2 by substitution with the Memorial Gender Language in the Constitution.

(The amendment was ADOPTED 06/06/2025)

Substitute Memorial Gender Language in Constitution was on the floor.

(The Substitute Memorial was ADOPTED 06/06/2025)

The Assembly was in recess until Plenary Session #3 at 1:30 PM.



**Thirty-Seventh New Jersey Synod Assembly
Hilton East Brunswick Hotel**

**Friday, June 6, 2025
Plenary Session 3**

At 1:30 PM, Bishop Bartholomew once again welcomed all and the Assembly sang *Behold! I Make All Things New*. Following the hymn, Pastor Moacir Weirich, St. Stephan's Grace Community, Newark, and the Migration Justice Team led the Assembly in a Litany for Immigrants and Asylum Seekers.

BISHOP ELECTION

Bishop Bartholomew called on Deacon Rothmeyer and Dr. Browne as we resumed our bishop election process by hearing questions and responses from the 7 nominees. Willie Richardson, Trinity, Jersey City, and The Rev. Susan Jones, Holy Cross, Toms River, members of the Bishop's Election team led the question and answer period. The seven nominees include: Michael Linderman, Christa Compton, Maristela Freiberg, John DiMatteo, Eric Trozzo, David Stoner, and Frederick Becker.

BISHOP ELECTION: BALLOT #3

Deacon Rothmeyer and Dr. Browne gave instructions for Ballot #3. Secretary Rothmeyer called on Assembly Registrar Dawn Roberts for the Report of Registration. Dawn reported 371 Voting Members present. The Assembly sang *Breathe on Us, Oh Breath of God* followed by The Rev. Daniel Fields, member of the Synod Council and Grace, Perth Amboy, who led the Assembly in prayer. Voting Members, using VPoll, proceeded with Ballot #3. The following names appeared on Ballot #3: Maristela Freiberg, Christa Compton, Frederick Becker, Michael Linderman, Eric Trozzo, David Stoner, and John DiMatteo.

Secretary Rothmeyer declared Ballot #3 closed, and returned the Chair to Bishop Bartholomew. The results will be announced following the Report of Cross Roads Outdoor Ministries.

CROSS ROADS CAMP AND RETREAT CENTER

Mr. Anthony Briggs, Executive Director, began the report by leading the assembly in the camp song *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean*. The New Jersey Synod and the Episcopal Diocese of Newark are celebrating 25 years of Cross Roads, our joint camp and retreat ministry.

As a way to stay connected with campers throughout the year, Faith Source was developed. It is a program to provide church leaders and parents with tools to use as a Sunday model or an at-home family Bible study. Anthony encourage congregation participation in this program available at no charge. In closing, a Cross Roads video was shown.

BISHOP ELECTION: REPORT OF BALLOT #3

Bishop Bartholomew called on Dr. Dianne Browne and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer for the Report of Bishop Election Ballot #3. The report follows:

Number of Votes Cast: 353
Number of Legal Votes: 353
Number of Votes Needed for an Election: 236
Illegal Votes: 0
Election Complete: No
Number Still needed to be Elected: 1

Christa Compton 117	Frederick Becker 24
Maristela Freiberg 77	Eric Trozzo 20
David Stoner 53	Michael Linderman 13
John DiMatteo 49	

The following will appear on Ballot #4: Christa Compton, Maristela Freiberg, and David Stoner. The Bishop election process will continue later in Plenary Session 3 with the 3 nominees responding to questions prepared by the Bishop’s Election Committee. Secretary Rothmeyer returned the Chair to Bishop Bartholomew.

2025 SYNOD COUNCIL RATIFICATIONS AND ELECTIONS

Mission District Elections (Terms Ending 2028)

Delaware	Jennifer Emerson, St. Mark, Oaklyn Jose Sanchez, Bridge of Peace, Camden
Gateway	No election needed in 2025
Middle	Nansi Krauss, Abiding Love, Kendall Park Cari L. States-Codding, Living Waters, Ringoes
Northern	No election needed in 2025
Western	The Rev. Jane McCready, Faith, New Providence

(The Synod Council Mission District elections were ratified by the Synod Assembly June 6, 2025.)

Nominee for Synod Council from the Nominating Committee

Shore Mission District - Lay Male or Gender Nonbinary (term Ending 2028)
Robert J. Rinderer, St. Paul, Beachwood

Since this position is unopposed, Bishop Bartholomew declared Robert J. Rinderer elected to the Synod Council, term ending 2028.

Synod Council- Youth (term ending 2027)
Agnetta Fasasi, Redeemer, Trenton

Since this position is unopposed, Bishop Bartholomew declared Agnetta Fasasi elected to the Synod Council, term ending 2027.

At-Large Synod Council- Clergy (term ending 2028, one needed to be elected)

The Rev. Linnéa K. Clark, St. Mark, Hamilton 154

The Rev. John M. DiMatteo, Holy Trinity, Rockaway/Shepherd of the Hills, Sparta 163

Using VPoll, the election results were as follows:

The Rev. John M. DiMatteo 163 The Rev. . Linnéa K. Clark 154

Bishop Bartholomew declared The Rev. John M. DiMatteo elected to the Synod Council, term ending 2028.

BISHOP ELECTION: NOMINEE ROTATION

Bishop Bartholomew called on Secretary Blake Scalet for announcements and instructions for room assignments for the Bishop nominee rotation. The three nominees will address questions prepared by the Bishop's Election Committee. The Assembly moved to the assigned rooms.

BANQUET OF CELEBRATION

Bishop Bartholomew welcomed all to the banquet, celebrating the completion of the *Bishop's Challenge on Caring for God's Good Creation*. Following dinner, Bishop Bartholomew called on Karen LeMorvan and the *Super Hero Friends* who led the recognition of the good work that took place over the last year in caring for God's good creation. The *Bishop's Challenge Awards for Environmental Excellence*, were announced and presented. A complete list is posted on the NJ Synod website.

Bishop Bartholomew called on The Rev. Scott Rush, Emanuel, New Brunswick, and Andrea Gerrard, St. Stephen, Woodbury, to lead the recognition of The Rev. Sara Lilja, for her work as the Director of Advocacy and Assistant to the Bishop. Pastor Lilja will leave the staff at the end of June to serve as the Executive Director of the NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders.

On behalf of the Synod, Pastor Rush and Andrea presented Pastor Lilja with a gift certificate to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, NY, and a financial gift in her honor to ELCA World Hunger.

The banquet closed with Holden Evening Prayer, led by The Rev. Linnéa Clark, St. Mark, Hamilton, and The Rev. Katherine Steinly, Zion, Oldwick.



**Thirty-Seventh New Jersey Synod Assembly
Hilton East Brunswick Hotel**

**Saturday, June 7, 2025
Plenary Session 4**

At 9:00 AM, Bishop Tracie Bartholomew welcomed visitors and voting members to Plenary Session 4. The Assembly rose and sang *Behold! I Make All Things New* followed by prayer led Deacon Shirley Talluri.

A slight adjustment will be made to the agenda, Unfinished Business (consideration of Memorial 1) will be moved before the Report of the Fifth Ballot for Bishop.

With Synod Council elections complete, Bishop Bartholomew called on Secretary Sue Rothmeyer and Dr. Dianne Browne for continuation of the Bishop election process. Deacon Sue Rothmeyer outlined the next steps in the election process for Bishop of the New Jersey Synod. The three nominees Maristela Freiberg, David Stoner, and Christa Compton were each given the opportunity to address the Assembly for 5 minutes.

BISHOP ELECTION: BALLOT #4

Secretary Rothmeyer called on registrar Dawn Roberts for the Report of Registration. Dawn reported there were 378 voting members present. The process continued with Dr. Dianne Browne giving instructions for casting Ballot #4. Deacon Sue Rothmeyer asked if there were any questions and gave additional time for any VPoll voting issues.

Secretary Rothmeyer called on Synod Council member Dr. Patty Espejo to lead the prayer followed by the Assembly singing *Breathe on Me Breath of God*. Secretary Rothmeyer instructed voting members to cast their vote for Ballot #4.

Secretary Rothmeyer declared Ballot #4 closed. Videos from United Lutheran Seminary and Seafarers and International House were shown and the chair returned to Bishop Bartholomew.

REPORT OF ELECTION – BALLOT #4: BISHOP

ELCA Secretary Rothmeyer assumed the chair as presider of the Assembly for the Report of Ballot #4 for Bishop. Secretary Rothmeyer called on Dr. Browne for the report of Ballot #4 for Bishop.

The report follows:

Number of Votes Cast: 351

Number of Votes Needed for an Election: 211

Election Complete: No

Number Still needed to be Elected: 1

Christa Compton 202 Maristela Freiberg 96 David Stoner 53

Secretary Rothmeyer declared the names Christa Compton and Maristela Freiberg on Ballot #5 and returned the chair to Bishop Bartholomew.

REPORT OF THE BISHOP

The Assembly continued with Arundel Clarke, Synod Vice President, assuming the chair of the Assembly as Bishop Bartholomew presented the Report of the Bishop.

REPORT OF ADVOCACY MINISTRY

Following the Report of the Bishop, Vice President Clarke introduced The Rev. Sara Lilja, Assistant to the Bishop, for the Report of Advocacy Ministry. Pastor Lilja began the report with words of thanks for Bishop Bartholomew's support of the ongoing advocacy ministry in our synod. Pastor Lilja lifted up our moral obligation to advocate for the vulnerable among us. Funding cuts to Medicaid and SNAP as well as affordable housing issues seriously impact many in our Synod. Pastor Lilja encouraged reaching out to elected officials as well as exercising our right to vote.

The report continued with a look at our partnership with the NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders, the oldest and largest interfaith organization in New Jersey. Pastor Lilja will serve as the Executive Director of the organization beginning July 1, 2025.

POINT OF PERSONAL PRIVILEGE

The Rev. Michael Gebhart, Retired, and The Rev. Gladys G. Moore, Retired, members of Bishop Bartholomew's Mutual Ministry Committee, led a Thanksgiving for Ministry Litany. The Synod staff presented Bishop Bartholomew with well-wishes of Voting Members collected throughout the Assembly. The time concluded with a "We will, we will miss you" stomp and clap rendition of Queen's *We Will Rock You!*

BALLOT #5: BISHOP

Secretary Rothmeyer called on registrar Dawn Roberts to give an updated Report of Registration. Dawn reported there were 378 voting members present. Deacon Rothmeyer called on Synod Council member Steve Hernandez, Faith, Lavallette, to lead the prayer followed by the Assembly singing *Breathe on Me Breath of God*. The process continued with Dr. Dianne Browne giving instructions for casting Ballot #5. Secretary Sue Rothmeyer asked if there were any questions and gave additional time for any VPoll voting issues.

Secretary Rothmeyer instructed voting members to cast their vote for Ballot #5.

Secretary Rothmeyer declared Ballot #5 closed. The results of Ballot #5 will be reported following the Report of Synod Council. The chair was returned to Bishop Bartholomew.

REPORT OF THE SYNOD COUNCIL

2026 Spending Plan

The 2026 Spending Plan was brought to the floor. Bishop Bartholomew clarified the line item in the Partner Section for NJ Interfaith Coalition. It is in fact the New Jersey Interfaith Coalition of Religious Leaders. There were no amendments to the Spending Plan. Using voting cards, a vote was called for the 2026 Spending Plan.

(ADOPTED by the New Jersey Synod in Assembly, June 7, 2025.)

The 2026 Spending Plan can be found at the end of this Minute document.

NOTICE OF 2026 SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Bishop Bartholomew called on Secretary Blake Scalet for notice of the 2026 Synod Assembly. Pastor Scalet reported the 2026 Assembly will be a one-day Assembly on Saturday, May 30, 2026 at the Doubletree by Hilton in Somerset, NJ.

REPORT OF REFERENCE AND COUNSEL UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bishop Bartholomew called on Kimberly McCleary, St. Matthew, Secaucus, and Chair of Reference and Council for Memorial 1.

RESOLVED that this Church publicly affirms the divinely-created goodness and beauty in all transgender, nonbinary, gender expansive, two-spirit and genderqueer people of all ages, races, ethnicities, abilities, religions, and beliefs; and be it further

RESOLVED that this Church speak out against the harmful policies and language towards transgender, nonbinary, gender expansive, two-spirit and genderqueer people perpetrated by government leaders and agencies wherever it is encountered; and be it further

RESOLVED that this Church, in partnership with long-time advocacy and education organization ReconcilingWorks, along with ecumenical and community partners, equip congregations, ministries, and rostered and lay leaders with information and theological background in order to empower us to public witness, as specified in the Strategy Towards Authentic Diversity; and be it further

RESOLVED that this Church continually seek guidance from transgender, nonbinary, gender expansive, two-spirit and genderqueer leaders both inside the Church (ReconcilingWorks, seminary scholars and students, synod staff, conference of Bishops, rostered leaders, lay leaders, and youth) and outside the Church for how to best advocate on their behalf in this time.

The Reference and Counsel recommended adoption of Memorial 1.

The Rev. Serena Rice, Abiding Peace, Budd Lake, rose to speak in favor of the memorial.

The Rev. Jeffrey Elliott, Cape May, Cape May, rose for clarification of the term two-spirit.

With no one speaking to the memorial, Bishop Bartholomew called for a vote.

(Memorial 1 was ADOPTED June 7, 2025.)

BISHOP ELECTION: REPORT OF BALLOT #5

ELCA Secretary Rothmeyer assumed the chair as presider of the Assembly for the Report of Ballot #5. Secretary Rothmeyer called on Dr. Browne for the report of Ballot #5.

The report follows:

Number of Votes Cast: 351

Number of Votes Needed for an Election: 176

Election Complete: Yes

Number Still needed to be Elected: 0

Christa Compton 235

Maristela Freiberg 116

(Secretary Rothmeyer declared The Rev. Christa Compton elected Bishop of the New Jersey Synod, ELCA, June 7, 2025, effective September 1, 2025.)

Bishop-Elect Compton addressed the Assembly. The chair was returned to Bishop Bartholomew.

REPORT OF REGISTRATION AND ATTENDANCE

Bishop Bartholomew called on registrar Dawn Roberts for the Report of Registration. The registration for the 2025 Synod Assembly:

Clergy	152
Lay	224
Total Voting Members	376
Non-Voting Members	59
Total Attendance	<u>435</u>

RECOGNITION OF OUTGOING SYNOD COUNCIL MEMBERS

Bishop Bartholomew recognized and thanked outgoing members of the Synod Council for their service:

The Rev. Linnea Clark, The Rev. Daniel Fields, Andrea Gerrard,
Steve Hernandez, and Grant Lefchak

INSTALLATION OF 2025- 2026 NEW JERSEY SYNOD OFFICERS AND COUNCIL

Bishop Bartholomew asked the 2025 – 2026 Synod Council members who were present to come forward for the rite of installation. The Synod Council will assume responsibility for the work of the Synod in the coming year. Synod Council members for 2025 – 2026 are:

Synod Council Officers

The Rev. Tracie L. Bartholomew, Bishop; Arundel Clarke, Vice President;
The Rev. Blake Scalet, Secretary, and James Harris, Treasurer

Synod Council – Clergy

The Rev. John DiMatteo, The Rev. Sarah Fryman, The Rev. Joseph Graumann, The Rev. Lisa Holliday, The Rev. Danielle McCleary, The Rev. Jane McCready, The Rev. Eric Trozzo, and The Rev. Pamela Werner.

Synod Council – Lay

Jennifer Emerson, Patricia Espejo, Agnetta Fasasi, Gail Gugliotti, Jaime Howey, Fred Humcke, Nansi Krauss, Wayne Olsen, Wannetta Phillips, Aretha Richardson, Rob Rinderer, Jose Sanchez, Cari States-Codding.

SENDING RITES

Bishop Bartholomew gave thanks for those representing the New Jersey at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in Phoenix, AZ and those participating in summer servant trips.

ORDER FOR CLOSING OF THE ASSEMBLY

Following announcements, the Assembly rose and sang *Behold! I Make All Things New*. Vice President Arundel Clarke and Bishop Bartholomew led the Assembly in the Order for the Closing of the Assembly. The Thirty-seventh New Jersey Synod Assembly was declared closed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.