

Synod Assembly Report April 24, 2021

Report of the Bishop

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

We are Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, “Lutherans together: Loving God. Reflecting Jesus. Serving our neighbors.” Over the last year, our work and life together in Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod has been one filled with pain, sorrow, death, challenges, innovation, surprises and abundant joys. There were times we didn’t know what was happening in our world. We saw and experienced loss, we shed tears over the unanswered questions, it was one thing after another. I found myself saying, why Lord? or how long O, Lord must your people struggle. Over 500,000 souls; mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, grandmothers, brothers, sisters, cousins, best friends, movie and music stars, no one is exempt from COVID-19, doctors, nurses, police officer, fire fighter, the young and the old. This virus caused a tsunami of unemployment, food insecurity in our cities, suburbs and rural areas. The pandemic poured salt in the wound of systemic racism unleashing microaggressions against Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) causing fear and anxiety. Civil unrest causing protests, riots and an insurrection. Our backdrop, everything shutdown, we were sheltered in place, we are asked to wear masks, physically distance, which meant for many worshipping on a virtual or digital platform: Zoom, Facebook, Lummi phone system, computer, buying equipment. We made hard choices, confronting Holy Communion, baptism, funerals, weddings, in sacred cyber space coupled with moving to online giving. We were all impacted, some said it felt like God abandoned us, we were crying out and there seems to be no response. Beloved, our response, God is present with us, yes, Jesus is in the room where it happens, life, death and the ebb and flow that happens in between. We are resurrection people; we believe that God is at work even when we don’t see it happening. *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Hebrews 11:1)* This is our root, it is the foundation of our faith, these times are not about our emotions how we’re feeling, it is us disciples of Christ, showing up making a difference as fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, deacons, pastors, cashiers, stock clerks, truck drivers, doctors, nurses. Do we lament, yes, do we reach out for help as well as give support, yes. The struggles of this pandemic are real; hold on to God’s unchanging hand and wait for our breakthrough, trusting that we are strengthened in the struggle. *“But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)* I share the infusion of scriptures as one of the tools, I use on my daily walk with Jesus to keep my focus as a leader in this mayhem which allows me to see with acuity the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts, hands, families, homes, congregations, workplaces, etc. *“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” (Psalm 119:105)*

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Jeremiah 29:11

We are experiencing a spiritual kaleidoscope: collaboration, innovation, and motivation in the body of Christ, God through the Holy Spirit working it all out for our good! Yes, through our hearts and hands throughout the five-county area of SEPA Synod.

Let me take this opportunity to offer my sincere gratitude to each and every one of you who offered a prayer, attended worship, gave an offering, led a ministry team in your congregation, provided food stuffs for the food bank or pantry, showed-up to serve, made masks, sent a note of sympathy or encouragement, thank you for all the ways you have cared for others in this cloud of pandemic and pandemonium. You have made over 100,000.00 sandwiches through Welcome Bread. You have given out collectively through Emmanuel, Souderton’s E-Meal Program given almost 90,000 meals. Feast of Justice has blessed its multi-ethnic community by sharing over two million pounds of food stuff. Grace, Royersford, started a community garden to afford fresh vegetables to go in bags of groceries. The Welcome Church becomes a founding partner in our Sanctuary Tiny House initiative to provide housing for those experiencing homelessness. Many of our childcare centers remained open to care for the children of frontline essential workers who were mandated to report to their jobs. The list goes on, and on, be sure we have your story, look for the highlights during assembly.

I am humbled and awed at the generosity of the people in Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. You have been faithful stewards of the gifts God has provided during this pandemic. You gave \$93,000 above congregational partnership support for: Heal the Heart campaign, which assisted Bishop Munga with his heart surgery that included medical air transport. Blessed to Be Blessings Fund to assist those challenged by COVID-19, you assisted 25 congregations and communities of faith and our annual All Saints campaign. In addition to supporting our Churchwide ministries, your partnership support enables your staff to fulfill their duties, thank you! It is with deep appreciation and pure joy I work with the gifted people in our Office of the Bishop:

Mrs. Yvonne Curtis, Director of Operations and Executive Assistant

Mr. Martin Schwab, Senior Accountant

Mrs. Cynta Outterbridge, Communications Assistant, Database Manager

Rev. Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop, Vocations and Leadership

Rev. Dr. William Flippin, Assistant to the Bishop, Director for Evangelical Mission

Rev. Robert Fisher, Assistant to the Bishop, Mission Interpretation and Communication

Mrs. Carrie Schwab, Synod Assembly Coordinator

Our excellent **Committee of Deans** working with Ms. Curtis to facilitate 11 Congregational Calls over the last year.

Rev. Marsha Bell, Director of Mobility

Rev. Dr. Christian McMullan, Dean of Interims
Rev. Erika Wesch, Upper Bucks Conference
Rev. Ron Weseman, Chester Conference
Rev. Jenn Casey, Delaware Conference
Rev. Jane Marston, Northeast/West Philadelphia Conference
Rev. Bryan Penman, Lower Montgomery Conference
Rev. Chris McKinstry, Upper Montgomery Conference
Rev. Regina Goodrich, Central Philadelphia Conference
Rev. Norbert Hahn, Lower Bucks Conference

And a host of Interims, stated and regular supply pastors and deacons.

I continue to value the expertise of the **Rev. Dr. Dolores Littleton**, Advisor, Fitness for Ministry and the **Rev. William Vanderslice**, advisor for Holy Closure process.

Our capable Vice President, Ms. Tracey Beasley and **Synod Council**, which has met faithfully to assure our fiduciary responsibilities were diligently carried out during this challenging time. Our Secretary, Pastor Karl Richard, diligently maintained impeccable records of all synod business for guidance and instructions. Along with regularly staying in touch with the ELCA Office of the Secretary for new and updated protocols. This also includes many sub-committee meetings, like our Finance Committee stewarding our financial resources. Treasurer Neff and Mr. Martin Schwab our Senior Accountant completing our Paycheck Protection Program Grant to assure our synodical ministries continue, this is truly a working council, they are to be applauded. Our Investment Committee continues to do a stellar job of managing our investments. The Constitution Committee faithfully walks along side our congregations as each updates its constitution.

It is with much appreciation I thank those outgoing members not eligible for re-election:

Rev. Laura Tancredi
Ms. Joyce Maloney
Mr. Philip Tackett

We are blessed for those eligible for re-elections:

Ms. Tracey Beasley
Rev. Joseph F. Klinger
Rev. Serena Sellers
Mr Albert Glenn
Ms. Doreen Kinzler
Mr. J. Everett Wick
Ms. Sandra Zimmermann

Mr. Tyler Emig, Mr. Henry Geyer, Ms. Hannah Malesich, and Pastor Matthew Staniz have chosen not to stand for re-election. Ms. Suwah Davies has concluded her time with us. Below is the full list of Synod Council members who served from 2019 to 2021.

Rev. Patricia A. Davenport, Bishop
Ms. Tracey A. Beasley, Vice President
Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary
Mrs. Janet H. Neff, Treasurer

Rev. Gwendolyn King, Calvary, West Chester
Rev. Joseph F. Klinger, Redemption, Philadelphia
Rev. Dwight Mason, Spirit and Truth, Yeadon
Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phelps, Trinity, Perkasio
Rev. Serena Sellers, Christ, (Kulpsville) Harleysville
Rev. Matthew Staniz, St. Luke, Devon
Rev. Laura Tancredi, St. Paul's Ardmore

Mr. Adam Clark, Zion Olney
Ms. Cheryl Detweiler, Grace Pottstown
Mr. Tyler Emig, Calvary West Chester
Mr. David Ehret, Grace Broomall
Mr. Albert Glenn, St. John Melrose
Mr. William Graham, Prince of Peace Philadelphia
Ms. Doreen Kinzler, St. John Philadelphia (Mayfair)
Ms. Hannah Malesich, Advent West Chester
Ms. Joyce Maloney, Trinity Philadelphia
Mr. Philip Tackett, St. Peter Hilltown
Mr. J. Everett Wick, St. Andrew Perkasio
Ms. Sandra Zimmermann, St. John Phoenixville

We have come to more fully appreciate Pr. Fisher and Ms. Outterbridge's work in communications as we continue to lean on a hybrid of remote and in-person meetings, our digital platform has increased 100%. We have hosted many Rostered Minister and lay gatherings to inform, educate and encourage in this pandemic fog. Secretary Richard and our staff have offered videos to keep us abreast of current events, as well as sermons to give opportunities for Rostered ministers to have a Sunday sabbath. A special shout-out to our Youth and Young Adult ministry leaders who have bridged the gap as we seek to find a person to fill this position.

Religious Leaders Council of Philadelphia and Vicinity has continued to meet regularly to address the ongoing concerns around pandemic, gun violence, civil unrest, vaccines and how we might collectively address the concerns that impact our communities.

Our Anti-racism Team (ART) has done an excellent job of facilitating book studies and conversations to focus on White privilege and understanding the ills of systemic racism that bring about injustices on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) who are disproportionately disenfranchised, oppressed, and the underserved, which left unaddressed will continue to impact the lives of too many individuals and remain a scar on our nation's moral character. ART creates space for conversations for all who are concerned about social justice, systemic oppression and economic issues that affect the lives of millions (BIPOC) deprived of equitable access to power.

Youth, Young Adult Ministry and Spiritual Formation: Although COVID-19 has altered plans for youth ministry in 2020-2021, the Tuscarora Planning Team successfully executed an online youth ministry retreat on Saturday, April 10th - Sunday, April 11th, 2021. The retreat featured live webinar streaming on Saturday for an interactive experience as well as a Sunday worship service. The small group sessions focused on Giving Our Worries to God & Being Known. The worship service is available to stream at <https://tuscaroralutheranretreat.weebly.com/>

This ministry is vital to our synod and I will continue to engage its leaders as we look forward to re-imagining future possibilities.

Companion Synod: In November, under direction of the Presiding Bishop Onael Shoo of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, our Companion Synod the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania, elected Rev. Dr. Msafiri Joseph Mbilu, a new executive committee and all new district pastors. We were invited to attend his consecration May 9, 2021; however, we regretfully declined due to ongoing travel restrictions. While we have been in conversation with Bishop Mbilu after we get through the pandemic, we have been in communication with him. Bishop Mbilu has a large social media presence.

I am delighted to report Bishop and Dr. Anneth Munga are doing well, they have returned to their home village and are settling into retirement.

#SEPASTRONG: You can learn more of what our SEPA teams accomplished in building the Kingdom of God that we all might be the Beloved Community Jesus describes, at this [link](#). My collective of ministry duties over the past year can be found at:

[Bishop's June 2020 Synod Council Report](#)

[Bishop's September 2020 Synod Council Report](#)

[Bishop's December 2020 Synod Council Report](#)

[Bishop's February 2021 Synod Council Report](#)

[Bishop's April 2021 Synod Council Report](#)

Hallelujah, praise the Lord for every benchmark, I am reminded of the Sankofa bird, for the Akan people of West Africa, “Sankofa” means, “it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot”. “Sankofa” teaches we must go back to our roots in order to push forward, level-up. Beloved, we reach back, gather the best of what these past months has taught us, so that we can realize our full potential as we press forward. The best is yet to come, God has greater instore for the Lutheran tribe of the Jesus Movement.