

the once & future church

Under the theme "The Once and Future Church," [The 2011 Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly](#) looked ahead to the faith needs of the millennial generation, reached back to heal an historic rift with Mennonites, and discussed the new realities in which the church is currently living.

'We are Ambassadors of Reconciliation'

In her sermon during worship, **Bishop Claire Burkat** opened the 2011 assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod reminding those present of their vocation as ambassadors of reconciliation for Christ.

"Think of the implications of this in your role as a Christian," she said. "You are, in the eyes of the Church, an official of the highest rank representing Christ himself."

While most of us do not have credentials to serve as "ambassadors," Burkat indicated that it is the particular contexts in which we live, work, and serve that make us perfect for the job because we are each positioned at the center of a unique constellation of local human networks.



Read more and view video of the bishop's sermon at <http://www.ministrylink.org/article/we-are-ambassadors-of-reconciliation/>

Living in the Present Tense

In a culture in which "none" is the second most frequently named religious preference among Americans, the church and our Synod are challenged to re-think how to join God's mission in the world, **Bishop Claire Burkat** said in her annual address. As the Synod readjusts staffing and priorities in the wake of recurrent budget shortfalls, the bishop offered a statement of purpose to guide us in this period of transition.

**"Activated by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we equip the saints
and congregations for the work of ministry,
for building up the Body of Christ."
(Ephesians 4:11-13, adapted)**

The elimination of two staff positions to balance the 2012 budget, and the voluntary departure of two other staff members, is not a crisis but "an opportunity for us to sincerely seek God's direction, to boldly lean into God's future, and to re-imagine the ministry we do together as a Synod," Burkat said. Citing inspired outreach programs the 259-year-old **St. Peter's, Lafayette Hill**, and the newly birthed **Rhawnhurst Turning Point** and **The Welcome Church**, the bishop noted that we are already embodying the outreach, authenticity and service that will revitalize the Lutheran witness in our area.

"This is the new world, and Church, in which we live," Burkat said. It won't be easy for the Church to change when such shifts are happening in the world. But, the Church of Christ has always been faithful through the ages and will continue to grow long after we are gone. We

pray...that we, too, may be faithful," she said, "so that the world may be blessed for generations to come."

Read more and watch video of the bishop's address at <http://www.ministrylink.org/article/living-in-the-present-tense/>

Millennial Ministry

Ministry with the generation aged 10-30 today "looks more like the church of the 1st and 2nd Centuries" than the institution of the 1960s that many leaders fondly recall, said **Dr. Rodger Nishioka**, a professor of Christian Education at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia and an expert in the faith of young adults.



Instead of catering to a dwindling tribe of insiders, *the church has the opportunity to reach out to religious "immigrants" who "have no experience with the church,"* Nishioka said. Research shows that youth and young adults are hungry for spiritual experience rather than religious knowledge, and are open to the mysteries of faith when presented in ways that resonate with them.

Nishioka outlined a number of trends among millennials that challenge the church to change. For example, this generation is looking for authentic, gifted leaders and doesn't rely on academic credentials. Also the rapidly pace of change this generation has grown up with forces organizations to shift focus from long-term to short-term plans. Seekers are looking for real experience of faith, not just a tradition to join. This generation is also hostile to traditional mass evangelism but is open to one-on-one invitations, he said.

View videos of Dr. Nishioka's entire presentations at <http://www.ministrylink.org/article/millennials-challenge-church-to-change/>

Reconciled Communities in Christ

The Assembly opened with **Lutherans and Mennonites** receiving bread and wine and distributing the elements side-by-side, and a time of reconciliation marking Lutheran repentance for the sins of our 16th Century ancestors who persecuted and murdered Anabaptists because of doctrinal differences.



Bishop Burkat made an emotional apology on behalf of the Synod to **Pastor Charles Ness**, a Franconia Mennonite Conference pastor who has been involved in the global Anabaptist reconciliation movement. She then presented him with a pitcher, basin, and towel representing the washing away of past sins.

In his own emotional acceptance of the gifts, Pastor Ness said, "These words and actions today point to the truth that the Kingdom of God is more than denominational labels and distinctions. Through these confessions I believe that Christ will heal the wounds of history and free us to become whole persons and spiritually renewed churches."

Financial Matters

The Assembly [approved a balanced \\$2.54 million budget](#) for 2012. After completing several years with deficits that depleted the Synod's Fund for Mission and with a continuing decline in partnership support gifts from congregations, the finance committee and Synod Council decided to present a balanced budget for 2012, said **The Rev. Christopher Weidner**, finance chair.



Bishop Burkat honors Dick Reimet and his wife, Elaine.

On the revenue side, the budget anticipates that partnership support income, which makes up 90 percent of the synod's revenues, will not significantly increase from 2010 levels. Last year, [partnership support income again fell below the total received in 1985](#). Partnership support as a percentage of congregations' regular income was about half what it was in 1985, Weidner said. To reduce expenses, the Synod eliminated two staff positions in March, and another staff position will be voluntarily reduced to half time this summer.

The Assembly also elected **Janet Neff, C.P.A.**, as treasurer to succeed **Dick Reimet**, who [stepped down after 32 years](#). Reimet will continue to handle property matters for the Synod.

Commissioned for Mission



Surrounded by family, friends, and congregations supporting ministry in Tanzania, **Tom and Susan MacPherson** were commissioned by Joanne Carlson, Assistant to the Bishop for Global Vision, and Bishop Burkat, to serve as volunteer missionaries at the Children's Home in Irete, Tanzania.

"We did not wake up one morning and say to each other let's be missionaries," said Tom. "On the contrary, I was trying to plan for our future. I thought I was in control. Boy, was I wrong."

He told of how a visit in 2008 to Tanzania with their home congregation, **St. John's in Mayfair**, changed their lives as they were touched by the depth of the people's love for God.

The Assembly also formally received **New Life Ministries** as a new congregation, which formed a year ago from a merger of Calvary and Immanuel in West Philadelphia.

Credits *Prepared by the SEPA Assembly Communications Team*

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Other Business

The Rev. Dr. Gregory Villalon, ELCA Director for Missional Leadership and Candidacy, [thanked the synod for its mission support in difficult times](#). These monies have contributed to sixty-one new mission starts and one hundred ninety-five grants to congregations for mission renewal. The ELCA has also contributed 6.2 million dollars to support people in places like Haiti and Japan where they have faced severe disasters. "We are a church that is focused in mission and grounded and being held up by the shoulders and arms of our Lord Jesus Christ," he said. He told the assembly about Living Into the Future Together (LIFT), a conversation in the ELCA to reflect on what God is calling us to be in the future and who we can be, together, as the church in mission.

The Synod re-elected **The Rev. Raymond Miller** as Secretary. Miller, pastor of St. John, Quakertown, has served since 1999.

Other election results: Synod Council - Clergy: **Sandra Brown** (2014), **Charles Leonard** (2014), **Christopher Weidner** (2014)

Synod Council - Lay Woman at Large: **Jill Meuser** (2014)

Synod Council - Lay Male at Large: **Fred Brown** (2014)

Synod Council - Chester Conference Representative (Male): **Rodman Rothermel** (2014)

Synod Council - Lower Bucks Conference Representative (Male): **Walter Shultz** (2014)

Synod Council - Youth (Male): **Malcolm Davis** (2013)

Synod Council - Young Adult (Male): **Brandon Starnes** (2013)

Synod Council -- Lower Montgomery Conference Representative (Female): Referred to Synod Council

Synod Council -- Upper Montgomery Conference Representative (Male): Referred to Synod Council

The Assembly passed a resolution encouraging congregations to model **environmental stewardship** by auditing and reducing their energy use, and encouraging members to use less energy in their homes. The resolution also calls on the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to challenge all congregations to reduce energy use by 5 percent a year, with an ultimate goal of reducing overall emissions by 35-40 percent by 2020.

The Assembly also passed a resolution urging congregations to join or create programs to **prevent bullying** in the church and to combat its effects in schools and other areas of culture.

The Assembly passed a resolution acknowledging 2011 as the **International Year for People of African Descent**, as well as one reinforcing the Synod's **anti-racism** practices.

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