

Report of the Bishop

2014 SYNOD ASSEMBLY REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Written April 7, 2014

The Reverend Claire Schenot Burkat, Bishop

At the center of our shared partnership in the Gospel, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod exists to “*equip the saints and congregations for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ.*” This report will highlight some of the significant ways in which I have been privileged to serve as bishop throughout the year since our last Assembly in May of 2013. The many other responsibilities: leading worship, preaching, teaching, visiting, meetings with SEPA Synod leaders, global partners, social ministry agencies, ELCA institutions, regional and national gatherings, as well as ecumenical and interfaith meetings are noted in my report to the Synod Council on a regular basis. As we gather together in Assembly to worship, learn, deliberate, decide and discern, we will celebrate our life together in Christ, and explore the opportunities and challenges of our Lutheran witness today.

2014 Synod Assembly Theme: “God’s Work. Our Hands”

⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 1:6, 2:13)

God’s Work

God is at work. Has been – is now – and forever will be. Today and from the very beginning of time, what God creates is good. It is the Creator’s intention and work to bless and heal the world, because God loves the cosmos. We can see and experience this life giving work through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The ministry of Jesus clearly embodies the blessing God intends for God’s world; welcome for the marginalized, mercy for the sinner, healing for those suffering in mind, body and spirit, hope for the hopeless, good news of great joy for all people – no exceptions – and God’s ultimate work – death on a cross, resulting in the promise of resurrection and new creation for the whole world.

Our Hands

This new creation is God’s work, working both in us and through us. God frees us from sin, self-sabotage, and death to use our hands, our hearts, our minds, our whole selves to live generously, mercifully, and faithfully in partnership with God’s holy work for the sake of the world. In our joy and hope we proclaim in word, sacrament, witness and service, that God will bring God’s whole work to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.

This ELCA tag line, “God’s work. Our Hands” simply yet powerfully describes our trust in God and the evangelical witness of the ELCA. Who better to share with the SEPA Synod Assembly the amazing Work of God through this Church and the global Church than our former presiding bishop of the ELCA, **The Reverend Dr. Mark S. Hanson?**

I have invited Dr. Hanson to preach at our opening Eucharist and to bring us the Keynote at our 2014 SEPA Synod Assembly.

Since leaving the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Dr. Hanson has been busy preaching, lecturing, and travelling. With Rabbi Steve Gutow he was co-convenor of the U.S Jewish-Christian Leaders Summit. Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will continue as the ELCA participating leader.

He serves as a member of the Steering Committee for “Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA.” As a volunteer, he is working on leadership gifts from individuals for the ELCA Campaign. With Catholic Bishop Denis Madden he co-chairs the *Declaration on the Way* working group. This group of ELCA and Catholic theologians is working on a possible joint declaration on Ministry, Eucharist and the Church that might be ready for the 2017 commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. By September 1, 2014, The Reverend Dr. Mark S Hanson will be starting a new call.

Our Churchwide Representative this year is **Ms. Judith Roberts**, ELCA Program Director for Racial Justice Ministries. In addition to her presentation to the Assembly, she will conduct a “Q and A with the Churchwide Representative” forum on Friday afternoon.

Another highlight of this year’s Assembly will be the leadership of our new Vice President of the SEPA Synod, **Ms. Tracey A. Beasley**, elected at the May 2013 Assembly. Tracey has been active in many congregational and synodical activities, including the Synod Council from 2005-2011, the Synod Council Executive Committee from 2006-2011, the Synod’s Candidacy Committee, and the Synod’s Tanzania Companionship Team. She has been a leader in the congregational life of Mediator and Reformation, in Philadelphia. At Reformation she has served as Congregation Council President, Congregation Treasurer, Minister of Worship and Music, and Chair of the Sunday school. Tracey is Treasurer of the African Descent Lutheran Association, Philadelphia Chapter. She holds an MBA from West Chester University, and is Tax Department Supervisor for Asplundh Tree Expert Company.

Spring 2013

2013 Synod Assembly Theme - *Show Me: We Want to See Jesus*

Pastor Jay Gamelin of Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Lexington, SC was our keynote speaker with musical assistance from **Mr. Justin Rimbo**, former Music Director of Jacob’s Well in Minneapolis MN, who is now attending the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. We received enthusiastic and positive evaluations of Jay Gamelin’s two plenary sessions and two forums on, “*The Gospel in a Post-Modern Era.*” Also well received was the Music and Worship Seminar held Saturday afternoon simultaneously with the afternoon Assembly led by Justin and Jay geared toward church musicians and worship leaders.

The theme – *Show Me: We want to See Jesus*, was chosen from the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John where Greeks approached Philip and were seeking Jesus. Jay shared with us how the post-modern world is changing from a culture where the question was – *tell me about your religion* – to a new world where the inquirer wants us to be able to *show our faith and our God*. Throughout the Assembly, the speakers, videos and worship services presented examples of how congregations, the Synod and the ELCA work together to “show” Jesus to our communities.

Our Churchwide Representative last year was **Pastor Neil Harrison**, Program Director for Congregational Renewal, Congregation and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA.

Vice President Patricia Robinson

After 12 exciting years serving as Vice President of the SEPA Synod, we blessed **Ms. Patricia Robinson**, as she retired from this position, and honored her at a dinner the following week at the LTSP Brossman Center. Under her leadership, our Synod Council has navigated several very challenging years. Her love for the church of Jesus Christ has been evident in her leadership as Vice President of the Synod, in her congregation, in her participation in several Churchwide ministries, and as she has represented us globally. During her tenure, she exhibited remarkable patience, gracious compassion, a commitment to fairness, and good humor. We have truly been blessed, and know Patricia will continue to serve her Lord and her Church all the days of her life.

Our Synod’s youth-led **Malaria Campaign Team** made an Assembly report and gave us an update on the progress of our SEPA Synod Malaria Campaign. Malcolm Davis dressed in a mosquito costume introduced a video highlighting the goals for the campaign. Ms. Molly Beck Dean, Pastor Matt Staniz, and Ms. Alice Bell reported the LYO sent “Swat Team” educators to raise awareness in our congregations of the ELCA’s efforts to eradicate malaria. Including the \$5,770 given in offering at the Synod Assembly, a total of **\$127,803.73** has been contributed to this Synod’s malaria campaign.

Missionaries Tom and Susan MacPherson were Skyped in live from Tanzania from the Irete Children’s Home in our companion North Eastern Diocese, where they live and work, assisting with the care and development of the children, teaching English and computer skills to students learning to be daycare workers, gardening, mentoring aids and Peace Corps volunteers, and welcoming visitors to the Children’s Home.

With Gratitude

Many thanks for a wonderful **2013 Assembly** go to our officers: Vice President Patricia Robinson, Secretary Pastor Ray Miller, and Treasurer Janet Neff. To our ELCA Parliamentarian, Pastor Larry Smoose; Pastor Sandra Brown, chair of the Nominating Committee; Ms. Jill Meuser, chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel; Pastor Rebecca Eisenhart, chair of the Committee on Elections, and Ms. Doreen Kinzler, coordination of Pages. Pastor Jennifer Ollikainen, Pastor Janet Peterman, Pastor Jay Gamelin and Mr. Justin Rimbo, and a team of more than 30 people who led the worship services over the two-day Assembly – we are most appreciative.

Ms. Joanne Carlson ably coordinated all the many details, made the arrangements, and navigated all the issues in putting together an Assembly once again.

Thanks to Ms. Cynta Outterbridge our Synod Registrar and Statistician for her dedication to this important work. To Ms. Molly Beck Dean who assisted the Malaria Campaign Team with their presentation and related to youth and young adult attendees; and Mr. Bob Fisher, the communications team and CCI Communications for the excellent coverage.

Gratitude is in order for our entire Synod staff who together made this Assembly run well and seamlessly: Ms. Yvonne Curtis, Pastor Pat Davenport, Mr. Bill Harp, Ms. Judy Koenig, Ms. Debbie Perez and Ms. Carol Ann Murray.

50th Jubilee of the ELCT

Joanne Carlson and I visited Tanzania from June 11-25, 2013 as ELCA representatives to the Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the forming of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The Global Mission Unit of the Churchwide office assisted with costs for this event. We visited with Bishop Munga, the head office staff, Susan and Tom MacPherson and the ministries of the North Eastern Diocese prior to our participation in the ELCT seminars and festivities in Arusha.

Summer 2013

Lutheran Charities

Over the summer the first meeting of the Lutheran Charities Future Committee was held. There were 8-key leaders in attendance from Ken Crest, Liberty Lutheran, Diakon and the SEPA Synod. At the very first meeting, **Vice President Tracey Beasley** and I represented the Synod. **Ms. Jill Schumann** former president and CEO of Lutheran Social Services of America was our facilitator. A newly formed Lutheran Charities Future team was appointed in September with representatives from each agency. I was pleased **Pastor Bradley Burke** and **Pastor Marissa Harris Krey** agreed to represent SEPA Synod in the ongoing discussions and planning.

This team has worked all year to imagine a new way of supporting Lutheran Charities in SEPA Synod and beyond. A new 501c(3) Lutheran Charities corporation is being formed to raise awareness and funds for our social ministry agencies and institutions for many years to come. As of the writing of this report a job posting for an Executive Director of this new initiative is posted on Ministrylink.

Churchwide Assembly - Pittsburgh PA - August 12-17, 2014

“Always Being Made New” was the theme of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Pittsburgh. From the huge projection screens at the front of the hall to colorful banners hung on streetlights surrounding the convention center, voting members were continually reminded that *“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything becomes new!”* (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A New Presiding Bishop -That theme resonated and came to life throughout the week in ways that none of us could have anticipated. The most startling new thing that happened at the Assembly was the election of a new presiding bishop. The incumbent, **Bishop Mark Hanson**, had made public that he was open to serving a third term. As the first and then second ecclesiastical ballots were announced, we all became aware of new and viable candidates being lifted up. On the fifth ballot, the Assembly elected **The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton**, bishop of Northeastern Ohio Synod, as our presiding bishop.

I have known and admired Bishop Eaton for eight years as together we served in the Conference of Bishops. She has already begun leading us with courage, wisdom, wit, and a deep and faithful engagement with the witness of the ELCA for a new time. Bishop Hanson was incredibly gracious and welcoming to Bishop Eaton, and expressed confidence in her leadership: *"This call process was a call process for new leadership. In our history we have never looked back. We have always looked ahead."* It was evident throughout the Assembly that the election of a new presiding bishop did not in any way diminish the great love and admiration the people at the Assembly have for Bishop Hanson. After his address, and on several other occasions during the week, the applause was continuous and thunderous.

Bishop Mark Hanson has faithfully led this church through a most difficult decade. I have never met a leader who spoke extemporaneously with such passion for the Gospel, prophetic wisdom, and pastoral sensitivity than Bishop Hanson. I have seen him address lay and rostered leaders, ecumenical, world leaders and global partners with the same attention and engagement that he has shown to children, teenagers and those new to the faith. It has been an honor and privilege to listen and learn from this gifted Christian leader.

New Secretary Elected - We knew far in advance that the Assembly would be electing a **new Secretary**, as **David Swartling** had announced his retirement earlier in the year. A number of excellent candidates emerged through the ecclesiastical balloting process, before we elected **the Rev. William Chris Boerger** as our new Secretary. In addition to serving as bishop of the Northwestern Washington Synod (Seattle area) for twelve years, Pastor Boerger is a trained parliamentarian. He and Bishop Eaton make a great team! The ELCA is blessed and will be well served by these two new officers along with our continuing Vice President, **Mr. Carlos Pena**, and Treasurer the **Rev. Linda Norman, CPA**.

Health Care Changes - Another way in which our church is being made new can be seen in the **changes to health care benefits** provided by congregations and other ministries through Portico Benefit Services. The Assembly heard that Portico is moving from one level of coverage to four choices to comply with federal law. The ELCA Church Council recommends the "Gold+" plan, as it aligns most closely with current coverage. Rostered leaders who have health coverage through Portico should have received information outlining the changes prompted by the Affordable Care Act.

New ELCA Funding Campaign - There were other new things on the Assembly's agenda. We approved a **five-year, \$198-million fundraising campaign** to increase the ELCA's capacity to renew and start congregations, educate and develop leaders, bolster global mission efforts and expand the impact of its relief and development work. Thanks to the efforts of many youth and young adult members of the Assembly, the initial proposal was amended to add \$4 million for youth and young adult ministries, and others successfully advocated for another \$4 million for disability ministries.

New Teaching on Criminal Justice - The Assembly also adopted a new social statement, **"The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries."** Our own **Ms. Linda Manson** served on the taskforce, which was formed out of concern from across the church about the massive levels of incarceration in the U.S. The statement is timely and important, as it presents a comprehensive perspective on the U.S. Criminal Justice system, and the many communities directly impacted by this system. The statement affirms the principles of the American system, but also describes the serious deficiencies therein. It calls us to offer compassion and hospitality to all who are engaged by this system – including victims of crime, offenders and their families – and to work to ensure a just system. Our synod has recently launched a new mission called, **Living Gospel**, which is a church without walls, reaching out to those convicted of a crime, the formerly incarcerated and their families as they return to society and try to make a new life following conviction and imprisonment. **Linda Manson**, mission developer for Living Gospel is leading this new mission with resources of the Spirit and the world, to equip those gathered for an abundant life in Christ and a fresh start as they return to their neighborhoods. This ELCA Criminal Justice Statement is now a part of the official teachings of the ELCA, and it can be a useful educational tool for your congregation. (The statement is online at www.elca.org/criminaljustice.)

At our 2013 Churchwide Assembly, we were represented by a diverse and dedicated group of clergy and lay people from our Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. I was especially impressed with the energy and enthusiasm of our young adult members. Thanks to **Vice President Tracey Beasley, Secretary Ray Miller** (a member of Church Council), **Rev. Sandra Brown, Dr. Addie Butler, Rev. Michael Carlson, Mr. Malcolm Davis, Mr. Mark Goodwin, Mr. Christian Hicks, Rev. Gwendolyn King, Ms. Kendra Kramer, Rev. Cynthia Krommes, Ms. Jill Meuser, Rev. Jennifer Ollikainen, Sr. Jane Roper, Mr. Thomas Salber, Mr. Karl A. Segletes, Ms. Courtney Smith, and Rev. Larry Smoose.**

Fall 2013

SEPA Synod Capital Campaign

In order to raise up Synod leaders and supporters, identify Synod strengths as well as areas needing attention, ensure synodical financial sustainability, and develop varied communication vehicles to articulate God's mission on our Synod territory, the Synod Council began discussing a Synod Capital Campaign. At our September meeting I presented a possible timeline for launching such a campaign beginning in 2014 and continuing to possibly 2017, the year marking the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation.

The general purpose of the campaign is to raise new funds for our Synod Mission – “To equip the saints and congregations for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ...” After vetting several Fund Raising Companies, the executive committee selected **Kairos and Associates** as our preferred choice. The title and components of the original plan may change based upon focus group feedback led by the Kairos team.

Installation of Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Farewell to Bishop Mark Hanson

On Saturday October 5th the Conference of Bishops, and Church Council members, including our own secretary, Pastor Ray Miller, attended the installation of our new presiding bishop the Reverend Elizabeth Eaton at the Rockefeller Chapel on the campus of the University of Chicago. It was an inspiring and historic service, which many people across the ELCA viewed via live stream provided by the ELCA communications department. Bishop Jessica Crist gave an outstanding sermon and Bishop Mark Hanson and Vice President Carlos Pena installed Bishop Eaton. Following the service Pastor Miller and I attended a joyous banquet in Bishop Eaton and her family’s honor.

On Sunday October 6 Bishop Mark Hanson preached and Secretary-elect Reverend Chris Boerger presided at worship at a poignant and heartfelt service during the Conference of Bishops retreat. His sermon on 2 Timothy 1 stressed the challenge and joy of passing on the faith. Sunday evening we had a private time of farewell for Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson and Secretary David Swartling.

Bishop’s Convocation -- The Art and Awe of Sharing the Gospel, November 13-15.

Rostered leaders and Synod staff gathered at the Hotel Bethlehem for our 2014 Bishop’s Convocation. The theme “*Provocative Insight - The Art and Awe of Sharing the Gospel*” led by two speakers, the Rev. Dr. Alyce McKenzie, a United Methodist professor of homiletics, an author, a popular speaker, preacher and blogger, and Pastor Jay Gamelin who was our keynote presenter at the 2013 Synod Assembly. In spite of tight continuing education resources the attendance was good, about 120 participants, including Synod staff and presenters. I was especially pleased to see so many leaders new to our Synod in attendance this year. We made an extra effort to personally invite them, and they responded!

Winter 2014

I traveled quite a bit both in and out of the country in the winter of 2014. Here are some of the places I visited, and the conferences I attended:

ELCA Bishops Academy - January 2-7. The Conference of Bishops travelled to a very chilly Savannah Georgia (20 degrees) for our Academy. The Theme: “Good News.....*From, With and For*.....the Nones”

Journey of Renewal (Carefree, Arizona) January 19-21. In 2013, Portico offered 16 ELCA Bishops the opportunity to attend two retreats a year apart, with a special emphasis on wellness in body, mind, spirit as well as other important aspects of a healthy

and abundant life in Christ. In between the two retreats at a Lutheran Conference Center called Spirit of the Desert, a Portico spiritual director coached us monthly.

First Call Theological Institute (Malvern, PA) January 27-30. Ninety first call rostered leaders from Region 7 gathered for imaginative worship, excellent seminars and presentations on adaptive leadership in a time of change, and a chance to socialize and reconnect with colleagues old and new. The seven Region 7 bishops take turns attending every third year. This year I attended with Bishop Robert Rimbo of Metropolitan New York Synod.

Christian Churches Together (CCT) (Newark, NJ) February 4-6. Ecumenical leaders from the Catholic, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Historic Protestant, and Historic Black Churches met in a conference center in Newark, NJ to learn more about how to advocate and work for substantial changes in the Mass Incarceration System in the U.S., which disproportionately imprisons Black, Brown and poor people.

Interfaith Trip to Israel/Palestine February 10-19. I traveled to Israel and Palestine with an interfaith group of Christians and Jews hosted by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Philadelphia. Our delegation of 17 religious leaders included 3 Jews, 4 Lutherans, 4 Episcopalians, 4 Presbyterians and 2 Baptists. Pastors Pat Davenport, Ellen Meissgeier, Dr. Jon Pahl and I represented the Lutherans. Jon's son Justin who is working as a journalist in Istanbul joined us for the weekend. Rabbi David Straus a co-convenor of the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia, Rabbi David Ackerman and Adam Kessler, Director of the JCRC arranged for the trip, and assembled an incredible journey of holy as well as secular places, people and possibilities for peace. We hear so much about the hatred and divisions in the Middle East, but there are many people of faith, good will and just political practicality who are working for peace in the Holy Land. Many are of a younger generation and not as entrenched in political narratives as their predecessors. Our itinerary was packed with learning and observing from early day to late at night. Together, as Christians and Jews we visited holy sites as well as geopolitical places. It was mind boggling at times to be in a location with a three thousand year history and to be listening to a speaker relating the dynamic operative today.

So for the purpose of this report I will list the places and some of the people who dialoged with us, and some other time I'll relate stories that moved, encouraged and sometimes discouraged our band of travelers.

Christian Holy Sites

Old City of Jaffa, Nazareth, Capernaum, Mount of Beatitudes, Mount of Olives, Garden of Gethsemane, Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Redeemer Lutheran Church on the Via Dolorosa, and a renewal of baptism at the Jordon River.

Jewish Holy Sites and Israeli Historical Sites

Independence Hall (where the State of Israel was declared in 1948) Memorial Site of Sha'ar Yishuv (in memory of 73 IDF soldiers killed) The Golan Heights, Overlook of

Jerusalem with traditional “Shehechiyani” Blessing, Visit to Kotel - Western Wall of the Temple in Jerusalem (Wailing Wall) The Dead Sea, Masada, a Shabbat Service at a new Jewish mission in Jerusalem, Vad Yasem – and The Israeli Holocaust Museum, Mevasseret Zion Absorption Center to meet with Ethiopian Jews who have immigrated to Israel.

Lectures and visits - Led by Julian Resnick, our Tour Educator we dialogued and listened to 28 lectures and presenters in 10 days in addition to visiting the sites listed above!

I wrote an article on a particularly hopeful sign in the building of a new city in Palestine called Rawabi. You can read the article by following this link:
<http://ministrylink.org/article/palestine-city-hope/#sthash.MwYigQ15>

I am grateful to Bishops Tracie Bartholomew (New Jersey Synod) and Sam Zeiser (Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod) who made themselves available in the event a situation arose that needed attention from a bishop.

Advocacy Trip to Washington, DC – March 31- April 2. I traveled with 32 ELCA Bishops, ELCA advocacy staff and leaders from all over the country, to Washington DC to learn about and advocate for a variety of issues affecting the quality of life in our country including poverty, food insecurity, Middle East Issues, environmental concerns, and immigration reform. I serve on the ELCA Bishops’ Ready Bench for Immigration Reform, so after learning from and listening to a variety of prominent leaders on how our government works, particularly lobbyists, I was sent to speak with legislators on Capitol Hill about the necessity for Immigration Reform. I brought with me a copy of the Principles for Immigration Reform developed by the Religious Leaders of Greater Philadelphia and the Christian Churches Together Immigration Reform statement to demonstrate how people of faith care about making these changes, and can work together for change in a bi-partisan manner.

ELCA Church Council (Chicago, IL) – March 4-6. I traveled to the Lutheran Center in Chicago to attend the ELCA Church Council meeting. I now serve as the Region 7 liaison bishop along with Pastor Ray Miller our Synod secretary who has represented the SEPA Synod on the ELCA Church Council very well for several years.

LTSP Presidential Search Committee. As a trustee of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, I have been very active in the last six months also serving as a member of the Presidential Search Committee. President Philip Krey will be stepping down as President this year, which coincides with the 150-year anniversary of LTSP. As of the writing of this report, the search committee has narrowed down the candidates and we are hoping a new president will be presented to the board, faculty and students soon.

Welcome Martin Schwab and Pastor Susan Lang

Martin Schwab has joined the Synod staff as Senior Accountant in our business office. He comes to us from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, where he worked in the business office for more than 10 years. **Sue Lang** is our new part-time contracted Assistant Events Planner. A pastor, an author, a consultant, networker and retreat leader, she will assist Joanne Carlson with planning and logistics for Assembly, Convocation and other smaller events. We are pleased to welcome Martin and Sue to our staff as together we *work to equip the saints and congregations for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ.*

Let me take this opportunity to thank and bless those leaders who have faithfully served on Synod Council and are now completing their term limits. We know the leadership they have given and the experience of working in ministries on the synodical level has strengthened their faith, and they will continue to serve their congregations, our Synod, their communities and the ELCA as they take on other leadership roles: **Pastor Sandra Brown, Pastor Charles Leonard, Pastor Christopher Weidner, Ms. Jill Meuser, and Ms. Madison Reid** who is leaving for college this fall.

SEPA Synod Capital Campaign

Since our Synod Council, staff and deans meeting with **Mr. Jeff Kjellberg and Pastor David Lose** on February 1 at the Brossman Center on the campus of LTSP, our partnership with Kairos has begun. More than 1,000 electronic **Landscape Surveys** have gone out to key rostered and lay leaders on our Synod territory. We received a 50% return rate, which is remarkable. This online survey, consisting of 60 multiple choice questions, will be tabulated as part of a sophisticated feasibility instrument to help determine energy in various ministry areas of the SEPA Synod.

I also hosted two **Bishop's Summits** with key leaders from many of our Synod teams to engage Synod stakeholders in deep listening to the hopes and dreams of rostered and lay leaders for a vital future for mission in the SEPA Synod.

Dr. David Lose will give an overview of the results of the Landscape Survey, at our Synod Assembly on Saturday morning, and will highlight what Kairos has learned about the energy and vitality already present in our Synod, and the areas needing strengthening.

Following David's remarks, and my report during the report of the Synod Council, the Assembly will be asked to approve a resolution to move this campaign forward.

Resolution: *In order to equip, strengthen, and grow the congregations and leaders of this territory, be it resolved that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (ELCA) enter a capital funding campaign by which to clarify and communicate a compelling vision, engage congregations in a process of discovery and growth, and develop resources necessary to achieve the mission to which we believe God is calling us.*

Spring 2014

Deans

The work of the **Committee of Deans** is critical to the effective functioning of our Synod, particularly as we are working with fewer Synod staff. In addition to monthly meetings to discuss congregational transitions, mobility for rostered leaders, and current issues facing leaders and congregations, we meet annually in retreat for scripture, prayer, worship, and time reflecting on and discerning God's direction for our work. Their services to our Synod are invaluable assets to staffing our missional priorities. In the fall and winter of 2013 we said goodbye to: **The Rev. Paul Sorcek, the Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf, and the Rev. Lamont A. Wells** and thanked them for their time of service as dean.

Deans who served in 2013 and 2014 are:

The Rev. Ellen Meissgeier, Lower Montgomery Conference, new dean **The Rev. Julie DeWerth**

The Rev. Paul Sorcek, Lower Bucks Conference, new dean, **The Rev. Jackson Haas**

The Rev. Carlton Rodgers, Central Conference

The Rev. Paul Townsend, Chester Conference

The Rev. Rev. Gordon Simmons, Delaware Conference

The Rev. Kevin Hilgendorf, Northeast Philadelphia Conference, new dean **The Rev. Ben Krey**

The Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells, Northwest/Olney Conference, now the position is Vacant

The Rev. Serena Sellers, Upper Bucks Conference

The Rev. William Vanderslice, Upper Montgomery Conference

The Rev. Marcia Bell, Interim Ministry Dean

I recently appointed **The Rev. Ellen Meissgeier as Director of Mobility** on a part time basis, to assist me with the administrative and confidential work of the Committee of Deans, and transitional ministry team.

In a similar way, **The Rev. Nancy Brown** serves as Director of Candidacy on a part time basis and **Mr. Fred Renigar** serves as the Chair of the Candidacy committee to oversee the many requirements and administration of the candidacy process, since we reduced staff three years ago.

Synod Staff

The Synod staff deserves kudos, congratulations and prayers for serving this Church with resilience, patience, tenacity, good humor and commitment to God's mission on our territory. Please join me in thanking the staff for their tireless efforts and love for Jesus Christ, His Church and the people of God in the ministry we share together.

Ms. Yvonne Curtis – As our Director of Operations with expertise in organizational leadership we are now living into all the gifts and abilities of this position. She has brought up to date our Synod office business protocols. She organizes my work and

schedule, oversees the operation of the office and staff, and deftly handles the many demands that come our way every day. **Pastor Patricia Davenport** - continues to serve as our Director for Evangelical Mission and brings her contagious faith and vision to the many ways we are being challenged to attend to evangelical outreach and the proclamation of the Gospel in these new times. The Program Staff: **Ms. Joanne Carlson, Ms. Molly Beck Dean, and Mr. Robert Fisher** lead and serve respectively in the specific areas which are priorities for our synodical work: global vision, youth and young adult ministry, and communication/mission interpretation.

Joanne has expanded our partnership with parishes of our companion Synod, the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania, and we hope to welcome Bishop Munga and members of the head office staff next fall to our Convocation. **The Rev. Susan Lang** has been brought on in a very part time basis to assist Joanne with the events planning of the Synod. Molly continues to gather our youth, young adults and youth leaders in a variety of ways synodically, domestically and internationally to equip our whole Synod for ministry with and for the young and those whose have an interest in the future of our church. Bob keeps us connected in many ways through social media, but also through his work of interpreting God's mission and helping to prioritize our work together. Our business office is now reorganized as we welcome **Mr. Martin Schwab** to our staff as Senior Accountant of the Business Office. With the collaboration and gifts of our program staff we are finding new ways to *equip the saints and congregations for the work of ministry, in order to build up the body of Christ.*

Our Administrative Staff: **Mr. Bill Harp, Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, and Ms. Debbie Perez** have demonstrated their willingness to adapt to the necessary changes in our office. They come together as a team with a strong faith commitment to our shared ministry, collaboration in all areas, and a sense of pride and competence in managing the many day-to-day challenges and opportunities that come our way. It is obvious that our Synod staff members support each other and serve our Synod graciously and willingly, motivated by their love for Jesus Christ and His Church.

My appreciation for the support and guidance I have received in leading this Synod are extended to the **Synod Council**, and especially to the Executive Committee: **Ms. Tracey Beasley** (Vice President), **Pastor Raymond Miller** (Secretary), **Ms. Janet Neff** (Treasurer), **Mr. Robert Hensil, Ms. Margie Pendarvis-Wright, and Pastor Karl Richard**. These leaders and other volunteers bless our work and make it possible for us to share ministry broadly, deeply, and faithfully. Please thank them during the Assembly for their volunteer service to our Lord and this Synod. May Christ continue to bless them with enthusiasm and energy for continued witness to His Church.

With and in Christ,

Claire S. Burkat, Bishop

Appendix



Religiously Diverse, United for Immigration Reform **Adopted January 29, 2014**

We are religious leaders representing thirty traditions and more than two million constituents in the greater Philadelphia area; and WE ARE UNITED.

1. We are united by our awareness that immigration reform has long been a priority for leaders and citizens in the US; and we are united by our disappointment that so little reform has been achieved. The absence of reform insures the unfortunate continuation of policies and practices that prevent family unification, encourage racial profiling, and enable unequal treatment under the law.
2. We are united in our sense of urgency, believing immigration reform ought to be among the top priorities of legislators, and caring for immigrants ought to be among the top priorities of the faith community.
3. We are united in affirming that moral imperatives for reform are grounded both in the teachings of our various religious traditions and in the guiding principles of our nation.

In meetings, we have shared our own families' experiences as immigrants and listened to the stories of others. We have heard the analysis of national and local leaders seeking immigration reform. We have compared statements on immigration reform issued by 16 of the religious bodies we represent. We have prayed separately and together, and debated among ourselves. We agree with all who support insuring

the security of our nation's borders as part of immigration reform. But, we are unanimous in our conviction that, even if consensus cannot be reached on how to secure our nation's borders, this nation must move forward with other reforms that:

- encourage documented immigration, promoting social and economic vibrancy for our nation;
- protect the human rights of immigrants and those detained, providing each one with access to due process under the law, including legal representation;
- promote compassionate treatment of families and enable family unification, especially for "mixed status" families; and
- provide a pathway to citizenship for those who are undocumented and already in the U.S.

We focus on these issues because our sacred texts insist that each person is made in the image of God and thus possesses dignity worthy of respect, regardless of that person's status in society. Our various traditions also are united in teaching that hospitality to strangers is God's will. For example, Leviticus 19: 33 – 34 in the Torah commands: "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." In the Christian Testament, St. Paul directs Christians to, "extend hospitality to strangers" (Romans 12: 13); and Jesus teaches that whenever a stranger is welcomed into the community, he (Jesus) also has been welcomed (Matthew 25: 35 – 40). The Qur'an directs us to "serve God ... and do good to ... neighbors who are strangers" (4:36).

These teachings were incorporated into our nation's founding documents, especially the Declaration of Independence, drafted in Philadelphia, which proclaims that "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" are unalienable rights for all people. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution ensures "equal protection under the law," which the Supreme Court has interpreted to apply to citizens and non-citizens alike. Even before our nation was formed, William Penn, guided by his Quaker faith, envisioned our region as a place that would be open and welcoming to those seeking a new life regardless of their nationality, ethnicity or religious background. The practical wisdom of the moral imperatives from our sacred texts and our national ideals is proven by the historical experience of Philadelphia, and other cities and towns throughout the US: immigrants add economic and cultural vibrancy to their new homeland. They revitalize our neighborhoods, congregations, communities, and nation. Welcoming immigrants to our land is not only the right thing to do; it is a good thing to do for immigrants seeking a better life and for our country as it welcomes them.

Our religious teachings, our nation's ideals, and the history of immigrants' contributions to our communities lead us to call upon national, state and local elected officials and all in authority to address immigration reform *now* and make changes to public policy and practice that are just, compassionate, and humane.

With hope and prayer, we also call upon all communities of faith within our region to actively "welcome the stranger" and advocate for reform of the laws that govern immigration. We urge our constituents to offer financial support to faith-based and secular agencies which meet the needs of immigrants and to volunteer time and expertise to help immigrants adjust to life in their new communities. Specifically, we lift up for consideration the following opportunities for our houses of worship: to WELCOME immigrants and refugees, EDUCATE themselves about the immigrant experience and the laws which govern it, and ADVOCATE for reform locally, statewide, and nationally.

WELCOME

- Meet with immigrants and refugees to learn about their experiences before, during, and after their move to the US, in order to welcome the stranger **and** sensitize our communities to immigration issues.
- As a community, accompany at least one immigrant or refugee family through their next year of transitioning to life in the United States.
- Provide worship opportunities in immigrants' first languages or translation, and include prayers and preaching focused on immigration issues.
- Make sure immigrant neighbors are aware of the legal, social, and pastoral care services that are available to them through your house of worship or referrals you can make.
- Sponsor a campaign to provide household goods for immigrants in need.
- Hold events that will provide social and professional contacts for immigrants.

EDUCATE

- Become aware of our sacred texts' teachings regarding "welcoming the stranger." Discuss how your tradition has interpreted these teachings and put them into practice.
- Learn what immigration laws are in place now, and how they are applied.
- Learn about current efforts to enact immigration reform and how your denomination or tradition has responded to the issue.
- Sponsor a panel or discussion on immigration reform and invite the larger community to attend.

ADVOCATE

- Communicate with your representatives in congress and the senate, asking for immigration reform.
- Learn the position on immigration reform held by your representatives and schedule an in-district visit with them to discuss the issue.
- Monitor local and state legislators and encourage them to 1) pass legislation supportive of immigration reform and 2) oppose legislative proposals that discriminate against immigrants.
- Form or join a coalition that advocates for immigration reform in order to maximize the use of resources and make a stronger impact.

As religious leaders in the greater Philadelphia region, we dream of a day when people from all our traditions will unite to act on the teachings and values we hold in common. We look forward to becoming even more effective together than we are separately as we respond to the needs of our neighbors and help shape the future of our nation. As we unite to care for the immigrants and refugees among us and work on immigration reform together, our dream will be realized.

Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia

Co-Conveners:

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput - Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Bishop Claire Schenot Burkat - Southeastern PA Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
Imam Anwar Muhaimin - Quba Masjid
Rabbi David Straus - Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Phila.

Members:

Rev. Luis A. Cortés, Jr. - Hispanic Clergy of Philadelphia & Vicinity
Rev. Wanda D. Craner - PA Southeast Conference, United Church of Christ
Bishop Clifton Daniel - Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania
Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell - Delaware Valley Association of Reform Rabbis
Dr. Bijan Etemad & Dr. Gity Etemad - Philadelphia Baha'i Community
Rabbi Albert E. Gabbai - Congregation Mikveh Israel
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Father Emmanuel Pratsinakis - Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey
Imam Asim Abdur-Rashid - Majlis Ash-Shura of Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley
Imam Mohamed Shehata - Al-Aqsa Islamic Society
Elder Robert B. Smith - The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints
Archbishop Stefan Soroka - Archeparchy of Philadelphia
Rev. Dr. Richard Speck - Joseph Priestley District, Unitarian Universalist Association

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