

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA  
Report of the Bishop  
September 24, 2020  
Zoom Meeting

"I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus."  
1 Corinthians 1:4

Pandemic Observation, in hindsight: My day on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 11:00 a.m. Communicator Zoom; 1:00 p.m. Luther Faithful Innovation; 2:00 p.m. Conference of Bishops; 4:00 p.m. Synod Council; 6:00 p.m. Muhlenberg Special Board Meeting and 7:30 p.m. African Descent Strategy Team. I love my call! I have had a few days as challenging and invigorating since; however, this is my new abnormal. Unfortunately, I am adjusting well which is causing some boundary issues, adaptive learning, I have learned I can just say, no.

### Churchwide

*Conference of Bishops (COB)* continue to meet weekly to discuss current events which seem to be ever evolving and relevant to our mission and ministry to care for all of God's people. Topics discussed: Pandemic happenings and learnings, what evolved was the COVID-19 synod grants of which we did apply, receive and distribute. Civil unrest, to which the COB wrote a letter condemning systemic racism. ELCA Votes, we are encouraging all members to be vigilant in voting (in-person or mail-in-ballot). Redesign of Assignment Process for First Call candidates. Well-being of Rostered Ministers under the stress of pandemic (connecting to all members of congregation and community). Synod Assemblies on a digital platform, with ecclesiastical ballots.

Serving on the Advisory Team for our *Authentic Diversity Committee* as noted in the Strategy for Authentic Ethnic and Racial Diversity and Equitable Inclusivity. We recently met to discuss how we disseminate the strategy. Currently, the strategy is being shared in many forms, digital dialogue, power-points, zoom meetings, etc. See link to preview one conversation:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/ted8bKmstXtLU6PW4UvnZflqRcf4X6a81ShL8vpZxBkJleTsU8cfvWnwaMCRyoQ> The team thinks we must know the historic timelines, stories and actions to keep the dialogue moving forward.

Luther Seminary held a 3-day virtual, *Faithful Innovation Summit*. It was an opportunity to learn and share, I served as a workshop leader and a panelist, my topic, Experimenting with Contextualization: *How do you translate the church's treasures into a different cultural context?* It was good to have many Rostered Ministers from SEPA Synod attend the event.

*Congregational Vitality Training*, I made a video greeting for the 550 participants engaging in “Holy Innovation”. It was a wonderful training that I encourage all of you to experience. I have included the links of the large gathering session of the Congregational Vitality Training:

Watch online: <https://vimeo.com/452723364/5a1e224130>

Download: <https://player.vimeo.com/external/452723364.source.mp4?s=dae10e3b0f7f8d935892b286bb3a3acdbae57ced&download=1>

Congregational Vitality Vimeo playlist:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/6119676>

Additionally, here is the google drive where they will be uploading additional resources.

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MHYklbgYlJgaqIF4-HP36AqwlZmZmf\\_a?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1MHYklbgYlJgaqIF4-HP36AqwlZmZmf_a?usp=sharing)

We have been diligent in accompanying our brothers and sisters of our companion synod, *North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania*, as they worked through pandemic, 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 have had regular conversations with Dr. Anneth Munga, on his travel, surgery, rehabilitation, return travel and current progress. We are awaiting word from Rev. Benyam Hasshun, ELCA Global Missions, on the status of the Diocese and election.

## **Ecumenical**

### **Religious Leaders Council**

I served on the Ad Hoc Committee for Philadelphia Area Interfaith Service for Healing and Peace along with: Bishop Daniel Gutiérrez - Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, Rabbi David Straus - Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia, Rev. Peggy Johnson - Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, United Methodist Church, Monsignor Robert J. Carroll, Father G. Dennis Gill, Director of the Archdiocesan Office for Divine Worship, Rev. Edward Livingston, Religious Leaders Council Coordinator, Mr. Kenneth A. Gavin, Chief Communications Officer for the Archdiocese, Ms. Alaina N. Longo, Deputy Communications Officer for the Archdiocese. This group of leaders has met over the last few months discussing the challenges of the pandemic, addressing civil unrest caused by systemic racism and preparing a public prayer service as a witness to our joint mission of healing and peace. The service is September 21<sup>st</sup>, at Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul and will be broadcast live.

## **Joint Episcopal and Lutheran Webinar**

I attended Advocacy Tools for Loving Your Neighbor an online training event jointly hosted by Presiding Bishop Michael Curry and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. Advocacy leaders from both denominations, took part in sharing the nature and power of faith-based advocacy. We heard of issues that need our voices in today's pandemics, economic downturn and civil unrest. We were inspired and encouraged to make a difference with tools shared.

## **Poor People's March**

Interfaith virtual march, The Mass Poor People's Assembly & Moral March on Washington was digital, my first! This was "a digital and social media gathering of poor and low-income people, moral and religious leaders, advocates, and people of conscience in this nation's history." We learned that we have over 140 million poor and low-income people who have not be heard or cared for in a humane manner. What this global pandemic exposed even more is the existing crisis of poverty caused by ongoing systemic racism.

## **Conversations on Race**

NewCORE whose mission is "to harness the power of sincere conversation about race and ethnicity and use it to break down barriers, facilitate mutual understanding and respect, build bridges, and promote truth, justice and reconciliation." We have had ongoing monthly meetings to discussion the current societal ills impact on people in our communities. How do we continually accompany those we have been called and chosen to serve in these challenging times is the question that guides our conversations.

**St. Peter's, North Wales** hosted *interfaith conversations* on historic facts and race: Abraham Joshua Heschel with Rabbi Danielle Parmenter, followed the next month with Rev. Dr. Richard Steward on Black history in SEPA Synod which helped to chart our progress. These virtual meetings were well attended by our Jewish and Christian siblings with good questions and discussion.

**Muhlenberg College Board of Trustees** continues to meet virtually to provide support to newly elected President, Kathleen Haring, faculty, staff and students in providing a safe learning environment for all.

I was invited by Rev. Linda Norman to participate in an evaluation of **Mission Investments and the ELCA Credit Union**. It was an hour-long one-on-one discussion of interaction with these two financial institutions, resting on what more can they offer to assist communities of faith.

Grateful to join via Zoom with *our Region 7 Bishops in welcoming The Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin*, the new president of United Lutheran Seminary. Dr. Erwin and his husband,

Robert T. Flynn have been on campus since the second week of August. We did send a warm greeting and a welcome to SEPA Synod as a sign of hospitality reflected in our Synod Council leadership, thank you. I am grateful President Erwin is able to join us for this meeting.

***The Uncomfortable Conversation*** (*Safe Space Dialogues with Church Leaders*) led by Rev. Dr. Simon-Peter with guest Rev. Dr. Herbe Brown. A great learning opportunity to discuss the blatant symptoms of systemic racism coupled with an opportunity to address “food apartheid” the layers of the food insecurity. In addition, “food sovereignty” the rights to define and lead the creation of food for “food swamps” and “food deserts.” We examined the purpose of food pantries, to meet the emergency food needs of people in the community. Encourage urban gardens to support church farmer’s markets where community members can purchase fresh vegetables. The overall hope is to move to “divine discontent” as we listen to clients that will move us to implement long term solutions.

## **ACTIONS ON THE ROSTER**

### **On Leave Extension Request to ELCA Conference of the Bishop**

**Deacon Laura Book** will exhaust her first three years on leave call status effective February 16, 2021. She recently gave birth to her second child and request Family Leave to care for both their children, an infant and a 3 year old. Deacon Book is married to Pastor Thaddeus Book who is currently serving full-time in a SEPA Synod congregation as lead pastor.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** Deacon Laura Book be granted Family Leave from the ELCA Conference of Bishops, and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council request approval of this Family Leave from the ELCA Conference of Bishops Roster Committee.

### **Invitation to UCC Minister to Serve ELCA Congregation in SEPA Synod**

A minister of Word and Sacrament of a full communion partner church may be invited by the synod bishop to serve as pastor of an ELCA congregation, under contract with the congregation, for an extended period of time. Upon the recommendation of the synod bishop and approval by Synod Council, the synod bishop authorizes an extended service ministry. With such authorization the minister of Word and Sacrament enters service in the ELCA through the entry rite, “Invitation to Extended Service,” which acknowledges the service of the minister of Word and Sacrament as pastor in a congregation or ministry of the ELCA.

I recommend the **Rev. Dr. Karyn L. Wiseman**, a minister in good standing with the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference - United Church of Christ (UCC), to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council for entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Huntingdon Valley, PA beginning October 1, 2020 until September 30, 2021. This call requires an annual report to the synodical bishop for the length of this call. Extended service is renewable annually by Synod Council.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council approve entry rite, Invitation to Extended Service, for the **Rev. Dr. Karyn L. Wiseman** at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Huntingdon Valley, PA beginning October 1, 2020 until September 30, 2021. This invitation is renewable annually by Synod Council.

### **Call to Specialized Ministry**

I recommend the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a one-year renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the **Rev. Sabrina LaBelle** as Protestant Chaplain at Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, PA beginning August 1, 2020 to July 31, 2021. This call requires an annual report to the synodical bishop for the length of this call.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council extend a one-year renewable call to Specialized Ministry to the **Rev. Sabrina LaBelle** beginning August 1, 2020 to July 31, 2021.

### **Call to Interim Ministry**

I recommend that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Susan M. Lang** to interim ministry at Christ, Trumbauersville, PA beginning June 1, 2020, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Lang resigns this call, whichever comes first.

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council call the **Rev. Susan M. Lang** to interim ministry at Christ, Trumbauersville, PA beginning June 1, 2020, and extending until a pastor is called by the congregation or until Pastor Lang resigns this call, whichever comes first.

### **On Leave Request**

Rev. Dwight Mason, second year, effective August 26, 2019

## **Information Not Requiring Action**

### **Transfers**

Rev. Cynthia D. Muse **to** Southwestern Washington Synod effective June 30, 2019

Rev. Carolann Hopcke **to** Nebraska Synod effective May 1, 2020  
Rev. Amy Hotter **from** New Jersey Synod effective May 26, 2020  
Rev. Sabrina LaBelle **from** Pacifica Synod effective Aug.1, 2020 (*pending Synod Council call approval*)  
Rev. Harold W. Bixby **from** Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod effective Aug. 31, 2020  
Rev. Adrienne Meier **to** Indiana-Kentucky Synod effective September 8, 2020

### **Bishop's Activities**

Ordination: 1

Consecration: 0

Installation: 0

Worship Services: (too many to number)

Celebrations (video or zoom): 5

Video Messages: 4

Synod Meetings: 5

Individual Meetings with Staff: 18

Rostered Leaders: 20

Full Staff Meetings: 7

Deans Meetings: 3

#### ELCA

- Regional Meetings: 3
- Region7 Bishops: 13
- Congregational Vitality
  - Conf/meetings: 2
- African Descent
  - Strategy Team: 2
- COB: 13

- COB Exec.

Committee: 2

Ecumenical/Interfaith Meetings: 7

Confidential Meetings/Investigations: 5

Hospital/Sick/Pastoral Contacts: 18

Funerals: 1

Days Off: 15

Medical Days: 0 (Praise God!)

Vacation Days: 18

Submitted by,

The Rev. Patricia A. Davenport, Bishop