

Report of the Bishop

2015 SYNOD ASSEMBLY REPORT OF THE BISHOP
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Written April 20, 2015

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 2014. The many other responsibilities: leading worship, preaching, teaching, visiting, meetings with SEPA 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.

2015 Synod Assembly Theme: “Forward Together in Faith”

“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”
Romans 12:4-5

Whether you are a voting member or a visitor to the 2015 SEPA Synod Assembly, and if you are reading this report online and following the activities of our life together as synod, you already know we are many members, we are diverse, and together we are the body of Christ. Joined by our faith, blessed with gifts to share, we gather annually as a synod in Assembly.

In spite of trends that indicate a decline in church participation as we have known and experienced it in the late twentieth century, God’s Spirit is alive and continually agitating inside and outside the church. As the body of Christ in SEPA Synod, we need to develop renewed sight to see the possibilities rising up before us, clarity in hearing to perceive the cries of sorrow and laughter in our communities, a purposeful touch to soothe the troubled soul and to embody the ministry of our Lord, a keen sense of smell to offer our lives as a fragrant offering, and an appetite to taste and savor the goodness of the Lord. In recent years, we have experienced societal and ecclesiastical changes at an astonishing rate. Faithfulness to the Gospel demands that we find fresh ways to express God’s message of grace and acceptance to the people God has placed in our midst.

Following the Landscape Synod Assessment and Bishop’s Summits conducted by Kairos Consultants last year, we heard you say you want to be equipped for ministry in this transitional time. You long to be better connected to each other in order to walk and work collaboratively as a Synod. It is evident that not one person, not one congregation, not one synod, and not one denomination can do this alone. We need each other, we will learn from and cooperate with each other, and we will remind each other that the reason we are moving forward is to align with Christ’s purpose to bless and reconcile the world.

This Assembly will launch the *Forward Together in Faith* Campaign to generate resources to help make this vision a reality. Instead of a keynote speaker, this year we will preview and present the five components of the campaign.

- *Forward Together as **Equippers***
- *Forward Together as **Innovators***
- *Forward Together as **Communicators***
- *Forward Together as **Networks**, and*
- We will send a tithe of our campaign to the ELCA Campaign also underway called *Always Being Made New*.

The Reverend Dr. Stephen Bouman

Our Churchwide Representative this year is the **Reverend Dr. Stephen Bouman**, who currently serves as the Executive Director of the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit of the ELCA. We were pleased to welcome him in February at our Senior High Youth Gathering (SHYG).

Treasurer Janet Neff

At the February 19th meeting of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council **Ms. Janet Neff** was re-elected to a second term as Synod Treasurer. Thank you and bless you Janet for your willingness to continue serving as an officer of the Synod and our treasurer!

Thanks to the Reverend Raymond A. Miller

Although eligible, **Pastor Ray Miller** has announced he will not stand for re-election as Secretary of the SEPA Synod. Pastor Miller is also finishing his six-year term on the ELCA Church Council. Join our Synod in thanking Pastor Miller at Assembly. A dinner in his honor is planned for May 15th.

We will be electing a new Synod Secretary at Assembly this year. Other elections will include new members to Synod Council and voting members to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2016.

Thanks to Joanne Carlson

Ms. Joanne Carlson will be retiring the end of July after 25 years as Synod staff serving in a variety of capacities, most notably as Assistant to the Bishop for Global Vision and Events. In her work in Global vision, Joanne has coordinated our congregation to parish partnerships, our support of missionaries to and institutions of the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania, and has been the Synod liaison to the SEKOMU Coordinating Committee. A dinner in her honor is planned for June 19th.

Our Synod Assembly offering this year will go to a new initiative of SEKOMU called **The Compassion House**, a training, research, respite and inspiration center for people with special needs and their families.

Departing Synod Council Members

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 strengthen their faith, as they continue to serve their congregations, our Synod, their communities and the Churchwide and global expressions of the Church as other opportunities to serve come along.

Pastor Regina Goodrich has served as chair of the Nominating Committee, and will continue to serve as a leader at the ELCA Youth Gathering.

Ms. Margie Pendarvis-Wright has served on the Executive Committee, and will continue to serve on the Candidacy Committee.

Several new members to the Synod Council will be elected at this Assembly

Spring 2014

2014 Synod Assembly Theme – God’s Work, Our Hands

This ELCA tag line, “God’s work. Our hands.” simply yet powerfully describes our trust in God and the evangelical witness of the ELCA. We were blessed to have as our opening service preacher and keynote speaker, **The Reverend Dr. Mark S. Hanson**. He preached and spoke powerfully about the unconditional love of Christ that frees us to worship, witness and serve in His name. He shared examples and stories of the amazing work of God through this church and the global church. Bishop Hanson truly enjoyed his time with us, and our appreciation for his service as Presiding Bishop of the ELCA and President of the Lutheran World Federation was evident all weekend long. The offering of \$5,823 gathered at the opening service was given in his honor to the ELCA Fund for Leaders.

Our Churchwide Representative last year was **Ms. Judith Roberts**, ELCA Program Director for Racial Justice Ministries.

Mr. David Neale, Chair of the Tanzania Companionship Team once again introduced missionaries **Tom and Susan MacPherson** who were skyped in live from Tanzania from the Irete Children’s Home in our companion North Eastern Diocese. They returned to the U.S. after their almost three year missionary journey in August 2014.

After my presentation to the Synod and **Ms. Tracey Beasley’s** address as vice president a vote to approve a Synod campaign was amended slightly then unanimously adopted by the Assembly.

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 mission advancement 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.*

With Gratitude

Many thanks from a grateful Synod go to our officers: **Vice President Tracey Beasley**, **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; and **Pastor Rebecca Eisenhart**, chair of the Committee on Elections. **Pastor Jennifer Ollikainen**, **Pastor Janet Peterman**, and a team of more than 50 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. This year **Pastor Susan Lang** our assistant events planner learned the ropes from Joanne for future planning.

Thanks to **Ms. Cynta Outterbridge** our Synod Registrar and Statistician for her dedication to this important work. **Mr. Bob Fisher**, the communications team and **CCI Communications** for the excellent coverage. And to our entire Synod staff who together made this Assembly run well and seamlessly: **Ms. Molly Beck Dean**, **Ms. Yvonne Curtis**, **Pastor Pat Davenport**, **Mr. Bill Harp**, **Ms. Debbie Perez**, and **Mr. Martin Schwab**.

Reformation 500

In June of 2014 I traveled with Pastor Stephen Godsall- Myers and 20 other pilgrims from SEPA Synod to Germany for a 10-day tour of the birthplace of the Reformation.

We visited the Castle Church in Wittenberg (where Luther posted his 95 Theses), Luther's Birth House and Death House museums in Eisleben, the Wartburg Castle (where Luther translated the New Testament in Eisenach), the university district in Erfurt (where Luther studied) as well as the church where Luther was ordained and the monastery where he took his vows. The tour also visited sites in Berlin, Leipzig, and Halle.

Luther and the Arts Trip 2015

The Reformation 500 Committee of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod is offering another trip to Lutherland, June 12-21, 2015. What better way to prepare for 2017, then to visit historical sites connected with Martin Luther, the artist Lucas Cranach, and the musician J.S. Bach?

Accompanying the trip in 2015 are **Drs. Karl Krueger and Michael Krentz**, both on the Faculty of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. The theme is Luther and the Arts, music and art specifically.

<http://ministrylink.org/ministries/teams/luther2017/luther-and-the-arts-trip-2015>

We plan to sponsor two more trips in June of 2016 and 2017. **Pastor Soenke Schmidt-Lange** will lead the 2016 trip. The itinerary is still in progress. If you are interested in travelling with new friends to experience the remarkable history of our denomination visit the Synod Reformation 500 link to get updates and information on ways to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation.

<http://ministrylink.org/ministries/teams/luther2017>

Same Gender Marriage

As the result of a ruling by the United States District Court on May 20, 2014 and an announcement by Governor Corbett that his administration will not seek an appeal, same-gender marriage became legal in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. At the link below is my letter to the rostered leaders from June of 2014, answering the question before us: *What, if anything, does this mean for the pastors, lay leaders, and congregations of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America?*

This letter was sent to rostered leaders, council leaders, Synod staff, and Synod Council. An abbreviated version with the full text and frequently asked questions was also posted through Ministrylink. <http://ministrylink.org/?s=same+gender+marriage>

Summer 2014

WELCA Ninth Triennial Gathering July 24–27, 2014

I had the honor of preaching at the opening worship service of the Triennial Gathering of Women of the ELCA at the Charlotte Convention Center, Charlotte, North Carolina. SEPA Synod was well represented at the event that gathered approximately 2,500 participants. Many photos with Presiding Bishop Eaton were taken by our WELCA women. The theme was “**Of Many Generations**” My sermon text was **Isaiah 58:9-12**... *Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.*

Lutheran Charities

Over the summer of 2014 the first meetings of the Lutheran Charities Future Committee was held. There were eight key leaders in attendance from KenCrest, Liberty Lutheran, Diakon and the SEPA Synod. This group worked for a year to imagine a new way of supporting Lutheran Charities in SEPA Synod and beyond. A new 501(c)(3) Lutheran Charities corporation is underway to raise awareness and funds for our social ministry agencies and institutions for many years to come. I am pleased to share that the Reverend Bradley Burke was called as Executive Director of Lutheran Charities. He started this work on October 1, 2014. Please welcome Pastor Burke as he visits your congregation. He will be installed at the 2015 Synod Assembly.

Mission Advancement Campaign

Many people worked July and August in various ways on our Synod Campaign. The name **FOWARD TOGETHER IN FAITH** - emerged after reviewing our Synod assessment and the conversations at the Bishop’s Summits. This title captured all the components and gave direction to our appeal, which will be launched at the May 2015 Assembly.

Fall 2014

ELCA Treasurers Gathering in Philadelphia

The Churchwide Office of the Treasurer planned a three day event for ELCA Synod Treasurers and Synod Business Office staff here in Philadelphia September 25-27, 2014. We hosted a reception for the gathering after our Synod Council meeting at Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion. Our Synod Council members and Synod staff stayed after our meeting to greet and mingle with our guests. The Ed Dennis Jazz group brought a lively Philadelphia musical

accompaniment to our festivities. I received many appreciative comments and kudos from our ELCA guests.

Ebola Crisis in West Africa

We first heard of the Ebola crisis in West Africa in the summer of 2014. Liberia was the hardest hit, but the virus moved to Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Guinea. **Faith Immanuel and the Liberian people living in Southwest Philadelphia and Delaware County** were in constant prayer, even as they themselves were also suffering from fear and anxiety worrying about the safety of their loved ones and neighbors back home in Liberia. The city of Coatesville also has a large Liberian population including many members at Good Shepherd. Throughout the summer and into the fall Pastor Moses Dennis, the people of Faith Immanuel and many other Lutheran congregations together with the Philadelphia Liberian community fought this pandemic with every available weapon. Medical supplies and financial assistance was gathered and sent to West Africa. Prayer services and supply events were held all around the Greater Philadelphia Region. Our Synod hosted a prayer and healing service for our Liberian sisters and brothers at **St Matthew Springfield October 19** that was well attended and supported by SEPA Leaders. We worshipped at St Matthew because Faith Immanuel's sanctuary was too small to accommodate the anticipated attendance. The people of St Matthew and the DELCO Conference hosted a dinner following the service.

Bishop Munga and General Secretary Mwinuka's Visit

General Secretary James Mwinuka who has administrative oversight for the diocese spent almost two weeks here in SEPA Synod in a variety of learning, worshipping and touring opportunities. Early on, he met with individual Synod staff members to learn about SEPA Synod administrative practices and processes. The General Secretary attended midweek chapel services at LTSP, Sunday worship at St. Peter Lutheran Church in West Oak Lane, and Advent in West Chester. He also toured the Feast of Justice ministry at St John's Mayfair. Since it was his first time in the United States he spent a day each touring Washington DC, New York City, and Philadelphia, hosted by Susan Pursch. On the New York trip, they were also accompanied by Ken and Diane Brown from the Synod SEKOMU Coordinating Committee.

Bishop Munga's visit was several days shorter because of commitments in Denmark and Germany before arriving here. He and I had several opportunities to talk privately regarding the development and strengthening of our partnership, and Joanne Carlson was able to have several in person conversations instead of her usual email and transatlantic phone conversations. Both Bishop Munga and Pastor Mwinuka attended the Bishop's Convocation in Bethlehem where Bishop Munga preached and spoke to those gathered about the importance of our companionship.

I accompanied Bishop Munga to St. Luke Lutheran Church in Devon, (companion congregation with Mikanjuni parish) on a Sunday morning where he preached, and we visited the confirmation class between services. Bishop Munga and Pastor Mwinuka also met with people at Upper Dublin Lutheran Church in Ambler (companion congregation to Cathedral Church), had dinner with our Synod's Tanzania Companionship Team, the SEKOMU Committee, Vice President Tracey Beasley, and the MacPhersons. Sunday night before their departure Joanne and John Carlson hosted us for dinner at their home. Their visit concluded with devotions and a farewell

luncheon with the Synod staff. Bishop Munga told us, as he has said before, that when he comes here he feels that he is home.

Bishop's Convocation: Generations of Generosity

November 12-14, rostered leaders and Synod staff gathered at the Hotel Bethlehem for our 2014 Bishop's Convocation. The theme- "Generations of Generosity" led by two speakers: the Reverend Dr. David Lose, President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, and the Reverend Renée LiaBraaten, formerly a Kairos consultant and stewardship specialist. The attendance was good, about 130 participants, and spirits were high.

This year Bishop Stephen Munga of the North Eastern Diocese of the ELCT and General Secretary James Mwinuka were our guests at the Convocation. Bishop Munga brought greetings and remarks Thursday evening and preached at the closing worship Friday morning. It was a joy and blessing for them to have time to relax and interact with our rostered leaders.

The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

The year 2014 was transitional for the Seminary at Philadelphia. Last November 2013, I agreed to serve on the search committee for a new president because I serve on the LTSP Board and Executive Committee, and the selection of a new leader greatly impacts our synodical ministry. The search committee met all during the winter and spring of 2014, and finally before our Synod Assembly in May made its selection, we were able to announce the selection of the new President, the **Reverend Dr. David Lose**.

Two of the highlights that I will mention here was the 150th Anniversary Banquet at the Ben Franklin Hotel November 16, 2014 with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton as the keynote speaker. I was honored to be the Mistress of Ceremony and to host Bishop Eaton while she was in Philadelphia. The 150th Anniversary (Black Tie) banquet was a huge hit with approximately 300 in attendance.

On December 7, 2014 at the Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion in Philadelphia, our new seminary President was installed during the Service of Advent Vespers. It was a wonderful conclusion to a whole year of meetings, interviews, discernment and prayer. President Lose and I plan to align our priorities for our Forward Together in Faith campaign with the ways in which the seminary needs to equip our rostered leaders for public and parish leadership in the future.

Winter 2014

Muhlenberg Elects New President

At a special meeting of the Board of Trustees at Muhlenberg College on December 5, 2014, we gathered to meet and vote on the selection of the new president of Muhlenberg. The Muhlenberg Board, advised by a search committee voted unanimously to appoint **Mr. John I. Williams, Jr.** as president when **Dr. Peyton R. Helm** concludes his 12 year term in June 2015.

Mr. Williams has an impressive vitae as an innovative and visionary leader with extensive experience in higher education. He is also gregarious and people oriented. To learn more about

our new college president-elect visit the Muhlenberg website
<http://www.muhlenberg.edu/latestnews/featuredstory/name,187630,en.html>

Molly Beck Dean Employment Transition

In December 2014, Molly Beck Dean, SEPA Synod Assistant to the Bishop - Youth Ministry Specialist, accepted a position as director of the ELCA Youth Gathering beginning in January 2015. Molly's love for our young people, her attention to equipping adult leaders, her creativity, courage and her deep spirituality have touched thousands of young lives during her 12 plus years on Synod staff. In her new role Molly will be responsible for this extraordinary ELCA Youth Gathering that brings together nearly 40,000 young people, adults and staff.

As the SEPA Youth Ministry Specialist Molly trained, resourced and equipped young leaders and adult youth workers, led teams of volunteers, planned and implemented several large annual synodical events, and served as a liaison and advocate for Outdoor Ministries, Campus Ministries, and LGBTQ Ministries in the Greater Philadelphia area. This past spring she taught an "Essentials of Youth Ministry" course as Adjunct Faculty at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia.

The Synod Council, representing all the constituents and ministries of SEPA Synod, said goodbye to Molly at our December meeting. Another farewell was planned by Youth Ministry leaders and held at St Luke in Devon January 11, 2015. Molly, Brent, Clara and Connor have been a blessing to the SEPA Synod. We send them with our love and prayers into this exciting new chapter of their family's journey. This is a huge opportunity and challenge, and I know that the Holy Spirit will guide and bless Molly as she is called to this new work.

Forward Together in Faith Teams

I have been working closely all year with Jeff Kjellberg, owner of Kairos putting together the components and the teams necessary to do a public launch of our Synod campaign at this 2015 Synod Assembly. Here is a list of the teams needed for the planning and delivery of this campaign.

- **Leadership Team** – Chairperson Ellen Daneke-St Peter Lafayette Hill
- **CAT Team** (Church Assessment Teams)
- **Communications/Marketing Team**
- **Lead Gift/Donor Development Team**
- **Congregational Engagement Team**
- **Campaign Events Team**

New PA Child Abuse Report Law

Recently 23 pieces of legislation were enacted in Pennsylvania changing how Pennsylvania responds to child abuse. These changes affect all of our churches regarding the protection of our children. The law went into affect on 12/31/14.

Pennsylvania law now broadens the definition of who is a "mandated reporter" to include the clergy, all paid church staff and volunteers who work with children and youth in any capacity. The mandated reporter will be required to make reports of suspected abuse directly, rather than

report it to a supervisor. Willful failure to report suspected child abuse can result in misdemeanor or felony charges, depending on the severity of the alleged abuse.

Pennsylvania now requires *all* employees of the church and volunteers that work with children and youth (18 and under) to have background checks every 36 months. A letter to all rostered leaders was sent by Dr. Dolores Littleton my Fitness for Ministry Advisor in February.

Also included was the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services fact sheet to help leaders understand the law that has been enacted to protect our children. Another excellent resource for congregational leaders can be found at: <http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/>

In addition, according to Act 31 all licensed professionals, employees who have direct contact with children and foster parents are also required to receive additional training on recognizing and reporting child abuse.

Dr. Littleton and I strongly recommend that all pastors and rostered leaders whose daily work brings them into contact with children, and all church staff and volunteers working with children, complete a FREE three-hour online training conducted by the University of Pittsburgh at www.ReportAbusePa.Pitt.edu

Synod Congregation Council Officers Gathering

The annual congregation council officers gathering was held **Saturday March 21, 2015 at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia**. Jeff Kjellberg and Bob Fisher joined me to answer questions and to discuss the components of the *Forward Together in Faith* campaign and how congregational ministry and leadership will be equipped and supported through this new initiative. Almost 100 congregational leaders attended the event.

Ordinations

Since our Assembly in May of 2014, I have ordained six new pastors. One more is scheduled following the 2015 Assembly. **Jay Mitchell** at Christ Ascension and other first call interviews are underway as well. This is the largest number of ordinations in one year I have seen since I became bishop.

- **Axel Kaegler** was ordained and installed at St John in Spinnerstown, September 27, 2014.
- **Linda Manson** was ordained November 22, at the Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion as pastor/developer of our new mission, Living Gospel Ministries.
- **Laura Tancredi** was ordained at the LTSP Chapel December 6, 2014. She was installed later at St. Paul in Ardmore.
- **Karen Sease** was ordained at the LTSP Chapel December 6, 2014. She was installed later at Grace in Pottstown.
- **Phillip Waselik** was ordained and installed January 24, 2015 at Emmanuel in Pottstown.
- **Gerald Tancredi** was ordained and installed February 14, 2015 at Centennial in Kimberton.

Our congregations, our Synod and our ELCA are truly blessed!

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 than in previous years. 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 2014 we said goodbye to **The Reverend Gordon Simmons** and thanked him for his time of service as dean.

Deans who served in 2014 and 2015 since last year's assembly are:

The Rev. Ellen Meissgeier, Director of Mobility

The Rev. Julie DeWerth, Lower Montgomery Conference

The Rev. Jackson Haas, Lower Bucks Conference

The Rev. Carlton Rodgers, Central Conference

The Rev. Paul Townsend, Chester Conference

The Rev. Gordon Simmons, Delaware Conference-new dean **The Rev. Leslie Richard**

The Rev. Ben Krey, Northeast Philadelphia Conference

The Rev. Rev. Serena Sellers, Upper Bucks Conference

The Rev. William Vanderslice, Upper Montgomery Conference

The Rev. Marcia Bell, Interim Ministry Dean

The Rev. Ellen Meissgeier serves as **Director of Mobility** on a part time basis, to assist me and Bill Harp, 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.

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 - Our Director of Operations brings much expertise in administrative leadership and up to date business protocols to our Synod office. 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. **The Rev. Susan Lang** has been enlisted part time to assist Joanne with the events planning of

the Synod. She will assume responsibility for coordinating Synod events after Joanne's retirement this summer. Even though **Molly Beck Dean** has now left our staff, she equipped many youth leaders who are assisting us on a stipendiary basis with the logistics of covering the Youth Events already planned for 2015. This position has not been eliminated and is in the budget for 2016. We will do a national search sometime this summer to seek a new Youth and Young Adult Assistant to the Bishop. **Bob Fisher** keeps us connected in many ways through social media and an online presence, but also through his work of interpreting God's mission for our Synod and helping to prioritize our work together. Our Finance Office is under the excellent leadership and watchful stewardship of **Mr. Martin Schwab** our Senior Accountant.

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 and Ms. Cynta Outterbridge** 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. At the end of 2014 we said goodbye and thank you to **Ms. Debbie Perez** who worked for the Synod for 12 years.

We welcomed three part time workers who are covering the administrative tasks of the Youth Ministry Office - **Ms Carrie Johnston**, the Evangelical Outreach Office - **Ms Kimberley Berry**, and we brought on **Ms. Eileen Zuber** to manage the administrative functions of the Forward in Faith Campaign.

Please take time to thank our Synod staff members as you greet them at Assembly for their excellent work as they 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 is 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