



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

November 23, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

This past weekend, close to 100 youth and their adult leaders gathered for a day-long synod retreat. After 19 months of not gathering in person, it was clear that being together, even while wearing masks, was a much needed boost. The day included large and small groups praying, singing, learning, and having fun. One of the questions for us to ponder and answer during a large group time was “where have you seen God’s grace recently?”.

So I’m asking you, where have you seen God’s grace recently in your life? In the midst of hardship, injustice, suffering, and loss, it’s helpful to remember that God’s grace continues to permeate our lives. And it’s even more helpful to share with one another where we see glimpses of that every day.

I see God’s grace in action in you – gifting you to serve and proclaim and lead and love in Jesus’ name. Having received the gift of faith, you freely share it with others. Thank you for being the church Christ needs in this world. Thank you for making our communities better with your witness. Thank you for showing the world a more excellent way.

May you have a blessed Thanksgiving,

Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

What follows are some announcements about our life together – further glimpses of how God’s grace is at work in our synod.

Candidacy Coordinator Transition

Pastor Becky Resch has resigned as our synod candidacy coordinator in order to become the Region 7 & 8 Candidacy and Leadership Manager, a full time ELCA churchwide position. She will begin that position in early January. I thank Pastor Resch for her time as our candidacy coordinator. During her time, the number of people discerning and entering candidacy has grown. In addition to being the first contact for many of these folks, this position requires attention to the administrative details of the candidacy process (read: completing and filing reports on time). Pastor Resch will continue to walk with our First Call Theological Education participants. Thank you, Pastor Resch for a job well done.

Beginning December 1, Pastor Marc Almanderez Stutzel will serve as our candidacy coordinator. He will continue to serve as pastor of Christ, Woodcliff Lake, while taking on this contracted, part-time position. As a current member of the candidacy committee, the work is familiar to him and I anticipate a smooth transition. Welcome to this new role, Pastor Stutzel. The email for inquiries and candidacy process questions remains candidacy@njsynod.org.

Youth Ministry

As mentioned above, our annual synod youth ministry retreat was held this past weekend. It exceeded the expectations of the planning team! When we made a change in how our youth ministry would be done, there were many questions about whether our commitment to walking with youth and their leaders was waning. I'm pleased to say that the Youth Ministry Mission Team, in coordination with Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center, has taken on the leadership role in creative ways that has allowed youth ministry to continue to be a strength of our synod.

During this past disruptive year, they have hosted zoom events for leaders and for youth, provided workshops on using technology in ministry, and responded to congregations' needs. Please join me in thanking those who have stepped up to serve in this way: Debra Porowski (chair), Alexandra Mack, Pastor Annemarie Cook, Jamie Moni, Alyssa Gautieri, Riley Jakubowski, Anthony Briggs, Kathryn Schaefer, and Jeffrey Blanford.

Our Savior's Endowment

At its most recent meeting, the NJ Synod Council approved the establishment of the Our Savior's Endowment. This endowment comes from the sale of the Our Savior's, Edison, property following their closing last December. This gift will provide an additional income stream to help fund the work of the Office of the Bishop and the Bishop's Discretionary Fund in caring for our rostered leaders and congregations. Under the leadership of Pastor John Fischer (retired), the congregation chose to give the entire sale proceeds as one gift in order to strengthen the impact of it. The generosity of this congregation will be a living legacy for many years to come. Thank you to those who were a part of Our Savior's and who made this gift possible.

Pandemic Protocols

By now, most of our congregations have resumed in-person, indoor worship. Thank you for the care you are taking to make gathering as safe as possible. I have been asked if there are new metrics we should be using to determine ongoing protocols. While the number of new cases per 100,000 and transmission rates remain central to our decision making, it is also true there may be other factors to consider, such as vaccination rates in your county and specifically your community, hospitalizations, school protocols, etc.

I continue to advocate for mask wearing inside, especially if there is congregation singing, as the youngest children and the most vulnerable are not yet vaccinated. Proper ventilation with access to outdoor air (such as open windows or doors) contributes to safer gathering. As we enter the regular flu season, precautions that include hand sanitizing and not touching during the peace are prudent practices.

The synod staff, including me, will be wearing masks when we join you for worship or other activities. We continue to ask guests who come to the synod office to wear a mask. The staff is working a hybrid schedule – all together in person on Wednesdays and a combination of remote/ in office Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday (Fridays remain a day off). When the situation warrants, we will adjust our practice accordingly.