

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA
Report of the Bishop
December 10, 2020
Zoom Meeting

"Therefore, let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe." (Hebrews 12:28)

Pandemic Observations: we have witnessed resilience and resolve in our Rostered Ministers and congregations, social ministry organizations, camp and seminary. We have seen worship services in sacred cyber space that have expanded their digital platforms to include, readings, music and liturgical dance, all founded in power of relevant preaching. Through lots of hard work, the Office of the Bishop has maintained her excellent task of meeting the needs of all three expressions of our church. Our Synod staff has done a wonderful job of adapting to a hybrid of in person and remote working. Our Committee of Deans has worked tirelessly to assure that congregations in transition are receiving necessary care, I think by the reading of this report, Ms. Curtis will have facilitated ten Congregational Call processes. There are many other roster actions that required Synod Council approval during this pandemic. This Council has approved 2 Terms Calls, 2 Calls to Interim Ministry (not including today's request), 1 invitation to serve to a full communion partner minister, 1 Call to Specialized Ministry, 6 retirement requests (not including today's requests), and numerous other roster actions related to transitions in congregations and other ministry organizations. Thank you.

Churchwide

Our first virtual **Conference of Bishops** allowed us to move a five-day in-person gathering to a two-day gathering on a digital platform. We are truly learning how to be an "agile church" we accomplished:

- Devotions to lay a firm foundation for the work ahead
- Committee meetings with written reports
- Regional meeting to discuss the size and structure of our synods (looking at possible collaborations)
- I hosted a Zoom Happy Hour to welcome our new bishops and bid farewell to parting colleagues
- Elections for our executive team
- Vote on the implementation of the First Call Process
- Legal updates
- Discussion of Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline
- Presentation by the Authentic Diversity Advisory Team, represented by Dr. Albert Starr and Ms. Judith Roberts who shared a PowerPoint on the strategic steps needed for the "Kindom" our ELCA wishes to accomplish in the years ahead. Beloved, I have found it a privilege serving on this team, noting the challenging and possibilities of this vital task, we have much work to be done.

Weekly meeting opportunities continue for the Conference of Bishops to allow personal check-ins, receive updates and learning opportunities. The pandemic, the presidential election, and the Future Church Design seems to have unearthed many concerns within our congregations/communities of faith.

In addition to our regular two-day (9 am-5 pm), 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. A board member on the **Stewardship of Life Institute**, our main focus is to serve stewardship in the ELCA through its seminaries. "The mission of the Institute is to engender stewardship as a way of life throughout the ELCA. Through the Institute, laity, seminarians, ministers of Word and Sacrament, and ministers of Word and Service will be exposed to a disciplined study and practice of stewardship as a way of life." A broad mandate: however, the bulk of our board work is reading proposals and granting funding.

Update on our companion synod, **North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania**, during pending bishop's election and medical concerns of Bishop Stephen Munga. We launched a fundraising campaign, Heal the Heart, to raise money to support medical air travel and expenses for Bishop Munga's surgery. I had regular conversations with Dr. Anneth Munga, on his travel, surgery, rehabilitation, return travel and current progress. On November 26th, at synod assembly, the Rev. Dr. Msafiri Joseph Mbilu was elected bishop and Rev. Dr. Stephen Munga, bishop emeritus. We are awaiting word from Rev. Benyam Hasshun, ELCA Global Missions, on the status of the Diocese given the election and transition.

"In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:4-5)

Ecumenical

In this time of ongoing pandemic, civil unrest and high murder rates, the **Religious Leaders Council** has intentionally met regularly to provide a safe space for judicatory heads to lament, pray and plan collaboratively to effect change within our individual communions that would prayerfully cause a ripple consequence of change across our five-county area. We also, continued with public prayers virtually and call for grassroots prayers held by local faith leaders in the public square.

Forum Philly, Inc. hosted an Inaugural Faith Leaders Election Round Table that rallied Philadelphia based faith leaders of diverse religious traditions for hosting a nonpartisan seminar. Given the contentious presidential election, an opportunity for congregational leaders interested in providing guidance for optimal and informed voter participation in the election cycle. I participated in the "Round Table" with officials of the City Commissioner Office to assure accurate and detailed information on existing state and local laws, regulation and policies concerning five broad topics: Voter Registration, Voter Protection, Voter Options and Access [mail, early, traditional], Administration and security of elections [drop box,

polling site staffing, safety and operations], and Securing and counting of completed ballots.

Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity increased its on-line meetings to collaborate efforts of voter turnout and continues dialog for peace on our streets given the uptick in gun violence and the shooting of Mr. Walter Wallace, Jr. I have invited our Rostered Ministers of color to participate, even offering to support the annual membership fee, it is important for us to have a Lutheran witness working collaboratively in grassroots efforts.

Lutheran Theological Center (LTCA)

The Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta is a ministry of the Southeastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American. The work of the Center is done in ongoing collaboration with the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina; Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, CA; and the Domestic Missions Unit of the Churchwide Organization of the ELCA. I serve on the Advisory Board tasked with examining her current status to: Provide Opportunity for leadership development among rostered and lay leaders of Southeastern Synod with an intentional focus on African Descent leadership development; offer continuing education and opportunity for spiritual development for lay and rostered leaders; and establish stronger ties between the Interdenominational Theological Center, the African Descent Community in the U.S. and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Our task is to build a job description to attract a leader who will allow LTCA to live into an even more expansive mission of equipping leaders. Grateful these are all virtual meetings.

Conversations on Race and Gender

I had the opportunity to participate in a virtual **Adult Forum with Holy Spirit, Emmaus, PA** to discuss my experience as an African America woman, who happens to be bishop in the ELCA. It was a good conversation, I was brutally honest about my journey and ongoing challenges; nonetheless, it was hope-filled as we examined some ways our predominantly White congregations can move forward in multi-racial diversity.

Christianity for Living Ministries hosted a conversation on "Women in Leadership", part of a virtual series of conversations on Sunday afternoons in October, covering current, controversial and consequential topics, including "Justice", "COVID-19", "Lies, Fake News and Alternate Facts". These conversations were designed to educate, engage and empower Christians going into the November elections. I trust, I was invited to this conversation due to my participation with the religious leaders across the five-county area. <https://www.facebook.com/christianityforliving/live/>

I must admit that I have served as keynote, panelist, or workshop leader in more than a few gatherings on race given the systemic racism that was being unveiled across the globe with the deaths of Black and Brown men and women.

Social Service Ministry

I had the opportunity to participate as one of many volunteers in the two-day Hope Festival of service held at Franconia Mennonite Church, yes, the site of our synod

assemblies. I understand as a culmination of the two-day project, we “handed up” 1,317 meals. It was a blessing to work with Pr. John Heidgerd, members of Emmanuel in Souderton, other Upper Buck conference members and ecumenical partners. Below are a few photos as a memory of God’s work through our hands.





Our **Healthy Boundaries Training** is mandated by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod for all Rostered Ministers every three years. Led, by the Rev. Dr. Dolores Littleton, an opportunity to focus on minister's emotional, physical, spiritual health and ministry. I had opportunity to lay a theological foundation for our work, our synodical responsibility to hold these trainings and the minister's obligation to attend. It appeared to be a time of information, education and relationship building with colleagues. I want to note the time invested and fine work of Dr. Littleton in this virtual gathering, as I popped in and out, enabled me to also attend the Muhlenberg Board meeting, which is a requirement for the synodical bishop of SEPA Synod.

ACTIONS ON THE ROSTER

Conference of Bishops Vote to Approve On Leave Extension Request

The ELCA Conference of Bishop VOTED: CB20.10.16 To approve, as provided in bylaw 7.31.07.d in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, extension of on-leave-from-call status, renewable by the Synod Council on an annual basis up to a maximum of two years for, **Deacon Laura M. Book**.

Call to Interim Ministry

I recommend that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Tina Mackie** to interim ministry at Zion, Spring City, PA beginning August 3, 2020, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Mackie resigns this call, whichever comes first.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Tina Mackie** to interim ministry at Zion, Spring City, PA beginning August 3, 2020, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Mackie resigns this call, whichever comes first.

On Leave Extension Request

Deacon Laura Book request 4th year on leave from call effective February 16, 2021

Request to move from Active Roster to On Leave Roster

Rev. DeBorah Glod request 1st year on leave effective May 1, 2020

Request to move from Active Roster to Retired Roster

Deacon Ethel Geist effective January 1, 2021

Rev. John Smolik effective January 1, 2021

Rev. Anita Baly effective January 1, 2021

Rev. Nancy Brown effective April 1, 2021

Rev. Frederick J. DeRasmo, Jr., effective February 1, 2021

No Action Required**Death**

Rev. Harry "Skip" W. McDowell, II – October 11, 2020

Rev. Howard Wiedemoyer – November 12, 2020

Transfers

Rev. Paul E. Chapman to Central/Southern Illinois Synod effective 11/8/2020

Rev. Lynette Chapman to Central/Southern Illinois Synod effective 11/16/2020

Bishop's Activities

Ordination: 2

Consecration: 0

Installation: 1

Worship Services: (too many to number)

Celebrations (video or zoom): 4

Video Messages: 8

Synod Meetings: 12

Individual Meetings with Staff: 24

Rostered Leaders: 14 (Zoom) 8 (In-person [physical distanced])

Lay Leaders: 5

Full Staff Meetings: 6

Deans Meetings: 4

ELCA

- Regional Meetings: 4
- Region7 Bishops: 9
- LAMPa: 1
- Soli Board: 3
- Congregational Vitality Conference/meetings 1
- African Descent Strategy Team 2
- COB: 10
- COB Exec. Committee: 2
- LTCA: 2
- Authentic Diversity Strategy Advisory Team: 2

Ecumenical/Interfaith Meetings: 7

Confidential Meetings/Investigations: 2

Hospital/Sick/Pastoral Contacts: 8 via telephone

Funerals: 1 (via Zoom)

Days Off: 13

Medical Days: 0 (Praise God!)

Vacation Days: 0

Submitted by,

The Rev. Patricia A. Davenport, Bishop