

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA
Report of the Bishop
February 18, 2021 - Zoom Meeting

“These trials will show that your faith is genuine.” (1 Peter 1:7)

Observations: our Rostered Ministers, congregations, and Office of the Bishop staff continue to persevere in this ongoing pandemic and national pandemonium caused by the January 6th insurrection at our nation’s capital. The epiphany of this violent attack perpetrated by a mob of “domestic terrorist,” was depth of vitriol behavior against the other, anyone who doesn’t agree with the MAGA message, we are a divided country. It is prayer time, we call for prayer to be the foundation of healing, yet we know that faith without works is not helpful. Beloved, we have much work to accomplish in healing the deep racial divide in our country. I trust in the days ahead SEPA Synod will be an example and a beacon of hope for all those striving to be the beloved community of Christ!

Rostered Ministers met in sacred cyber space, it was an opportunity for us to gather for an open conversation in light of the civil unrest, insurrection and ongoing push for racial justice. I am grateful for the space created, there was open sharing, vulnerability, “I am, or I feel.”

Portico’s Ms. Barb Debski met with us to share insight and practical ways for our Rostered Ministers to find sabbath in this ongoing pandemic and racial unrest. Ms. Debski stressed the importance of sabbath as a way of self-care, we were able to offer \$50 sabbath grants to afford the 24 Rostered ministers in attendance an opportunity to live into some of the examples to create sabbath space.

Churchwide

Conference of Bishops continues to meet weekly, learning, strategizing and managing the issues before us as leaders, members and people who live, work and worship in America during these challenging times. In due diligence we have viewed the draft of Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline which now goes to the Church Council for approval. We had an emergency COB meeting to respond to the attack on our Capitol to address what shall we say and what can we do to bring comfort, peace, healing and hope through our communities of faith.

The COB continues gathering to learn more of the Future Church Design which was “In response to the continuing trends in membership and diversity and the data from an innovation readiness survey, the following new criteria were affirmed for the ELCA:

1. Prioritize the engagement of new, young and diverse people.
2. Unite all expressions of the church (congregations, synods and the churchwide organization) into one church—together.
3. Align decision-making, accountability and leadership where best suited.

4. Operate in agile, flexible and speedy ways.
5. Act based on data and measurable impact.
6. Eliminate silos and divisions.”

We want to better understand how this vision will be implemented across the ELCA. There has been attempts to share information broadly for all to know and live into our church’s desire to be new, younger and more diverse.

African Descent Strategy Team: Deep conversation with leaders in the African Descent Community from across the country on the Future Church Design. There is a strong sentiment that we have failed to incorporate PoC in CWO staffing to model and facilitate reaching a more diverse ELCA. Notably there is no staff for the African Descent Desk.

I continue to serve on our **Authentic Diversity Advisory Team**, we are tasked with implementing:

“The 2016 Churchwide Assembly adopted a resolution [CA16.05.25], titled “Motion B: Resolution for a Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity,” to create a task force composed entirely of persons of color from regions and synods across the country. In November 2017, the Church Council appointed individuals to the task force [CC17.11.27]. Under the leadership of co-conveners, the Rev. Abraham D. Allende, bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod, and the Rev. Albert Starr Jr., director for ethnic specific and multicultural ministries, task force members began their work to implement Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity within the ELCA (Motion B) and provided periodic updates to Church Council on the task force's progress. At the April 2019 meeting, the Church Council received an executive summary and report and recommendations of the task force for strategic authentic diversity titled “How Strategic and Authentic is Our Diversity: A Call for Confession, Reflection and Healing Action,” and voted to transmit the following recommendation to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

Assembly action

To thank the Task Force for Strategic Authentic Diversity and all who contributed to its work to develop a report and recommendations on how this church exhibits authentic diversity and formulates its own goals and expectations for racial diversity and inclusion;

To call this church in all its expressions into a time of confession, reflection, and healing as its members renew an honest relational engagement in the body of Christ;

To urge the church in all its expressions and related agencies, organizations, and institutions to intentionally engage more deeply in the recommendations named in the report and to provide funds in support of these recommendations; and

To call upon the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in collaboration with appropriate units in the churchwide organization, to establish and oversee processes for consideration,

assignment, implementation of, and accountability for these recommendations identified to the churchwide organization and to report regularly to the Church Council.

- This matrix is provided to outline the strategies and emerging plans for implementation over the coming months
- Initial Consultations with designated CWO lead Unit and Program Staff will be completed by Dec. 2019
- Subsequent Consultations will facilitate deeper conversations to better determine resources, cost projections, timelines and prioritization of work
- Annual Progress Report to be presented to Spring Council Meeting”

I share the aforementioned information as a background reminder of the work ahead of us in our ELCA as we remain the whitest denomination. This work is even more crucial as our country deals with ongoing racial unrest. I have shared the information with ART, our Anti-Racism Team, what are the ways we are continuing to address dismantling racism and the Churchwide mandates.

Muhlenberg College Board of Trustees continues to meet virtually to provide support to President, Kathleen Haring, faculty, staff and students in maneuvering the pandemic safe learning environment for all. In addition, we have implemented a major campaign to deal with racism. We are blessed to have Rev. Claire Burkat, our former bishop as interim chaplain. I appreciate having the opportunity to lead prayer for and with the board members and staff, a true reflection of Muhlenberg Christian roots.

North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania, the Rev. Dr. Msafiri Joseph Mbilu, newly elected bishop has begun his official duties; making the following changes to the staff, Rev. Michael Mlondakweli, Dean and Rev. Godfrey Tahona Walalaze, General Secretary. We look forward to welcoming Dr. Mbilu and his staff when we push through this pandemic; however, we continue building relationship via social media and our financial support of the valuable ministries throughout the diocese. We were extended an invitation to Bishop Mbilu’s consecration on May 9, 2021 to which I humbly declined noting the ongoing pandemic and travel precautions; however, I did offer an invitation for he and his new staff to visit SEPA Synod in the future. Also, Bishop and Dr. Anneth Munga have returned to his home village where he is enjoying retirement.

*How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!
Psalm 133:1*

Ecumenical

Religious Leaders Council continue with public prayers virtually and call for grassroots prayers held by local faith leaders in the public square. Our first meeting of 2021 was dedicated to collaborative ways to benefit our communities in the fight against the pandemic and ripple effects impacting the people we are called to serve. Noting a Restorative Cities Initiative which will host training events on Restorative Justice in the

upcoming month (we will post on ministrylink.org) A recommitment to support Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence, a faith-based movement to prevent gun violence.

Albeit, I have worked hard to not to do in-person worship, I was grateful for the invitation from the Right Reverend Daniel G. P. Gutiérrez, Bishop of the **Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania** to participate in *A Service of Christmas Lessons and Carols* simulcast from The Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, Palestine and The Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral. https://youtu.be/gN1NDHI_Frs
In response to the racial unrest in our country, I was invited by **Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod**, Bishop Leila Ortiz, to participate in the historic reading of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's Letter from the Birmingham Jail, a stark reminder of how far we have come on the issues of race. https://fb.watch/38lyX5_1P.

Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity gathered virtually for a New Year's Eve time of Sacred Prayer and Fellowship. <https://fb.watch/38mJsW4MvH/>

Domestic Companion Synod event:

Thanks to Vice President, Beasley and the African Descent Lutheran Associations of Philadelphia and Detroit we were able to co-sponsor MLK joint service with SEPA and Southeast Michigan Synods

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nDM3NTw0wydtjIGi9mVJ4BUI6h_EOOBa/view?usp=sharing

ACTIONS ON THE ROSTER

Renewal – Call to Specialized Ministry

I recommend the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a renewable call to Specialized Ministry to **the Rev. Margaret J. Ainslie** as Director of Pastor Care at Doylestown Hospital effective February 27, 2021 to February 26, 2022. This call requires an annual report to and meeting with the synodical bishop for the length of this call.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the **Rev. Margaret J. Ainslie** as Director of Pastoral Care at Doylestown Hospital effective February 27, 2021 to February 26, 2022.

Call to Interim Ministry

I recommend that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Stuart Luce** to interim ministry at St. Michael's (Unionville) beginning January 4, 2021 and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Luce resigns this call, whichever comes first.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Stuart Luce** to interim ministry at St. Michael's (Unionville) beginning January 4, 2021 and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Luce resigns this call, whichever comes first.

I recommend that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Christian McMullan** to interim ministry at St. Luke's (Zieglerville) beginning January 25, 2021 and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor McMullan resigns this call, whichever comes first.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Christian McMullan** to interim ministry at St. Luke's (Zieglerville) beginning January 25, 2021 and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor McMullan resigns this call, whichever comes first.

Request to Move from Active Roster to Retired Roster

The Rev. Kristina V. Ahlman effective March 1, 2021

Request to Move from On Leave Roster to Retired Roster

The Rev. Andrena Ingram effective May 1, 2021

Items Not Requiring Action

Transfers

The Rev. Stuart Luce *from* Delaware-Maryland Synod effective January 4, 2021 pending call through Synod Council

The Rev. Bruce Davidson (retired) *from* New Jersey effective February 2, 2021

The Rev. Michael McKillip (retired) *to* New Jersey effective February 5, 2021

Bishop's Activities

Ordination: 0

Consecration: 0

Installation: 0

Worship Services: (too many to number)

Celebrations (video or zoom): 3

Video Messages: 5

Synod Meetings: 9

Individual Meetings with Staff: 27

Rostered Leaders: 19 (Zoom) 8 (telephone)

Lay Leaders: 10

Full Staff Meetings: 4

Deans Meetings: 1

ADLA Meeting: 1

ELCA

- Regional Meetings: 1
- Region 7 Bishops: 8
- Stewardship of Life Institute Board: 1
- African Descent Strategy Team: 3
- COB: 8
- COB Exec. Committee: 3
- Authentic Diversity Strategy Advisory Team: 2

Ecumenical/Interfaith Meetings: 4

Confidential Meetings/Investigations: 1

Hospital/Sick/Pastoral Contacts: 10 via telephone

Funerals: 0

Days Off: 17

Medical Days: 0 (Praise God, but I did get me vaccine shots!)

Vacation Days: 0

Respectfully,

The Rev. Patricia A. Davenport, Bishop