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ANTI-RACISM TEAM

Synod Assembly Report for 2022 – 2024

“You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free...” John 8:32

People throughout our country are seeking the truth about racism and this country. We, as followers of Christ, also seek the truth about racism and the Church.

Two Thousand twenty-two (2022) was an especially productive year for the SEPA Synod Anti-Racism Team (ART). It was a year of adaptive learning, tweaking and updating our presentations, and continuing to update our own educational spheres of learning, as individuals and as ART, in the areas of race, racism, anti-racism, racial justice and understanding “white privilege” and the system that is at work within it. As ART team members, we embrace the fact that the T/truth has freed us. It is our hope to help build the Kingdom of God so that open acceptance, valued inclusivity, and true agape love, are visible signs of relationships found within the Kingdom. As peer educators, we also want to equip others to help identify, dismantle, and change those policies, procedures, behaviors, and actions that are oppressive and spirit draining in nature, and prevent the fullness of the Kingdom from coming about. With God’s help, the members of the SEPA Synod Anti-Racism Team, who are all volunteers, have been very active in this endeavor.

As a Team during 2022 – 2023, we met for meetings on 6 separate occasions, not including at least 7 separate smaller presentation preparation meetings. We completed two Foundational Education Opportunities for Rostered Leaders, which include an Introductory Module on Zoom, viewing 9 other video modules over a 10-week period, and ending with an all day, in person

ART presentation at United Lutheran Seminary. Over 40 rostered leaders embarked on these educational opportunities throughout the year. We encourage all our rostered leaders and others to sign up for these educational opportunities and ask that you look for them on the SEPA Synod website in the upcoming year.

In 2023 four of our ART members attended the Region 8 Racial Justice Training event, others attended an “Introduction to Systemic Racism Workshop” facilitated by Cross Roads; while still others attended the “White Privilege Conference” virtually. All events were to enhance our own learning, skills, and abilities. Various ART members also read and vetted new articles and books, viewed new videos, as well as reviewed some of the classic writings and videos in the field. As a Team, it is our plan to embark on a new experience together, with materials from the Episcopal Church, from their National Commission on Race Reconciliation entitled “Sacred Ground: a film-based dialogue series on Race and Faith” with 11 sessions. We also continue to field emails and calls from congregations, groups, and individuals throughout the synod and beyond via our SEPA Synod website and in some cases have served as consultants.

After several years of intense effort at reshaping the curriculum for the Foundational Education Opportunity, the Team spent much of 2023 regrouping. During 2023 – 2024 we met as a Team on 4 separate occasions, not including 2 separate preparation times. Our primary focus was to complete the series with one group in the spring and to start another one that finished up in February 2024. We carefully reviewed evaluation forms and so far, have received many appreciative comments from participants about being able to complete much of their learning on-line. We also updated the content of the curriculum to include more recent events and published material. After a few years of focusing on registering Rostered Leaders for the education mandated by a resolution passed by the SEPA Synod Assembly in 2019, we are now actively encouraging lay people to sign up for the Foundational Educational Opportunity, either individually or as a group from a congregation or conference. We still encourage our Rostered Leaders to sign up for this important education.

Educating ourselves continues to be a core commitment of the Team. We are greatly indebted to team member Fern Hagedorn who posts regularly on the SEPA Anti-Racism Team Facebook page. The whole Team is currently reading a book by Shari Seifert and published last fall by Augsburg Fortress about protests in response to the killing of George Floyd called “Ashes to Action, Finding Myself at the Intersection of the Minneapolis Uprising.”

Early in 2023 we said goodbye to one of our team members, Rev. Jay Mitchell, as he accepted a call in a different synod. We thank him for his friendship and walking with us these past 9 years and wish him well in his new ministry.

As members of the Anti-Racism Team, we consider this “sacred work” on behalf of God’s Kingdom. If you have an interest in joining us in this work, please contact us through antiracism@sepa.org. We are grateful for the support of Bishop Patricia Davenport, and members of the SEPA staff, who have supported us in our efforts. We look forward to serving God and SEPA Synod in the future.

Yours in Christ,

The SEPA Synod Anti- Racism Team

The Rev. Dr. Susan Kay Folks (co-chair)

The Rev. Jane Marston

The Rev. Gwendolyn S. King (co-chair)

The Rev. Raymond Miller

Deacon Kathleen Afflerbach

Karen Paulus

Janet Bischoff

The Rev. Serena Sellers

Charles (Chase) Ferguson

Fern Lee Hagedorn

The Rev. Kathleen Harkness

CANDIDACY COMMITTEE

The gifts Lord gave were that some would be apostles some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith in the knowledge of the son of God. Ephesians 4:11–12.

The ELCA candidacy process is designed to raise up leaders for our church who will proclaim the Good News. Our congregations, our synod, and the world crave leaders who are authentically and boldly witnessing to their faith in Jesus Christ and God’s power to change lives. The candidates who are discerning calls to public ministry are eager to continue finding new ways to be the Church even as our religious landscape changes.

Over 35 people are in contact with the Vocations and Leadership office about pursuing candidacy. They range from the beginnings of the Spirit’s whisperings about calling to waiting for their first calls. We are proud of our candidates who have been approved (the final step of our candidacy process) since the last assembly. Congratulations to Ann Shade who has been approved as a candidate for Minister of Word and Sacrament!

We are privileged to work with a whole team of people in the communal work of discernment. We seek members of our committee to be diverse including, and not limited to, rostered ministers and lay people, age, gender, race, and sexuality.

- The following people currently serve on the SEPA Candidacy Committee: the Rev. Becky Resch (Churchwide Representative), the Rev. Dr. Charles Leonard (ULS Representative), Deacon Kathie Afflerbach, the Rev. Sarah Anderson-Rajarigam, Jonathan Bagby, Sara Calderon, the Rev. Jenn Casey, the Rev. Bill Coleman, Lucille

Hall, Bobbie Hoffman, Lisa Pressley, the Rev. Thomas Russert, Ms. Nancy Stevens, and Deacon Allison Wilcox.

- Our initial interviews are conducted by the Rev. Lauren Bruno, the Rev. David Grainson, the Rev. Steve Keiser, the Rev. Tina Mackie, the Rev. Carlton Rodgers, and Deacon Allison Wilcox.
- A special thank you to Bishop Patricia Davenport for her support of our candidates, her prayer for the committee's work, and her leadership with committee appointments.

The committee meets 5-6 times annually, including 1-2 gatherings spent in fellowship and formation. In between decision meetings, our committee members serve on relator teams, staying in regular communication with our candidates to provide support and guidance.

We are grateful to all for their dedication to our candidates and the Church. Please thank these leaders for the ministry and service they provide. They have given much of their time and commitment to the candidacy program here in our synod.

As always, we ask that our congregations, rostered ministers, and lay people continue to lift up future leaders within their communities and nurture their development as leaders of the church. Our world and the ELCA need strong, visionary leaders for the future who are not afraid to call on the name of Jesus, to proclaim Christ crucified and risen, and to be sent to form beloved community.

Thank you for partnering with us in this important ministry.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Paul Neff
Candidacy Committee Chair

and, The Rev. Karen Sease
Assistant to the Bishop for Vocations and Leadership / Mission Advancement

FORWARD TOGETHER IN FAITH

2024 Synod Assembly Report

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Isaiah 43:18-19

The Forward Together in Faith team has been able to award \$260,288.04 to congregations/agency and seminarians since the beginning of the campaign. Grants continue to support new initiatives that reflect the campaign’s 4 pillars (see below). This past fall, the team reviewed 17 grant applications requesting \$73,403.96 for the 2023-2024 grant year. There were two applications denied due to eligibility. We are excited and thankful for the opportunity to award 15 grants for a total of \$25,000.96

The four pillars of the Forward Together in Faith campaign

Networking: Creating and sustaining new networks and partnerships among congregations and leaders. Building bridges within the synod, and with other community partners.

Innovating: Prioritizing piloting new forms of ministry and planting new communities of faith, particularly among underserved populations. Supporting worship, faith formation, and community service.

Communicating: Training/consulting for websites, social media, and use of other forms of media (e.g. video). Equipping the communication needs for events for communities, multiple congregations, and/or the larger synod.

Equipping: Training for lay leaders, mission/outreach based continuing education for rostered leaders, supporting seminarians.

Grants Awarded for 2023, (funds distributed in 2024) - \$25,000.96

| 2023-2024 | Awarded– \$25,000.96 | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|
| | Advent | Harleysville | \$1,000.00 | Communicating |
| | Agustus | Trappe | \$500.00 | Communicating |
| | Centennial | Kimberton | \$250.00 | Equipping |
| | Christ | Kulpsville | \$1,050.00 | Equipping |
| | Christ Ascension | Trumbowersville | \$721.96 | Equipping |
| | Christ Ascension | Philadelphia | \$3,000.00 | Equipping |
| | Community of Love | Oxford | \$3,750.00 | Innovating |
| | Good Shepherd | Coatesville | \$1,229.00 | Innovating |
| | Grace | Broomall | \$1,245.00 | Innovating |
| | Reformation | Mt Airy | \$3,500.00 | Innovating |
| | St Mark's | Clifton Heights | \$3,000.00 | Innovating |
| | St. Andrew | Perkasie | \$1,480.00 | Innovating |
| | St. John's | Ridge Valley | \$2,000.00 | Networking |
| | St. John's | Mayfair | \$775.00 | Networking |
| | The Welcome Church | Philadelphia | \$1,500.00 | Networking |

Previous Years Grants/Awards

| 2022-2023 | Awarded Grants– \$24,958.08 | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| | Advent Harleysville | Harleysville | \$1,000.00 | Communicating |

| | | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| | Christ, Philadelphia | Philadelphia | \$500.00 | Communicating |
| | Grace, Philadelphia | Philadelphia | \$1,000.00 | Communicating |
| | St. Matthews Chester Springs | Chester | \$1,000.00 | Communicating |
| | St. Timothy, Fox Chase | Fox Chase | \$708.98 | Communicating |
| | Agustus, Trappe | Trappe | \$4,500.00 | Equipping |
| | St. Michael's Unionville | Unionville | \$5,000.00 | Equipping |
| | Holy Trinity, Walingford | Walingford | \$3,000.00 | Innovating |
| | Redemption | Philadelphia | \$1,500.00 | Innovating |
| | St Luke Obelisk | Obelisk | \$4,000.00 | Innovating |
| | St. Peter's, North Wales | North Wales | \$1,000.00 | Innovating |
| | Grace, Broomall | Broomall | \$1,750.00 | Networking |

| 2021-2022 | Awarded Grants – \$87,004 | | | |
|------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| | Mediator | Philadelphia | \$2,500.00 | Communicating |
| | St Peter's | Philadelphia | \$2,500.00 | Communicating |
| | St. Peter's | Hilltown | \$1,500.00 | Communicating |
| | Calvary | West Chester | \$2,000.00 | Communicating |
| | St Peter's | Pottstown | \$1,661.00 | Communicating |
| | St. John's | Ridge Valley | \$2,500.00 | Communicating |
| | Spirit and Truth | Yeadon | \$2,500.00 | Communicating |
| | Ascension Washington | Newtown | \$5,900.00 | Equipping |
| | Holy Trinity | Wallingford | \$2,500.00 | Equipping |
| | St. John's | Mayfair | \$2,000.00 | Equipping |
| | Nueva Creation, | Philadelphia | \$5,023.00 | Equipping |
| | Grace | Broomall | \$10,000.00 | Equipping |
| | St. Paul's | Olney | \$10,000.00 | Equipping |
| | Grace | Broomall | \$1,710.00 | Innovating |
| | St. Paul's | Olney | \$1,710.00 | Innovating |
| | Augusta (Old Trappe) | Trappe | \$1,000.00 | Innovating |
| | Christ | Upper Darby | \$2,000.00 | Innovating |
| | Immanuel | Norwood | \$2,500.00 | Innovating |
| | Sanctuary Village | Philadelphia | \$20,000.00 | Innovating |
| | St. John's Spinnerstown | Spinnerstown | \$1,000.00 | Innovating |
| | The Welcome Church | Philadelphia | \$1,500.00 | Innovating |
| | Grace | Hatfield | \$5,000.00 | Networking |

| 2020-2021 | Awarded – \$28,774 | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------|---------------|
| | St John's | Phoenixville | \$2,000 | Communicating |
| | Faith Montgomeryville | Montgomery | \$1,000 | Communicating |
| | St Matthews | Springfield | \$2,000 | Communicating |

| | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|----------------|---------|-----------------------|
| | Holy Communion | Philadelphia | \$2,000 | Communicating |
| | St Peters Lafayette Hill | Lafayette Hill | \$2,000 | Communicating |
| | Christ Upper Darby | Darby | \$2,000 | Equipping |
| | Holy Trinity | Philadelphia | \$2,000 | Equipping |
| | ULS | Philadelphia | \$1,400 | Equipping |
| | Reformation Media | Media | \$2,000 | Equipping |
| | Welcome Church | Philadelphia | \$2,000 | Innovating |
| | St Andrew Perkasio | Perkasie | \$1,750 | Innovating |
| | New Hannover | New Hanover | \$2,500 | Innovating |
| | Trinity Fairview | Fairview | \$1,124 | Innovating |
| | Grace Temple | Havertown | \$5,000 | Networking/Innovating |

| | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|--------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| 2019-2020 | Awarded– \$24,595 | | | |
| | Ascension | Newtown | \$2,105 | Communicating |
| | Liberty Lutheran | Ambler | \$1,650 | Equipping |
| | Lutheran Campus Ministry | Philadelphia | \$5,000 | Equipping |
| | New Life Ministries | Philadelphia | \$500 | Equipping |
| | St. John's | Sumneytown | \$1,500 | Equipping |
| | St. David's | Philadelphia | \$1,000 | Equipping and Communicating |
| | Community of Love | Oxford | \$1,000 | Innovating |
| | Grace Lutheran Church | Hatfield | \$2,000 | Innovating |
| | New Hanover - Peer Support | New Hanover | \$2,515 | Innovating |
| | New Hanover - Incubator | New Hanover | \$1,000 | Innovating |
| | Redeemer | Jamison | \$1,000 | Innovating |
| | Trinity | Fort | \$1,825 | Innovating |
| | St. John's | Blue Bell | \$500 | Network |
| | Family of God | Buckingham | \$500 | Networking |
| | St. Michael's | Philadelphia | \$2,500 | Networking / Communication |

| | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|---------|----------------------------|
| 2018-2019 | Awarded - \$26,000 | | | |
| | Redemption | Philadelphia | \$2,500 | Communicating |
| | The Welcome Church | Philadelphia | \$3,000 | Equipping & Networking |
| | Calvary and Advent | West Chester | \$1,000 | Innovating |
| | St. Peter | Riegelsville | \$3,100 | Innovating & Communicating |
| | St. John | Blue Bell | \$1,000 | Equipping |
| | St. Luke | Devon | \$3,500 | Innovating |
| | Tabor | Philadelphia | \$2,000 | Innovating |
| | Trinity | Lansdale | \$3,000 | Equipping |
| | Kairos | Quakertown | \$1,900 | Innovating |
| | Atonement | Philadelphia | \$2,500 | Equipping |
| | Central Philadelphia Conference | Philadelphia | \$2,500 | Equipping |

Grants from beginning of campaign, including raffles and support for CAT/MAP - \$43,956

| Date | Congregation | Location | Award | Pillar |
|-------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| May 2015 | Christ the King Deaf | West Chester | \$1,000 | Innovating |
| July 2016 | Living Gospel | Philadelphia | \$10,000 | Equipping |
| Dec 2016 | St. Mark's Conshohocken | Conshohocken | \$4,000 | Equipping |
| Feb 2017 | Faith Philadelphia | Philadelphia | \$1,000 | Innovating |
| Oct 2018 | Mediator | Philadelphia | \$1,000 | Networking |
| | CAT/MAP Congregations | SEPA | \$26,956 | Equipping |

Respectfully submitted by Ellen Daneke, Forward Together In Faith, Chair

SYNOD GENEROSITY TEAM

We love as God first loved us. (1 John 4:19) And we respond generously as we have been graced by a loving and generous God.

Your generosity is what provides for the work of God through this Synod and beyond. That generosity includes time, energy, talents, and experience, helping us DO God's work here and beyond. And that generosity includes financial giving in regular mission support and special gifts which funds the work of God in and through our synod. THANK YOU! Thanks to all who have provided for this work. A special thanks goes out to congregations who have committed to maintaining or even increasing their mission support to the synod. Thanks also to those who have dealt with financial difficulties but continued to prioritize the work of God in this larger expression of the church. Your generosity nurtures faith and changes lives!

I hope you realize how much your generosity means, and what that Mission Support does:

Some of our funds stay in the Synod and support:

- Office of the Bishop
- Youth and Family programming
- Generosity Team, Anti-Racism Teams, Green Team
- The work of the Vitality Team
- The Candidacy process for candidates in our own synod discerning a call to rostered ministry
- Communications
- The Deans (helping congregations through pastoral transitions)

Half of our funds go to Churchwide to support:

- Service and Justice work across the globe
- Congregational Leadership by developing rostered and lay leaders and developing new and renewing congregations
- National youth and family programming (including the National Youth Gathering)
- National outdoor ministry network of camps
- Campus Ministry
- Office of the Presiding Bishop (Ecumenical Work and Global Witness)
- Office of the Secretary (keeping the administration of our church running)
- Office of the Treasurer (oversees the management of national assets as well as distributing churchwide funds back to us in the form of grants for ELCA Hunger supported ministries, our DEM's, and grants to support developing congregations).

This has been a year of transition for our Generosity Team. With new leadership, and a bunch of new members, we have been focusing on a few goals:

First, listening and learning. If we will be helping YOU (congregations, rostered, and lay leaders, and members) in being generous, it seems wise to find out a bit about you. And so, team members have been having some conversations, and we will be asking people at the SEPA Synod Assembly, to help us learn a bit more. What are some of your best practices in generosity (financial stewardship, but also time, talent, people stuff...)? What are barriers to that work?

Second, helping you know about resources out there for you, and helping you access them. There is so much available – articles, videos, programs, other resources. But it can be hard to know where to look. We want to help. (Come by our table for a good start.)

Third, planning some events - workshops or videos – which can help, inspire, inform, or mobilize you in your own generosity work.

Thanks to the members of our Synod Generosity Team for their ideas, conversations, and desire to help us all learn and grow in generosity. If you have questions or ideas, come to our table at the assembly, or talk with one of the team members. Members of the team are:

- Pr. Mark Singh-Hueter (Chair)
- Pr. Bryan Penman – SEPA rep
- Pr. Karen Sease – SEPA resource
- Pr. Phil Krey
- Ms. Doreen Kinzler
- Pr. Kayla Sadowy
- Mr. Carl Reitz
- Pr. Anthony Scott
- Mr. Thomas Rutter
- Ms. Kim Malcolm
- Pr. Kathleen Kerin

The biggest Generosity (and Vitality) event this past year was the 2024 Extravaganza. Although I was not able to be there this year (I took my turn at getting Covid for that week), I have heard many people about the wonderful workshops, inspirational presenters, and valuable take-home skills and information. So, I close with the report on that Extravaganza event, and a HUGE thanks to Pr. Larry Smoose for all his work in leading and organizing that team and event and providing the Extravaganza report. Larry, you rock!

Your partner in Christ's mission,
Mark Singh-Hueter, Generosity Team Chair

Generosity - 2024 Extravaganza

The **2024 Extravaganza** was held on January 20. There were 149 registrants, with 126 attending on the day after our major snow storm. This included members from 35 congregations in SEPA and 14 congregations in NEPA with some also attending from the Delaware-Maryland Synod.

Bishop Davenport had an outstanding sermon in our opening worship service, to set the pace for the rest of our event. Then those attending enjoyed a wonderful contingent of nationally acclaimed speakers, including:

- Grace Duddy Pomroy our lay, millennial keynote speaker who is the Director of the Stewardship Leaders Program at Luther Seminary. Her workshop was **Faithful Stewardship: Expanding the Conversation to Spending, Saving, and Earning.**
- The Rev. Dr. Doug Powe, Jr., the Director of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership and the James C. Logan Professor of Evangelism at Wesley Theological Seminary whose topic was **Think Outside the Box: Congregational vitality, particularly in an urban context.**
- Sister Marianne Brock is an ordained deacon in the ELCA as well as a member of the ELCA Deaconess Community. She serves as a Regional Gift Planner for the ELCA Foundation and spoke on **Taking the Mystery Out of Planned Giving.**
- Clyde Walter brings experience, energy, and innovative thinking, based on over 15 years of Executive leadership and Board service for non-profits across the United States. His topic was **Annual Campaigns: Practical Tools for to Energize Generosity.**
- Rev. Dr. Andrea L Walker currently serves as pastor of the historic 180-year-old congregation, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in DC. Previously, from November 2012 to January 2020 she served in the Global Mission unit of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) as the Area Director for Madagascar, West and Central Africa. She spoke on **"Living in God's Abundance when Scarcity is All You See"?** Tim Brown is a pastor, a professional fundraiser, and is a certified coach with the International Coaching Federation. He served an inner-city parish in Chicago, was the Senior Pastor of a large parish in suburban Raleigh, NC, and is currently the Director of Congregational Stewardship for the ELCA. His Topic was **The Offering: A Highpoint in Liturgy.**

- The Rev, Dr. Philip D. W. Krey is the former President and Ministerium of New York Professor of Church History, emeritus of United Lutheran Seminary. He has served parishes in Baltimore, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Since 2015 he has been the Pastor of St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Perkasio. He spoke on **Leading from the Center**
- The Rev. Micah Krey serves in a shared ministry partnership as the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Cockeysville, MD and as the Assistant to the Bishop for Generosity in the Delaware-Maryland Synod. His topic was "**Shared Ministry: Faithful Service in Difficult Times.**"
- Carolyn Wilt is an Engagement Leader with Thrivent, covering the Greater Philadelphia Market. She led a workshop entitled **The Generosity Story: A New Page in Christian Giving.**

Comments we received in the evaluations included: looking forward to the next Extravaganza in 18-24 months; pacing was good; thank you for an excellent event, great use of time; thank you for sponsors who underwrote this and made it very affordable; thank you for allowing me to attend (from Wilmington, DE) this was closer for me than similar events in my own synod.

We were blessed to receive a SOLI (Stewardship of Life Institute) grant for \$12,000, Thrivent Financial a \$750 grant and six congregations from SEPA synod provided \$1,000 sponsorships to help keep the cost affordable so that congregations can have teams of people attend this outstanding training event. These congregations were Trinity, Lansdale; St. Matthew, Springfield; St. Andrew, Perkasio; Advent, West Chester; and Reformation, Media. We were also blessed by the donation of the continental breakfast and the lunch donated by Teri and Mark Lanan, members of Trinity, Lansdale.

Watch for our next Extravaganza in 2026, and also watch for the ULS/Lower Susquehanna Synod Extravaganza at the Gettysburg site in 2025.

THE SYNOD HUNGER MINISTRY TEAM

The Team continues to be a work in progress. We are still at work recruiting members and leadership to help the synod in responding to the realities of hunger here and globally.

This year a survey was prepared in an attempt to find out what congregations are doing to address hunger and food insufficiency in the synod. It is clear that almost every congregation is doing something in response to growing need in virtually every community in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The survey is an attempt to identify and celebrate what congregations are doing, and to discover what is working and also what challenges are being faced. With this information, it is hoped that the hunger team can help us learn from each other and provide what might be important networking aimed at being more effective and helpful in this work. Sadly, so far there have been no responses to the survey, so we plan to make it available again.

Advocacy is an important part of addressing and ending hunger. This year a number of initiatives are in front of congress that have been crucial in our nation's response to food insecurity in the United States. Congress must re-authorize the Farm Bill, which contains provisions that assist low-income family farmers who contribute to the production of essential foods. It also provides funding that helps farmers develop effective and sustainable agricultural practices. The Farm Bill also provides funding for the Supplemental Nutrition and Food Assistance Program (SNAP). In October, Pastor Bryan Penman and I were part of a delegation of ELCA pastors, Bishops and Advocacy Staff members that visited the offices of Pennsylvania's two United States Senators to advocate for swift passage of the Farm Bill and its provisions. We also visited with Pennsylvania Congressman Glen Thompson, who is chair of the House Agriculture Committee, which reviews and recommends the Farm Bill to the House of Representatives. We were encouraged to note that this legislation has strong bi-partisan support among the legislators we visited.

An important part of the work of the Hunger Team is reviewing requests for Domestic Hunger grants from the ELCA World Hunger Appeal. These grants are given across the ELCA for programs in congregations and agencies that are innovative, well-grounded, and unduplicated. Grants are extended for up to three years, and can sometimes be renewed. There is limited funding available, and it is meant to be shared as broadly as possible across the United States. Synod hunger leaders are asked to review the grant submissions that come from their synod's territory, which is a fairly involved process.

In 2023 the application process for these grants was changed. Applicants were asked to submit a "Letter of Intent" (LOI) giving a brief picture of the program seeking funding. After review, a limited number of applicants that submitted LOIs would be invited to submit a more detailed grant application.

This year nine LOIs were turned in from southeastern Pennsylvania. As chair of the team, I reviewed each one and followed up by phone with each applicant. This was an extensive process that required several hours, but it was incredibly informative and inspiring. It was amazing to hear the stories of agencies and congregations that are doing amazing work to respond to food insufficiency in our communities. In addition to the distribution of food packages, community meals, neighborhood outreach, advocacy, community gardens, food delivery, food rescue, and heroic efforts to reach underserved populations is being done by and through synod congregations and social ministry organizations. Because of the commitments of people of faith, tens of thousands of people in need are being served.

As I mentioned, this year nine LOIs were submitted. Across the ELCA over 600 were received, more than twice as many as last year. Of these only 46 requests could be funded based on money available through the hunger appeal. Tabor Lutheran Church in the Olney section of Philadelphia received one of the three-year grants: a recognition of the significant work the congregation is doing in responding to food insufficiency in their neighborhood. The ability of Tabor's members and volunteers to grow, learn and respond to the needs of the community is indeed remarkable, and will provide a helpful model for our whole church to learn from.

In addition to Tabor, three other ministries are in their second and third years of support from ELCA Hunger: New Hanover Lutheran Church Community Garden, Feast of Justice, operating out of St. John's Lutheran Church in Mayfair, and Grace Lutheran Church in Broomall.

The synod budget enabled us to provide smaller one-year grants to five congregation-based ministries: Christ the King Deaf Church, West Chester; Emmanuel, Souderton; Loaves and Fishes, Gilbertsville; Mediator, North Philadelphia; and Redeemer, Pennel.

Also, thanks to a generous gift from Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale, the feeding programs of six inner-city Philadelphia congregations were given grants: Atonement (Fishtown), Grace (Mantua), Iglesia Nueva Creacion (N. Phila), St. Michael's (Kensington) and St. Peter's (West Oak Lane).

There is an amazing response in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to Jesus who said, "When I was hungry, you fed me... when you did it to those counted least among you, you did it to me."

I am grateful for the support of Bishop Davenport, and Assistants to the Bishop Pr. Stacey-Kyle Rea, Pr. Bryan Penman and Pr. Moses Suah-Dennis who provide support to the Hunger Ministry Team.

Submitted by Pastor Bruce H. Davidson, Chair, Hunger Ministry Team

INTERIM MINISTRY

Interims and Interim Consultants help congregations make a healthy transition from the departure of a pastor to the identification and arrival of the next pastor.

We the Church, the ELCA, the Synod, and the congregation are growing into new ways of being that are new, unfamiliar, as yet unimagined. This has made us more anxious.

We are seeing more pastoral vacancies, fewer available pastoral candidates, increased costs associated with having a pastor, decreased giving (income) in congregations, a shift to partial-time pastor positions, cultural hostility toward religion in general and to the persons serving in the Office of Pastor in particular. This is clearly a challenging set of conditions in which to do ministry and to facilitate healthy pastoral transitions. Even with all that I know, God has this!

My responsibilities, in concert with the Conference Deans, is center on continuity in the Office of the Pastor. We aim to have an Interim or Interim Consultant, and/or Bridge Pastor identified, confirmed by the congregation, and ready to begin work the day after the pastor officially completes their service. This is a bit tricky with all the moving parts, and we have been unable to accomplish this in far too many situations, but we have made some advances.

There is much to do, obstacles like we have never experienced, and a growing fatigue with the effort, but in all that let us continue to proclaim the truth we know – God is with us, God is at work in all the places in which we serve, God has this!

Rev. Wayne R. Shelor
SEPA Director of Interims

DIRECTOR OF MOBILITY

One of the major responsibilities of the Director of Mobility is oversight of the Committee of Deans. Deans are generally elected by the conference (on occasion appointed by the Bishop) and serve three-year terms. As a committee, deans meet monthly along with Bishop Davenport and her executive staff. In September our Committee of Deans enjoyed a two-day working retreat at Paradise Falls Lutheran Association in the Poconos.

The deans work diligently to support the needs of the pastors, deacons, and congregations in their conferences. Much of their work involves the congregational transition process, but deans also support congregations through other challenges. This support includes conducting exit interviews when a rostered leader retires or takes another call, explaining the basics of the transition time, interviewing candidates interested in serving in SEPA Synod, reviewing Ministry Site Profiles, and making recommendations of possible candidates for call processes. In addition, deans conduct and assist with installations, work with congregations in times of conflict, and walk with congregations through the steps of closing after they have voted to end their ministry.

In addition to these functions, deans are asked to welcome new rostered leaders to their conferences, to encourage all their colleagues in their ministries, to represent the Office of the Bishop at various functions, to share information about synodical programs, and to inform the Office of the Bishop of rostered leaders who are seriously ill or congregations that are struggling.

The following pastors are now serving on the Committee of Deans: Noah Hepler, Central Philadelphia Conference; Christopher Franz, Chester Conference; Marie Sager, Delaware Conference; Nathan Krause, Lower Bucks Conference; Julie DeWerth, Lower Montgomery Conference; Joey Klinger, NE/NW Philadelphia Conference; Erika Wesch, Upper Bucks Conference; and Christopher McKinstry, Upper Montgomery Conference. I am grateful to Pastor Regina Goodrich who served as Dean of Central Philadelphia Conference and has recently completed her second term. Pastor Sarah Aasheim served as Lower Montgomery Conference Dean and has now accepted a call in another Conference. The Committee of Deans

is privileged to work closely with Pastor Wayne Shelor who currently serves as the Director of Interim Ministry.

As Director of Mobility, I also review Rostered Ministers' Profiles from across the ELCA and review Ministry Site Profiles for congregations in our synod who are seeking to call rostered leaders. I make recommendations to the Deans of candidates to interview and review the summaries of those interviews. Together we work to find the most suitable candidates to recommend to congregational call committees. One of the biggest challenges facing mobility in our synod is the increasing number of congregations that are looking for part-time pastors. Most of the rostered leaders in mobility are interested in single site and fulltime ministry opportunities.

It is a privilege to work with congregations, pastors and deacons, and our synod staff in the important work of mobility. I am grateful for this opportunity to serve God and to further the mission of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Marcia G. Bell

TANZANIA, NORTH EASTERN DIOCESE

Our Diocesan Annual Bible Verse comes from Job 22:21 **“Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; Thereby good will come to you”**

1. MISSION AND EVANGELISM

Our core mission of proclaiming the word of God in various areas of the Diocese is being carried out in the entire Diocese. We are experiencing the rapid growth of the Diocese through the increasing number of church members. The Diocese had four Districts for a long time, but in September 2023 we opened a new District with the name Western District. This District is actually located in the area which is largely dominated by the Maasai people in Handeni area.

During the period of two years, we have opened 11 new parishes in the Diocese. Some parishes of the Diocese were too large for a pastor to effectively perform his/her duties. By opening new parishes pastors are having enough time to serve in a rather manageable area.

The demand of building new churches is always increasing in the Diocese.

2. THE OPENING OF KOLOWA TECHNICAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

The Tanzanian Government has given us a permission to reopen an academic institution at the campus of the former Sebastian Kolowa Memorial University (SEKOMU). As it is known to most

of us that SEKOMU was closed by the Tanzanian Government in 2019 due to some large debts amounting TZS. 7.5 Billion (ca. US\$ 3,200,000). These big debts were caused by various reasons including shortage of students, failure to pay statutory payments to the employees and other management crises.

I am glad to inform you that until December 2023 we have managed to reduce the debts of the Diocese at TZS. 2.1 Billion (ca. US\$ 820,000). This is from the collection coming from all members of the Diocese to service the debts.

The payment of these debts has given has raised the confidence of the Tanzanian Government to give us the permission to reopen the College at SEKOMU since October 2022. The College is known as KOLOWA TECHNICAL TRAINING INSTITUTE (KOTETI). As of now the college offers a Diploma Course in Pharmaceutical Studies. New courses will also be offered at KOTETI including Childhood Education, Eco Tourism, Special Needs Education, Church Music etc.

You can visit our website at www.koteti.ac.tz

3. SOCIAL SERVICES

With its hand of social services, the Diocese continues to give good services to various vulnerable groups including women, old people, children and people with various disabilities. All these social services are being provided in our institutions such as:

- Bumbuli Hospital
- Lutindi Mental Hospital
- Kilindi Hospital
- Irente Children's Home
- Irente Rainbow School
- Irente School for the Blind
- Bumbuli College of Health and Allied Sciences.

We are glad that through these institutions we are able to offer social services to the community around us. It is always the church's responsibility to offer social services to people as a sign of working together with the government in all aspects of human life.

With some challenges of old facilities and infrastructures of some institutions, we are glad that we are moving forward to offer the intended services.

4. SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The church through the Department of Education runs two Secondary Schools namely Lwandai Secondary School and Bangala Junior Seminary.

These schools serve as our important arm in nurturing young people both girls and boys. It is through these schools that we are able to properly teach Christian Education. The increased number of students in our schools is a sign that parents have put the trust on these church schools.

5. INCOME GENERATING PROJECTS

In order to generate income, the Diocese has got some small-scale income generating projects. The major objective of these projects is to provide sustainable income for the church, to create

employment opportunities and to give skills and knowledge to people so as to improve their livelihoods.

Some of these projects are:

1. Tumaini Hostel in Lushoto
2. Mbuyukenda Hostel in Tanga
3. Irente Farm Cottage

6. IRENTE FARM AND FOREST

In our means of overcoming the climate change and all deforestation activities in the region, the Diocese keeps a large forest at Irente Farm. Irente forest is one of the popular nature conservation area in the region. It is in this forest that the church has Irente Cottage where many tourists and other guests are being hosted. At Irente Farm the Diocese has recently planted avocado as one of the income generating projects in the future.

In its various units, Irente Farm has a small cattle keeping project. This project is especially for providing milk to Children at Irente Children's Home, making chees and other milk products.

7. FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGNS

In order to overcome the diocesan debts which at present amounts at TZS. 5.5 Billion (ca. USD 2 Million), we have decided to make Fundraising Campaign for two years. This campaign aims at collecting money so as to clear the debt. All church members have been kindly asked to generously contribute so as to get reed of these debts.

We also invite all friends who are willing to join hands in this Fundraising Campaign.

Presented by

Bishop Dr. Msafiri Joseph Mbilu
ELCT – North Eastern Diocese

Few Photos with the caption on top:

Bishop Mbilu with Women Leaders from all Parishes of the Diocese



Opening of a new church



TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Report to the 2024 SEPA Assembly of the Transitional Ministry Development Team (TMDT)

TMDT has spent this year rebuilding its team following a few years where it was difficult to function. We believe strongly that the Church beyond the individual congregation should be especially visible in times of pastoral leadership transition, for support and encouragement.

In this era of rapid societal change, we also notice that many of the tools we use in transitional ministry to help us be more reflective/less anxious during stress and change could also be helpful more broadly in the wake of the broad changes that almost all our congregations now face. (Reflections on conflict styles and communications? What is confidentiality and what does breaking it do? What does a long period of conflict avoidance do in a parish? Why is gossip harmful? What is leadership development in a small church context? What are the roles of the rostered leader? The laity? How are they shifting? Where is the joy in that?) We look forward to seeing how our skills will be important in important conversations in the new bishop's tenure.

We are a team of *the synod* composed of people *from across the synod*, representing the various ways that congregations, lay people and rostered leaders engage with leadership transitions. It's important to us that we have broad representation in various ways on our team. (See our list of members at the end of the report.) We continue to seek ways to broaden our representation from our synod's city congregations: As a synod, we have not done well in offering interim coverage in the city, where congregations have not had the same money to pay. We see this inequity and

want to address it better. If you think you could be part of that side of TMDT's work, email or text the Chairperson.

TMDT provides resources for the transition process. Our synod was the first in the ELCA to produce a transition guide for congregations, in 2010. It's been updated several times since then, with the most current full edition in 2019 – pre-pandemic. Yes, a new one is in the works! But first new resources in areas where there are none.

Much in the 2019 manual remains valuable. The deans have been advised about which parts to set aside for now, until a more complete overhaul can be completed.

TMDT meets every other month as a whole team, by Zoom to accommodate people across the synod. (Our team building retreat in November 2023 was in person at the Lutheran Home at Telford.) In between, smaller task groups tackle particular areas of work. We have 2 current tasks groups: one working on resources for congregational leaders and rostered leaders shifting the leadership of a congregation from FT staffing to paid staff being partial time. Some individual interim leaders and congregations have done this work, but many more congregations now face this financial and demographic squeeze. These resources will become a whole new section of the Transition Guide, available first as an addendum.

Another task force is working on resources and best practices for Exit Interviews, as we gear up toward a more thorough-going practice of reflective conversation at the end of every transitional experience. Our goal is modeling how important it is to sum up the transition period, for the sake of naming the good and the difficult, to thank people and to release what cannot be changed, for the sake of moving forward. We also want to provide simple, effective evaluation materials that make such annual conversations possible, going forward.

A third task group will be underway before the assembly gathers: to begin working on resources for the “fourth phase of transition,” the newly settled rostered leader's first year in place following a time of transition (to incorporate the work of mission planning into the daily work of ministry in that place). There are outlines of resources in the transition manual already, but we expect this to become a more fully developed section of resources, to help integrate the work done in the transition period, to connect it with the ministry that flows out of it, into the shared work of the congregation with their new called leader. We expect these resources, also, to be available as a stand-alone section of the manual that will be available separately for congregations that can benefit from it before the whole manual is revised.

Over the next year, our current scope of work will include:

- Working on a full revision of the Transition Manual
- A more permanent cloud storage home for the created resources of the interim cadre who have worked in our synod. About 8-10 years ago, a concerted effort was made by one of the interim deans to gather this material for the teaching and ongoing support especially of newer leaders entering the cadre. All of those resources were lost. We seek safer storage to regather and store the materials that have made our synod one of the leaders in transitional ministry in the ELCA.

- An annotated bibliography of resources for use by congregations in transition, as well as other congregations across the synod, for the various issues faced by congregations experiencing change and transition.
- Resuming the work of conducting Exit Interviews for all members of the interim cadre (Intentional Interim/Transition Pastors; Bridge Pastors; Interim Consultants, both lay and clergy), in the month of their leaving, for the upbuilding of the ministry and the ongoing learning and support of those who do this specialized ministry of the whole Church.
- Creating profiles for each of the members of the transition cadre with them, based on their core strengths as shown in the Exit Interviews, for the assistance of better deployment of them across the synod in a time when there the synod has fewer of these resources than needed overall.
- Creating an online support group for pastors and other leaders who are serving the positions of rostered leader partial time, in a congregation that has downsized their leadership recently; for their encouragement as they forge new paths; and to better understand their needs for support, that these needs might be better considered in future transition processes.

Members of TMDT include:

Director of Interims, Pastor Wayne Shelor

These Members of the Interim Cadre (Interim Pastors, Interim Consultants, Bridge Pastors): Pastors Sandra Brown, Ghislaine Cotnoir, Dayle Malloy, Janet Peterman (chair) (Tabernacle, West Philadelphia); and lay interim consultants Teri Lanan (Trinity, Lansdale) and Karl McClellan (Immanuel, Norwood).

People across the synod who have recently experienced a rostered leader transition:

Cari Kramer (staff, St. Paul’s Exton); Pastor Maeve Schurz (St. Stephen’s, Feasterville); Pastor Amy Smith (St. Luke, Zieglerville); Dale Herbranson (St. John, Phoenixville); Richard Hollenbach (Faith, Montgomeryville)

Others from across the synod: Pastor Kevin Tracey (St. Mark, Clifton Heights)

Congregational names are listed to show membership breadth across the synod, where people are settled pastors or are members of a home congregation.

Respectfully Submitted,
 The Rev. Janet S. Peterman
 Intentional Interim Pastor, and Chair, TMDT
 janetspeterman@gmail.com

URBAN MINISTRY TASK FORCE

The Urban Ministry Task Force has been charged with developing a coherent strategy for supporting urban congregations in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA. This report

summarizes the Task Force's work from June 2023 to Spring 2024. In this time, the task force completed one task and initiated two others. First, we held listening sessions with current and former leaders of urban ministry in Philadelphia. Second, we began working with Churchwide's Innovation Team to develop creative solutions to managing historic buildings. Third, we are exploring the creation of an endowed fund to support urban congregations.

History of the Urban Ministry Task Force: At the 2022 SEPA Synod Assembly, our synod passed a memorial to study the state of Urban Ministry in our synod. The resolution contained three primary objectives: 1.) assess compensation of urban pastors, 2.) assess the state of city church buildings and 3.) develop pastoral leadership in urban settings through internships and other programs. From Fall 2022 - Spring 2023, the task force surveyed 35 urban congregations on general church finances and pastor compensation. The survey confirmed that there are significant racial discrepancies, even within the City of Philadelphia. Compensating all urban pastors at synod guidelines and current or full-time calls would require approximately \$450,000 or \$920,000 per year, respectively, beyond current congregational budgets. Providing healthcare and retirement benefits for pastors who do not already receive them would require approximately \$150,000.

Listening sessions: This summer, we heard stories of the Lutheran Church of America (LCA)-supported Center City Lutheran Parish (CCLP) and how that helped support and grow urban congregations. CCLP staff members were responsible for hiring and mentoring new pastors and interns as well as organizing programming such as summer camps, building support, and continuing education for parishioners. Pastors described the camaraderie and pride of CCLP, and the losses they suffered as funding for the program declined through the 1990s and eventually ended. As the ELCA was created, funding for urban ministry was drastically reduced, and projects like CCLP were eliminated. Immediately after those funding cuts, 14 city churches closed in the mid 1990s. Six more city churches have closed in the past ten years. As our church, along with broader society, grapples with its role in institutional racism, it is important to consider how white flight has played a role in these closures. After *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, white families across the United States moved away from cities to the suburbs. In Philadelphia, they left behind elaborate European-style church buildings. These oversized and often historic buildings are ill-suited to modern needs and now drain congregations of resources that are desperately needed to support ministry.

Innovation Team: The ELCA received a donor-directed gift to research smaller congregations and ways that they can thrive; the ELCA then identified our synod's Urban Task Force to receive those funds and complete the work. As part of this work, we hosted Iain Chester and Tyra Dennis for a weekend in Philadelphia. They visited eight congregations to better understand the challenges faced by urban churches and to identify common themes. One of these themes was a need for improved collaboration between neighboring Lutheran congregations. Our next step with the Innovation Team will hold a small conference for urban pastors and lay leaders to connect and

generate small collaborative project ideas. The donor funds will support these "experiments", which will provide important information on what does and does not work to improve morale and engagement in urban communities.



Figures: ELCA Innovation Team members visiting city congregations in December 2023.

Endowed fund. As discussed above, at least 20 urban churches have closed since central support from the ELCA was reduced or eliminated. The economic status of the neighborhoods served by many urban congregations cannot support living wages and/or healthcare for their pastors. To combat this inequity, we propose to create an endowed fund. A portion of revenue from selling city church buildings would contribute to the principal, and interest would be shared among eligible congregations. Implementing this idea requires answering many questions. Which congregations would be eligible, and what could they spend funds on? Who would administer the fund and make decisions on awards? How would congregations and administrators be held accountable? We will proceed carefully and prayerfully through these and other questions. We welcome your feedback and suggestions.

VITALITY TEAM

2023 Vitality Team Report

for the 36th Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Purpose

As we look ahead to the future, the Vitality Team aspires to have congregations whose faith shines in their relationship with God, each other and their wider community. Vital Congregations experience a heightened sense of worship, prayer, the study of scripture and sharing of testimony as they discern the presence and will of God for their faith community.

To accomplish this goal our team:

- ***Is renewing a sense of Spiritual Vitality*** – we work to shift our focus away from the institutional church’s definition of success and uncover the depth and breadth of measuring the effect of spiritual relationships as a qualitative (rather than quantitative) measure of success.
- ***Clarifying our Vital Work*** – we work to help congregations clarify their purpose and giftedness as a unique community of God called into this world for a particular mission.
- ***Leading Change*** - Helping leaders navigate the shifting landscape of ministry with tools for adaptative leadership to give us clarity when the way forward seems unclear or unknown.
- ***Renewing Evangelism*** - Giving congregations new eyes to see the landscape of the mission field in their own contexts. Helping them discover ways to reach new people and foster new and vital relationships with others
- ***Generosity over scarcity*** - Working to help ground leaders in a sense of God’s abundance rather than in the world’s scarcity mindset. Helping congregations respond faithfully with a sense of God’s generosity guiding their work.
- ***Finding ways to collaborate*** - Helping congregations find ways to partner with other congregations to share resources, partner together for the sake of mission and dream new ways of doing ministry together.
- ***Making a difference*** - Working with networks of service providers we work to help congregations make a difference in their communities. Housing, health, feeding, education, environmental and community justice issues are all ways we help develop a congregation’s sense of purpose
- ***Raising up new leaders*** - Working to help develop in partnership with our Conference Deans a way to raise up new and diverse leadership to serve our congregations across the synod.

New Ministry Starts & Vital Congregations

The most widely known work of the Vitality Team is helping to start new communities of faith. Developing new communities is a partnership between local congregations, the synod and our national church. We also are blessed to have several Vital Congregations as communities of faith that serve key populations that are often not reached via conventional congregations. We support the work of these Vital Congregations as a way that we are church together as an interdependent network of believers.

The Welcome Church

A community of Jesus serving those on the streets of Philadelphia, it gathers a beautiful community of believers who gather on the Parkway for worship and fellowship. The ministry of Welcome Church is made possible because of the interconnected network of our church. A model of church generosity, any undesignated gift they receive they share 50% with the synod in response to the support they receive from the synod and churchwide. This year they also hosted

an Art Show called Welcome Art featuring various artists from the Welcome Church. They are also partnering with Chef Kevin Hart to create a “pay it forward Philadelphia” movement in restaurants across the city to inspire people to buy forward their meals so those that would have need might have access to food at a restaurant.

Mission Developers: The Rev. Violet Little & The Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 18,000

SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 43,000

The Well

The Well is a special sheltering program born out of the Welcome Church. The Well is an ecumenical partnership between the Presbytery of Philadelphia and our Synod. The Well serves as a women’s shelter and works to help their members find and secure long-term housing.

Mission Developers: The Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 12,000

Kairos Communities

Kairos Communities is an experiential faith community that seeks to model gathering as the early Christians did in small group communities. Often called a “house church” model of ministry, these small groups form relationships that help people nurture their spiritual lives, honor their doubts and questions, and engage in actively making a difference in the world through acts of service.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Bob Fisher

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 10,000

Iglesia Luterana Nueva Creación

Inglesia Luterana Nueva Creacion is a Latine community in North Philadelphia. Serving their community, they offer ministry to their surrounding communities with the support of many partner congregations and organizations. This year they are working to develop their Spiritual Pharmacy in partnership with the City Department of Health helping individuals continue the path to sobriety. This year we discovered that the property had unclaimed water bills on the parking lot as part of the deed transfer many years ago. We worked with our Synod Attorney to negotiate a settlement for \$31,812 – yet another hurdle to some of our congregations, we are blessed that we can help support these congregations overcome these challenges for the vital work they are doing in the community.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Lyzette Rios – Sanchez

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$18,000

SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 4,422.75

Mindfulness + Church

Our newest new ministry community, approved this year as a new Synodical Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC). In partnership with St. David's Lutheran in Philadelphia, mission developer Pastor Tom Natalini is working to gather folks into an experience of church that is radically different than the Sunday morning experience of worship. Mindfulness as a spiritual practice is a way to tend to the soul of a believer. Mindfulness helps us navigate some of the collective stress and trauma we have experienced living through a global pandemic and the ever increasing distress in our world.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Tom Natalini

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 22,000

SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 6,000

Strategic Ministries

Strategic ministries are those communities of faith who serve ethnic minorities, in diverse socioeconomic neighborhoods, serve ministries among those at risk or whose worship language is other than English.

Atonement Lutheran, Philadelphia (Fishtown)

This is the final year for Atonement's Strategic Ministry grant, moving forward it will transform into the work we are doing with a St. Michael's and Atonement partnership. Atonement has had continued success this year with growing Day By Day center – providing early childhood resources to folks in the community and continues to see new, young and diverse folks connect to their congregations amid the changing landscape of Fishtown.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler

SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 4,000

Grace, Broomall

We at Grace continue to be in awe and wonder at how the Holy Spirit has moved us to build relationships. Our Wellness Center continues to expand its reach and impact in many ways, but perhaps the most surprising was to one of our neighboring Jewish communities. Thanks in part to the Forward Together in Faith Grant and ELCA Strategic Ministry funds, we implemented Menus With Meaning. These free meals journeyed through foods of the Bible, often from the Hebrew scriptures and focusing on Jesus' heritage. We welcomed our Jewish siblings and their rabbi on multiple occasions, especially to learn about the practice of keeping kosher and the many symbols of Passover. We worked with our longest standing Wellness Center partner, Chef Dad's Table, a non-profit organization offering cooking classes to kids. We all learned so much - about food, scripture, and our faith. More importantly, we have established ourselves as a welcoming community that reveres and celebrates difference as a way to become curious.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Kayla Sadowy

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 15,000
SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 20,000

St. Michael's, Philadelphia (Kensington)

St. Michael's had a rough start to their year – their mission developer Danny Phelps resigned his call just before Easter. Discerning next steps, the people of St. Michael's renewed looking at a partnership working with Pastor Noah Hepler. Working with the congregation to stabilize and chart a direction forward with more stable leadership has been a major goal for them this year. All the while, continuing to meet the needs of the neighborhood by offering a feeding program and going to the people in the parks. Their building continues to gather folks from all walks of life in the building each week; from AA groups, musical groups, children's groups and other community groups, St. Michael's continues to serve as a hub of community action.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 10,000
SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 10,000

Mediator, Philadelphia

The vitality team has been having conversations with Pastor Regina Goodrich about ways they can continue to develop and support the vital work Mediator is doing in their neighborhood and in the world to cultivate relationships that develop deep and passionate faith. Over the coming year we have a plan to help them expand their ministries through a series of street revivals. We will also partner with them to help develop culturally appropriate stewardship resources as we help them grow their spirit of generosity. They will also be exploring partnership possibilities with shared leadership that may lead to developing new urban ministry pastors with other congregations.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Regina Goodrich

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 15,000
SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 10,000

Trinity Lutheran, Philadelphia (Germantown)

The Lord connected me with the SEPA Synod in May 2022 through a Zoom Conversation with Bishop Patricia Davenport. That wonderful interaction with Bishop Davenport set into motion a series of follow-up conversations with other leaders in the Synod. Long story short, the Lord brought me into a relationship with Trinity Lutheran Church by June 2022, when I was asked to serve as Supply Pastor. After several unsuccessful interviews with some Call Committees, the Lord made it possible for me to serve as Mission Developer/Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church. This assignment followed fourteen months of supply ministry with Trinity. My new assignment took effect as of September 1, 2023. For the past six months, the Lord has been working in our midst, leading and guiding leaders and members of Trinity Lutheran Church in a New Mission in a Historic Place. For example, the number of worshippers have increased on an average from 10 to 17. The Church is slowly but surely becoming attractive to the youths of Germantown

Community. The second Youth-participation Worship Service has been set for March 31st. A new core of Church Council Leaders is now spearheading the new mission with the Lord. An assessment exercise has been carried out on the steeple of the church. A weekly Bible Study and prayer Meeting are held on Sundays (9-10 a.m.), and Wednesdays (7-8 p.m.), respectively. I am grateful for the support of the Synod and Churchwide Staff and the opportunity to serve the Lord and His Church.

Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Eric Allison

ELCA Supporting Funds: \$ 21,500

SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 10,000

Community of Love, Oxford

This year we began working with Vicar Sarajejan Grainson to enter the TEEM Process (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries). TEEM is an alternative training track to prepare for ordained ministry that allows candidates to serve while they complete their education. Vicar Sarajejan takes classes as well as ministers to the people of Community of Love. In addition, she has been an incredible mission developer making strong connections with various community service groups in the area to help with the rising numbers of migrants in the community. Growing and expanding, Community of Love's clothing ministry, Col held its first annual "Share the Warmth" coat collection in November; 375 coats, new hats, and gloves were distributed, thanks to their ecumenical and conference partners in Oxford and surrounding areas. An additional 150 coats to date have been distributed, as well as clothing every week.

Right before Christmas, the Holy Family arrived at our doorsteps, standing right in front of me, needing not shelter but clothes. This holy family consisted of two teenage moms and their four children who had arrived in Oxford three days prior via Texas, Philadelphia, and then Oxford. I feel blessed that we could clothe them, thanks to the generosity of those who support this mission. We at, Community of Love are excited and hopeful about continuing the mission of clothing God's people."

Community of Love is also contributing to the stewardship and conservation of our earth. This spring, a Watershed Garden will be installed on our property in partnership with the Borough of Oxford, which has allocated \$42,000 of a grant it received for multiple projects.

Mission Developer: Vicar Sarajejan Grainson

SEPA Synod Funds: \$ 18,000

Vitality Consults

Throughout the year the Vitality Team is asked to come and speak with congregations to help them focus on forming new relationships in their community. Many of the congregations that call feel stuck and the Vitality Team can help them get unstuck and focus on what really matters to help form new relationships to foster a deeper sense of vitality. The Vitality Team can help

you focus on your purpose and discover how your congregation can be a unique piece of your community.

- *Community of Love, Oxford*
- *Zion, Philadelphia*
- *Trinity, Philadelphia (South)*
- *Trinity, Philadelphia (Germantown)*
- *Mediator, Philadelphia (Strawberry Mansion)*
- *St. Peter's, Pottstown*
- *St. John's, Folcroft*
- *Prince of Peace, Philadelphia (North)*

Orderly Closure of Congregations

The Vitality Team walks with congregations from cradle to grave and everything in-between. While not the hope or goal of the vitality team, seeing the end of a congregation's mission in a community is sometimes a reality for a congregation. Helping to walk congregations through this process is Pastor Paul Jann, the bishop's deputy for the closure of congregations. Assisted in this work is Pastor Jane Marsten and Pastor Sandra Brown.

- Trinity, Philadelphia (South) 10.08.23

Synod Vitality Strategy: Love Revolution- Love God, Love Neighbor

Since our last assembly our synod submitted a proposal to the Lilly Endowment, Inc. as part of their Vibrant Congregations request for proposals. In November, we found out that our synod was one of the 107 congregations selected to be part of this round of Vibrant Congregations. Our synod was awarded \$1,040,700 from Lilly Endowment will help support the development of Love Revolution. Love Revolution is a process to develop lay and rostered leadership in congregations across our synod. Working over a 2 year process and in several waves over the next 5 years, this process will invite congregations to select leaders to participate in affirming their baptismal promise to live among God's faithful people, to hear God's word and share in his supper, proclaim the Good News of God in both word and deed, serve all people following the example of Jesus and strive for justice and peace in all the earth. The whole process we are calling the Love Revolution: Love God, Love Neighbor as we seek to make things clear and simple for people as we look to build strong and vital congregations across our synod. To find out more about Love Revolution, watch the recording of our Vitality Open Forums: <https://youtu.be/wEQaCXQNXf0?si=WXqwK0V8TeYgv8Ja>

ELCA Coaching

Our synod is blessed to have several ELCA trained coaches to help walk alongside congregations and leaders as they seek to develop their ministries. Coaching is a relational alliance that leverages the art of deep listening, powerful questions, and intentional exploration to produce

awareness, change, and transformation for the client. In coaching, the client has agency, is the one naming the goals, designs action plans to meet those goals, and does 80% of the talking. Faith-based coaching (from a Christian lens) looks at everyone as beloved of God, believes that person has been specifically gifted by God, and helps the person discover how they are being invited by God to use these gifts in God's work of loving and healing the world. We are working to develop a more robust network of coaching in our synod. If you think you could benefit from the work of coach, be in contact with one of our Directors of Evangelical Mission.

Congregational Vitality Survey

A new resource is available for use in our synod – the Congregational Vitality Survey. An online (and paper) survey to congregation members helps take a snapshot of your congregation's vitality. As an assessment tool, it can be used as part of a larger process of missional planning or beginning the conversation of where to start to build more effective and vital ministries. The survey is free to use and easy to set up, if you would like to use it in your congregation, speak with one of our DEM's or a member of the vitality team. Congregations who have utilized this tool:

- Centennial, Kimberton
- Trinity, Havertown
- Little Zion, Telford
- St. John's, Spinnerstown

Presentations, Conference & Trainings

Vitality Team Open Forum

This year the Synod Vitality Team started hosting Saturday morning open forums every other month to gather both rostered and lay leaders to talk about the work of Vitality. Over the year we have covered a variety of topics that help of center the work of Vitality in our congregations. This past year we explored Andy Root's new book, *When Church Stops Working: A Future for Your Congregation beyond More Money, Programs, and Innovation*, we learned more about the ELCA's coaching network and how coaching can help enhance the life of a congregation, we learned about the Love Revolution and how congregations will participate with it and exploring various development options to help congregations use their property as a resource for ministry. Check out the Synod's webpage under events to find the date and time of our next Open Forum!

ELCA Vitality Trainings Online

Given the blessings of technology, this fall we were able to offer Congregational Vitality Training for congregations in a series of sessions hosted on Zoom with congregations from across the country. Participant congregations learned about the foundations of Congregational Vitality and put those principals to work with hands on learning and planning in small group settings. We hope this will be an annual offering in the fall and spring – so if you would like to

participate in the next Vitality Training – speak with one of our DEM’s or a member of the Vitality Team.

Mission Developers Training @ Churchwide

Our synod sent mission developers to Chicago for mission developers training this spring as we are working to develop some new mission start communities, ministry explorations, and emerging ministry possibilities. In October we were able to send Mission Developers. Pastor Bryan helped to lead the Vital Congregations learning track and Pastor Moses helped to lead the New Start track.

DEM Gatherings

We had the chance to network with other DEM’s several times last year – In Chicago for our annual meeting, in the spring at ULS with our Region 7 & 8 partners and with our Mission Developers in Region 7.

Vitality Team Members

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|----------------------------|---|
| The Rev. Kayla Sadowy | Grace, Broomall |
| The Rev. Sandra Brown | Interim Ministry |
| Mr. Tom Salber | Prince of Peace, Philadelphia |
| Mr. Wayne Goerlich | Good Shepherd, Southampton |
| The Rev. John Heidgerd | Immanuel, Souderton |
| The Rev. Brita Carlson | St. Martin and the Field Episcopal, Philadelphia, |
| The Rev. Nathan Krause | Redeemer, Jamison |
| Mr. Brendan Galvin | Gloria Dei, Huntingdon Valley |
| Ms Hannah Knauss | Messiah, Downingtown |
| The Rev. Bradley Gow | St. Peter’s, Reiglesville |
| The Rev. Jane Marston | Tabor, Philadelphia |
| The Rev. Paul Jann | (Retired) Reformation, Media |
| The Rev. Kathleen Harkness | Trinity, Pleasant Valley |

Mission Developers

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| The Rev. Violet Little | The Welcome Church, Philadelphia |
| The Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel | The Well, Philadelphia |
| The Rev. Bob Fisher | Karios Communities, Quakertown |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler | Atonement / St. Michael's, Philadelphia (Fishtown & Kensington) |
| The Rev. Lyzette Rios Sanchez | Iglesia Luterana Nueva Creación, Philadelphia |
| The Rev. Dr. Eric Allison | Trinity, Philadelphia (Germantown) |
| The Rev. Bo Banister | St. John's, Hatboro |
| The Rev. Regina Goodrich | Mediator, Philadelphia |
| The Rev. Tom Natalini | Mindfulness + Church, Philadelphia |
| The Rev. Seminarian Sarajeon Grainson | Community of Love, Oxford |

Conclusion

We are excited for the work ahead of us in 2024! As we continue to help congregations emerge from the pandemic, we know that we are all navigating a large paradigm shift when it comes to how we do ministry. The Vitality Team is ready to help you not only do ministry in new ways, but thrive in the process. If you want to be part of our vital work – we are always looking for ways we can expand our work and our team. Is God calling you to be part of helping congregations write their next chapter of ministry? To find out more about our work, speak with our Directors of Evangelical Mission – The Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis (mdennis@sepa.org) or The Rev. Bryan Penman (bpenman@sepa.org).

WOMEN OF THE ELCA

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synodical Women's Organization of the Women of the ELCA

We were blessed to hold our Southeastern Pennsylvania Synodical Women's Organization Convention on June 3, 2023, at Augustus Lutheran Church Trappe, PA. We were in person this year and had 24 attendees. Our offering was split with \$225.00 to churchwide Women of the ELCA and \$225.00 to Augustus congregational unit of Women of the ELCA to be used to support their ELCA missionaries working with sick children in Tanzania. Our theme was 'Celebrating what makes our SE PA women so unique'. Bible verse, 'Shout to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with joy; come before him with singing. The Lord is good. His love is forever, and his faithfulness continues through all generations.' Psalm 100: 1-2, 5. We were uplifted to hear about the how Gemma services help children; the work in Africa by the ELCA missionaries supported

by Augustus Lutheran Church; and the history of Augustus Lutheran church. We also took a tour of 'The Old Trappe Church' designed by Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg.

September 18-21, 2023, our 4 voting members Pastor Gwendolyn King, Sue Swope, Joy Grace, and Joan Seader represented us at the Twelfth Triennial Convention of the Women of the ELCA in Phoenix, Arizona. The theme was 'Just Love'. More than 251 Women of the ELCA voting members worshiped together, conducted business, and elected new officers and churchwide executive board members. Women of the ELCA participants were encouraged to participate in the Truth and Healing Movement and to ask their congregations to create their own land acknowledgment statements.

The 12th Triennial Gathering of the Women of the ELCA followed September 21 -24 with nearly 800 women from across the country meeting to learn, grow, worship, and serve together. Focus topics included: immigration, human trafficking, justice for indigenous women, climate change, the Truth and Healing Movement and allyship. The participants were challenged to be Ambassadors of 'Just Love' during the closing worship when the Rev. Tiffany Chaney preached a sermon based on the parable of the landowner and day laborers (see Matthew 20:1-6). She posed several questions for those worshipping to consider, including:

- In what ways do we grumble about God's graciousness when others are treated the same as us?
- In what ways do we call generous people, policies, and programs in our country unfair because we don't think others deserve the same as us?
- In what ways do we create a hierarchy, even in our church?

On October 14, 2023, we had a women's retreat at the United Lutheran Seminary with support from Katie's Fund \$1,000 seed grant. Led by The Reverend Leslie Richard with theme 'the blessing of the sabbath', we spent a day of sharing, prayer, discussion, and contemplative exercise aimed at renewing our sense of self and growing recognition of 'God's Self' in our daily life.

During every Women of the ELCA meeting we acknowledge that we are meeting on the ancestral homelands of the Lenni-Lenape people.

Our plans for 2024 include following the Women of the ELCA mission and purpose statements, helping with an Ingathering during the Annual Synod Assembly in May, scheduling several Conference sponsored events, supporting our congregational units, and holding our Synodical Women's Organization (SWO) convention June 1, 2024, at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale.

Respectfully submitted by,

Linda Garcia

President of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synodical Women's Organization of the Women of the ELCA

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP

Report of the Assistant to the Bishop for Youth and Young Adult Discipleship

Young Adult –

- We are excited to announce that last year's dream is now a reality! Gather Philly+ is a new ministry of SEPA Synod, a ministry for young adults planned by young adults. We have a great planning team and held our first event at Board and Brew in University City

Youth -

- Our first Synod Youth ASP (Appalachia Service Project) trip was July 1-8. We had 16 participants from 6 different congregations. We served in Kentucky for this week of accompanying a family who needed repairs to their home. Thanks to Ray Hopkins for leading us
- Bridge Builders – This program for campers who have completed 9th-12th grades intends to help campers "grow as a leader, develop peer ministry skills, and join the fight against racism as an expression of your faith & our call to love our neighbors!" 13 multicultural youth from SEPA attended, along with Rev. Regina Goodrich and me, who led the group. Thanks, Pastor Gee
- ELCA Youth Gathering – We have at least 125 people attending the Gathering, with 42 Youth attending MYLE (multicultural youth leadership event) We held a Mardi Gras Gathering kickoff to have fun and answer questions. Thanks to our Gathering Synod Champion, Kelsey Tomlinson
- Our past and present Youth Synod Council members, Damar Wilson and Tredon Stevenson, along with Robin Alderfer and me attended the ELCA Youth Leadership Summit in Chicago
- We doubled our number of leaders attending the ELCA Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza. 23 leaders from SEPA participated.
- We are beginning Conference Youth Helping Hands events. Our first was hosted by Chester Conference. Dean Franz hosted the event at Advent, West Chester. 90 participants of all ages helped pack meals for Rise Against Hunger, then enjoyed an ice-skating party.
- Our Montgomery Conferences Youth Helping Hands event is Box City, April 6-7 at Advent, Harleysville

Advocacy

I serve as Synod Staff liaison for the Inclusive Communities Team, SEPA Hunger Team and our new Creation Care Ministry. Many thanks to Rev. Alina Gayeuski, Rev. Daniel Eisenberg, Rev. Kevin Tracey, Rev. Bruce Davidson, Joy Baxter and Dr. John Collins for your leadership on these teams. We are always looking for new members! Some highlights:

- Deacon Ross Murray came for a book signing event for his latest book, “The Everyday Advocate; Living Out Your Calling to Social Justice
- ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering was attended by Rev. Tricia Neale, Luvenia Johnson, Damar Wilson and me
- Our In God’s Image event was a great success. Thank you to Upper Dublin LC for hosting
- We celebrated PRIDE and God’s love for all on June 1 at Grace, Broomall.
- MLK Day of Service was a joint service day between United Lutheran Seminary, Lutheran Congregational Services and SEPA Synod, benefitting Lutheran Disaster Response

I continue to represent the Office of the Bishop on the Bear Creek Camp Board and ELCA Synod Youth Ministry Band of Leaders (SYMBOL).

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Stacey-Kyle Rea