

Bishop's Report 2025

Intro

Grace and peace to you in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ.

This year's assembly theme, *Ponder Anew*, has taken on deep meaning for me in this first year serving as your bishop. Entering into this role has invited me to “ponder anew” nearly every aspect of my life: my rhythms, my faith, my sense of call, and most especially, what it means to lead with love in a time of significant change in the church and the world.

At the heart of this report are stories of that kind of pondering and renewal: how we are tending to the daily work of synod administration and the stewardship of our shared resources; how we are walking alongside congregations in seasons of discernment, transition, and transformation; how we are living out our connection to the wider church through national, global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships; and how we are showing up for our neighbors through courageous advocacy and witness.

One refrain I've heard again and again in my travels across the synod is this: “I don't think God is done with us yet.” I've heard it whispered with trembling hope in congregations wondering about their future. I've heard it spoken with conviction in rooms full of leaders trying new things. And I've heard it in quiet moments of prayer when all we have is trust. One moment that stays with me happened after worship in a small congregation navigating deep change. A member approached me and said, “We may not be what we used to be—but I think God still has work for us to do.” That faithful insistence—that God is not finished with us—is what keeps me going. It reminds me that pondering anew is not just about ideas, but about trusting the Spirit's power to renew us in love.

May this report bear witness to the many ways God is already befriending us—and may it inspire us to continue imagining what the Almighty can do.

May the Spirit who brooded over the waters of creation stir your imagination and renew your hope.

May Christ, whose love reaches into every corner of our lives, meet you with grace on the journey ahead.

And may the God who is not yet finished with us bless you with courage, clarity, and joy as you ponder anew what the Almighty can do. (+) Amen.

In Christ,
+The Rev. Bryan Penman

Synod Administration

Staffing Changes

As I began my ministry as Bishop, I made several staffing changes to better position our synod staff to support the work of our congregations. Some of these additions are made possible through two Lilly Endowment grants, while others result from reworking our existing staffing structure within the synod's budget.

New Staff and Role Adjustments

- **The Rev. Karen Sease** now serves as Assistant for Congregations. Her primary responsibilities include managing the Conference of Deans and congregations in transition. She will continue overseeing the mobility process for rostered leaders but will no longer handle candidacy.
- **Ms. Cynta Outterbridge** continues managing our synod's databases and event registrations and will now also oversee our technology and IT needs, working in coordination with our outsourced IT management partner.
- **The Rev. Stacey Kyle Rea** concluded her synod-level ministry as her position transitions to part-time. As we rethink, regrow, and retool our youth and family ministry efforts, we will move forward with a part-time model during this period of redevelopment.
- **The Rev. Paula Lebo**, formerly bishop of the Allegheny Synod, joins us as Assistant for Mission Interpretation. With a background in news and graphic design, she will lead efforts to revamp, modernize, and retool our synod's communications.
- **The Rev. Erika Wesch** is serving part-time as Assistant for Formation. She now oversees the Candidacy Process and supports the development of a new formation path for Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs).
- **The Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook**, coming from the New Jersey Synod, is the Program Director for our *Faith Alive* Lilly Endowment grant. She will work with congregations to create a more welcoming environment for our youngest disciples. You'll hear more about this exciting ministry as it launches across the synod this year.
- **The Rev. Rick Summy** joins the staff part-time as Director of *Love Revolution*, a Lilly Endowment-funded initiative to revitalize congregations by engaging deeply with our Baptismal Covenant and renewing our commitment to loving God and neighbor.

- **The Rev. Kayla Sadowy** serves part-time as Grant Evaluator for *Love Revolution*, while continuing her ministry at Grace Lutheran, Broomall.
- **The Rev. Linda Manson** returns home to Southeastern Pennsylvania from the Southeastern Synod and now serves as our Director of Evangelical Mission for Congregational Vitality—my former role. In addition, she takes on a new staff position as Assistant for Diversity, Equity, and Belonging. This new dual role is funded through a restructuring of our Youth Ministry position. Over the coming year, we will launch new synod diversity initiatives, grounded in our commitment to both vitality and radical welcome.

Continuing Staff

- **The Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis** continues as DEM for new mission starts while also serving as pastor of Faith Immanuel.
- **Ms. Yvonne Curtis** remains Director of Operations and Executive Assistant to the Bishop.
- **Mr. Martin Schwab** continues as Senior Accountant.
- **Mrs. Carrie Schwab** continues her role as Synod Assembly Coordinator.

Positions to Be Filled

- Administrative Assistant to support candidacy and mobility processes.
- Part-time staff position for Youth and Family Ministry.

Synod Council

Synod Council met a total of 5 times since our last assembly meeting. We are grateful to Reformation, Mt. Airy, St. Matthew's Springfield, and United Lutheran Seminary who provided host sites for our in-person meetings. At our meetings we received mission moment updates from various ministries happening across our synod, that I would like to elevate for you here. For full details of these mission moments, please see the minutes from our Synod Council meetings.

June 2024 – Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

Ms. Thelma Jacks presented the work of the CRLC, formed by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly to reimagine ELCA structure and purpose with a focus on dismantling racism. The 35-member commission is gathering extensive input through listening sessions and surveys and is working across seven focus areas. Key themes emerging include

restructuring synods, enhancing accountability and clarity in church language, and elevating the role of affiliated ministries. Recommendations are being developed for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

September 2024 – Love Revolution Launch

Rev. Richard Summy and Bishop Penman introduced the Love Revolution initiative, supported by a \$1.2 million Lilly Endowment grant. This two-year effort empowers congregations to live out the baptismal promises through relational outreach, rather than programmatic evangelism. Five initial congregations will serve as a learning cohort, with hopes of expanding the model throughout the synod. A public launch event took place on October 19, encouraging broader participation.

December 2024 – Congregations in Transition & Leadership Challenges

Rev. Karen Sease highlighted current pastoral transition challenges, with 24 SEPA congregations in transition and a widening gap between ordained clergy supply and demand. She discussed alternative leadership models such as Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs), noting growing interest and formal training under development. Congregations are being encouraged to consider Transformation, Partnership, or Resurrection paths during transitions, supported by vitality practices and Holy Spirit-led discernment.

February 2025 – Faith Alive & Mission Interpretation

Rev. Annemarie Cook shared her vision for the Faith Alive initiative; the synod's second Lilly-funded program focused on fully including children in worship and congregational life. She emphasized contextual ministry and her commitment to building relationships across the synod. Rev. Paula Lebo was introduced as the new Director for Mission Interpretation, bringing journalism experience and a passion for sharing God's love in creative and meaningful ways.

April 2025 – United Lutheran Seminary Update

Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, President of United Lutheran Seminary, offered updates on the seminary's life and mission and responded to questions from the synod council, reinforcing the vital connection between theological education and congregational leadership.

Congregational Constitutions

In collaboration with our Constitution Committee, I am committed to ensuring the synod maintains updated copies of each congregational constitution. Ready access to these documents is crucial when congregations reach out to the synod for assistance. As a

reminder, the ELCA will convene its assembly this summer, where significant updates to the model constitution are possible. Please be attentive to these potential changes in the coming year. If your congregation has not reviewed its constitution recently, I encourage you to consider forming a task force to undertake this important work. These are dynamic documents that should be regularly consulted, updated, and reviewed.

Synod Council Officer Gatherings

To better equip the saints for ministry, we are reintroducing synod-wide gatherings and training sessions for congregational council officers. As a former parish pastor, I know firsthand the need for support in developing lay leadership.

We're designing a series of learning events targeted at key leadership roles:

- **Early in the year:** a general training for all newly elected council officers, including an introduction to the synod and their roles.
- **Later in the year:** focused sessions for Council Secretaries (note-taking best practices) and Council Treasurers (guidelines for financial oversight and reporting).

Policy Statements, Continuing Resolutions and Guideline Review

This year, we began a regular review of our synod's policy statements, continuing resolutions, and ministry guidelines.

- **Policy statements** govern how we approach areas like finance, communications, and personnel.
- **Continuing resolutions** outline ongoing initiatives adopted by either the Synod Assembly or Synod Council.
- **Guidelines**, such as compensation recommendations, help shape the practical frameworks for ministry across the synod.

Lilly Endowment Grants

We are grateful to The Lilly Endowment, Inc. for awarding our synod two significant grants:

- **Love Revolution:** A \$1 million grant as part of the *Thriving Congregations Initiative*. This five-year project will revitalize congregations by focusing on Loving God and Loving Neighbor, using our baptismal covenant as a foundation for creating authentic, welcoming communities.

- **Faith Alive:** A \$1.25 million grant from the *Nurturing Children through Worship and Prayer* initiative. This project helps congregations rethink worship with a child-centric lens. Resources are currently being developed, with plans to launch across the synod in 2025–2026.

Synod Assembly Renewal

As we look to the future of our annual Synod Assembly, I’m exploring a new rotational model for our gatherings. I’ve heard the desire to return to the city and the interest in a more relational, residential experience. Here’s the vision:

- **2025:** suburban location at Trinity, Lansdale (May 30-31)
- **2026:** residential assembly with overnight lodging possibly on a college campus (May 28-30)
- **2027:** gather in the city (April 30-May 1)
- **2028:** gather in the suburbs (June 2-3)

We recognize this shift may involve changes in cost, but we are committed to keeping expenses manageable while enriching our time together in meaningful ways.

Bear Creek Camp / Project Connect

This year, we restructured how we support youth from urban congregations attending Bear Creek Camp. In past years, grant funds covered extra costs for city congregations. However, with those grants now expired, Bear Creek has shouldered the costs—unsustainably.

To ensure continued access for our youth, the synod will now offer scholarships to city congregations through the Fund for Mission. Camp changes lives, and many of today’s young pastors trace their call to time spent at camp. This support not only affirms historically underrepresented youth but invests in future church leadership.

Urban Ministry Task Force

Over the past year, the Urban Ministry Task Force has continued its commitment to walking alongside our city congregations in meaningful and practical ways. Through a partnership with the ELCA Churchwide Innovation office, we received donor-directed funds to research the realities and potential of smaller urban congregations. Coupled with support from our synod, this funding allowed us to award grants focused on essential building repairs,

facility upgrades, and leadership development.

To date, the task force has supported 22 congregations and distributed over \$108,000 in grant funding. These resources are helping sustain vital ministries and strengthen local leadership. Additional funding opportunities are on the horizon—stay connected to synod communications for updates on how congregations can apply.

Mission Support

For the first time in many years, we experienced an increase in Mission Support over the previous year! We aim to build on this positive momentum by striving towards becoming a 100% Mission Support synod. My goal is to report at our next assembly that every one of our congregations contributes to Mission Support. I extend my sincere gratitude to the 61 congregations (42%) that increased their mission support and encourage all our congregations to prayerfully consider their role in supporting the wider church. Our aspiration is for congregations to give 10% of their regular or plate giving and to stretch to give 10% of their total income to support the work of the synod and the churchwide organization. Your congregation's Mission Support contributions directly enable our shared ministry: raising up new leaders, guiding congregations in transition, discipling the next generation, fostering generosity, sharing stories of God's grace in action, advocating for the vulnerable, and inspiring our congregations with a spirit of vitality that encourages ongoing reflection and renewal. Importantly, half of all Mission Support received is forwarded to support the vital work of the ELCA.

All Saint's Appeal

Each fall, the synod invites individual donors to support our synod's ministry through the *All Saint's Appeal*. While I wish Mission Support could fully fund our synod's operations, this is no longer feasible. We rely on additional funding streams, such as the *All Saint's Appeal*, to sustain our shared work. Importantly, 100% of the funds raised through the *All Saint's Appeal* remain within our synod, directly impacting the ministry we undertake here in the Philadelphia Metro Area; these funds are not shared with the wider church. My personal tithe to the synod is directed to the *All Saint's Appeal*, and I encourage you, as delegates and rostered leaders, to consider making an annual donation or establishing recurring electronic giving through our synod to support this crucial appeal. This year, we have raised nearly \$50,000 (and counting!) to support and offset the synod's budget.

Management of the Roster / Congregations

Congregations in Transition Renewal

A significant portion of my time this year has been spent working with our Transition Ministry Development Team (TMDT), Conference Deans, and Interim Ministry leaders to reimagine how we support congregations in leadership transitions. Many of the traditional assumptions about interim ministry no longer align with the current realities—congregations are experiencing transitions more frequently and often lack the capacity to support full-time pastoral leadership. It’s time to help congregations “**ponder anew.**”

At this year’s Synod Assembly, we’re introducing a new transition model that offers congregations one of three distinct pathways: **transformation, partnership, or resurrection**. This model invites congregations to discern their next faithful step with renewed clarity and purpose. Our hope is that by the end of each transition journey, congregations will experience a deeper vitality and a stronger connection to the Spirit’s call in their midst.

Over the coming year, we will begin using these new resources in partnership with the Conference Deans as we accompany congregations through times of change.

Candidacy

Raising new leaders in the church is a responsibility we all share. As we look toward the future, we recognize that the path to ministry is evolving. While traditional seminary formation remains vital, new models of preparation—especially for bi-vocational ministry—are emerging to meet the changing needs of the church.

As we continue to move from an institutional to a more missional church, we give thanks that God is opening multiple pathways to serve. In the coming year, the ELCA will begin releasing updates to the Candidacy Manual and process. These revisions will help make candidacy more accessible to a wider variety of people who feel called to Word and Sacrament or Word and Service ministry.

As your bishop, I want to remain closely connected to our candidates, whether they are preparing for ordained ministry or exploring the call to serve as Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs). I’m grateful to our Candidacy Committee and our Regional Candidacy Coordinator, who have been key partners in this work of discernment and formation.

Annual Reports to the Bishop from Rostered Leaders

Thank you to the many rostered leaders—under call, on leave, or retired—who submitted their annual reports this year. These reports, often referred to as “Confidential Reports,” are an important tool for staying connected and providing appropriate support.

These reports also help us track compensation trends. In reviewing them, I've seen that some leaders are receiving compensation at levels that may no longer be line with their call slipping from full time to ¾ time. If that's the case for you, please be sure to submit your report. It helps me advocate for your call and benefits as you serve in your call.

Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs)

As we address the ongoing leadership needs of our congregations, the ELCA is moving toward a more unified national structure for credentialing lay leaders in congregations that historically struggle to call ordained pastors. While this practice has long been in place in other synods, our synod has not actively used this model in recent years.

This year, the synod staff and Conference Deans have explored how we might implement a SAM process here in Southeastern Pennsylvania. By partnering with seminaries and neighboring synods, we're building training pathways that will equip lay leaders for this ministry.

I'm proud to share that we now have our first official SAM: **Minister Bobbie Hoffman**, who is serving St. Luke's, Gilbertsville, while continuing her ministry at St. James, Limerick.

First Call Theological Education

One of my early priorities as bishop was gathering with those in the first three years of ordained ministry. These leaders have experienced significant disruption in their formation due to the pandemic—completing seminary with limited in-person learning and beginning their first calls in a uniquely challenging time.

In recent years, our synod's First Call Theological Education process had become fractured. What was once a regionally coordinated effort fell apart in the years leading up to the pandemic, and individual synods were left to create their own approaches.

We are now partnering with **LeaderWise**, an organization that offers reflective, context-based learning experiences to help early-career leaders explore their gifts and the evolving nature of leadership in their communities. In addition, we are working toward renewed **regional collaboration** for First Call programming.

The good news is that we have **nearly 25 first call leaders** in our synod—the most in ELCA Region 7! That's a hopeful sign for the church we are becoming.

Churchwide

Conference of Bishops

A vital part of my role as bishop is to be in relationship with the other 65 synodical bishops across the ELCA. Together, we form the *Conference of Bishops* (CoB), which meets twice a year in person and occasionally over Zoom as needed. As a new bishop, I also participated this year in *Bishop Formation*—a cohort-based learning journey to help new bishops become oriented with the wider church and its leadership structures.

At our fall meeting in Chicago, we focused on core business, hearing reports from key areas of the church. This included updates from our Research and Evaluation office on the state of leadership in the ELCA, progress on new and revised social statements, and preparations for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Our spring meeting leaned more into collective conversation, but we also received important updates from Portico about the forthcoming *Benefits Reimagined* changes, which will take effect in 2026. We also engaged work from the churchwide organization around *Authentic Diversity* and the tools being implemented to help the ELCA become a more inclusive church.

A major focus of the CoB this year has been receiving updates from—and offering feedback to—the *Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church*, as it prepares to present its recommendations to the Churchwide Assembly this summer.

Additionally, this year included *Bishops' Academy*, our biennial learning event. We gathered in Puerto Rico, home to the Caribbean Synod, where we learned about the history of Lutheranism in the region—home to some of the oldest Lutheran expressions in the Americas. We were blessed by their generous hospitality, inspired by Latino scholars in our church, and encouraged by the work of *ELCA World Hunger* on the island. Yes, there was also dancing!

ELCA Lutheran Disaster Response

In times of crisis, the ELCA lives out Christ's call to love and serve our neighbors through the work of Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR). This past year, LDR has been active on multiple fronts, providing critical support in the aftermath of devastating natural disasters across the United States. Following the wildfires in Los Angeles, LDR worked closely with local synods and partner agencies to provide immediate aid and begin the long-term process of rebuilding lives and communities. Likewise, after the hurricane that struck Western North Carolina, LDR stepped in with resources, pastoral care, and infrastructure

support to help congregations and neighborhoods recover.

LDR's approach is grounded in accompaniment—walking with communities through recovery for the long haul, long after headlines fade. Through your gifts and partnership, this vital ministry ensures that when disaster strikes, the church is there—present, prayerful, and ready to respond.

How Your Congregation Can Help:

I encourage all congregations to consider holding a “Lutheran Disaster Response Sunday”—a time for prayer, education, and special offerings to support this crucial ministry. LDR also provides downloadable resources for worship, adult forums, and temple talks to help your congregation learn more about the work we do together as church. You can learn more or donate directly at elca.org/disaster.

Living Lutheran Magazine

One exciting development this year is the return of *Living Lutheran* magazine to print. Beginning in 2025, it will once again be delivered to mailboxes four times a year (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter). Subscriptions will cost \$19.95/year for individuals or \$17/year per subscriber for congregation group plans (minimum 10 copies).

To subscribe, visit livinglutheran.org/subscribe. For group subscriptions, be sure to enter your congregation's name and designate the person responsible for managing your plan.

Living Lutheran also continues to serve as a hub for digital content—featuring press releases, feature stories, and other resources that are great for newsletters, bulletins, annual reports, and temple talks.

Pulse Survey and Updates to reporting to the ELCA

The ELCA is expanding its data-gathering efforts through additional surveys conducted by our churchwide Research and Evaluation office. In addition to the annual congregational report submitted each February, congregations will now occasionally receive a *PULSE Survey*—a new tool designed to gather qualitative data that complements the usual statistical reporting.

These surveys are emailed to the general contact address listed with the ELCA, which may not always be accurate or up to date. We're working to ensure that rostered ministers and congregational leaders are looped in and have access to these tools.

Muhlenberg College Board of Trustees

This year I also began serving as a member of the Board of Trustees for Muhlenberg College, one of our ELCA-affiliated colleges. It's a privilege to represent our synod in this capacity and to support the vital work of higher education grounded in Lutheran values. Muhlenberg continues to be a place where faith, learning, and leadership intersect in meaningful ways, and I look forward to deepening our relationship as a synod with this important institution.

ELCA Coaching

Did you know the ELCA is building a network of trained coaches to walk alongside rostered leaders and congregations? Coaching is not counseling, consulting, or mentoring. Instead, coaching is a relational alliance that uses deep listening, powerful questions, and guided reflection to spark transformation and forward movement.

To explore coaching, connect with a coach, or train to become one yourself, visit elcacoaching.org. If cost is a concern, please reach out to the Office of the Bishop—we may be able to assist with financial support for coaching relationships.

Organizing for Mission Network

Our synod is now part of the ELCA's *Organizing for Mission Network*—a community of leaders committed to using the skills and values of community organizing to build Gospel-centered, justice-oriented communities of faith.

This network focuses on three main lenses:

1. **Organizing for Racial and Economic Equity**

The network helps congregations center their justice work by asking hard questions around race and class, prioritizing the leadership of impacted communities, and fostering solidarity across boundaries.

2. **Place-Based Organizing**

Rooted in the idea that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution, this approach strengthens local accountability and equips teams to build unlikely relationships for the sake of collective action.

3. **Organizing as Spiritual Practice**

Alongside people and resources, the network believes in the power of *organized spirit*. Trainings include deep listening, liberating theologies, and somatic practices that honor the diverse spiritual lives of participants.

Ecumenical, Inter-Religious and Global Work

Religious Leaders Council - Interfaith Philadelphia

Part of my role as a regional judicatory head includes serving on the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia, an initiative of Interfaith Philadelphia. Established in 2006, the Council exists to build relationships of mutual support, offer a moral and spiritual voice in the region, and address local issues through dialogue and shared action. It includes senior leaders from 35 diverse religious traditions, collectively representing over two million people in the greater Philadelphia area.

This year, the Council gathered for mutual conversation and relationship-building at several locations, including Mt. Airy Church of God in Christ, the offices of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and Mishkan Shalom Reconstructionist Synagogue. These meetings provide opportunities to listen deeply across differences, foster trust, and discern areas for common witness.

A shared concern among many leaders this year has been the state of our country and how we can best support our immigrant neighbors. In response, several solidarity walks have been organized in local neighborhoods as a public witness to peace, dignity, and shared humanity.

At my first meeting, I was honored to witness a recognition of Pastor John Hougen for his decades of work developing the *Zones of Peace* ministry. This initiative is a region-wide interfaith movement involving congregations, schools, and community-based organizations working to address the root causes of violence in our communities. Zones of Peace uplifts and recognizes organizations pioneering creative and effective responses to violence, helping to make our neighborhoods safer and more compassionate places to live. I encourage our congregations to explore how they might become a Zone of Peace—learn more at [Interfaith Philadelphia's website](#).

Christmas Simul Cast – Jerusalem and Christmas Church

Each year, the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania partners with the Anglican Church in Palestine to offer a special Christmas simulcast from the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Simultaneously broadcast with services here in Pennsylvania, this shared liturgy allows us to celebrate the joy of Christ's birth in unity with our Christian siblings in

the very land where the Good News was first revealed.

Over the past two years, amid the devastating realities of war and conflict, the service has taken on even deeper meaning. At Christmas Lutheran Church, the nativity was placed among the rubble of crumbling city walls, lifting up the image of *Christ in the Rubble*—a powerful sign of hope breaking into brokenness. This global witness reminds us that the incarnation continues to meet us in the midst of our world’s deepest pain.

Global Companion Synod

Our synod’s global companion relationship with the Northeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania continues to be a gift and a blessing. The diocese is led by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Msafiri Joseph Mbilu, and we were deeply honored to welcome him to our synod this past year, both for our Synod Assembly and my installation as bishop in September.

This spring, the diocese also elected a new Assistant to the Bishop (Dean), the Rev. Frank Mntangi, following the faithful retirement of Dean Michael Kanju. The church in Tanzania continues to grow and thrive, celebrating the Spirit’s movement in their communities. We look forward to strengthening this companion relationship and are actively exploring plans for a synod delegation to travel to Tanzania in the coming years.

Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

As part of the global communion of Lutheran churches through the Lutheran World Federation, we are connected to over 77 million Lutherans in 99 countries. The LWF continues to be a global leader in public theology, climate advocacy, refugee response, and humanitarian aid. Through our participation in this wider body, we are reminded that we are never alone in our mission—we are part of a Spirit-filled global church seeking justice, reconciliation, and peace in Jesus’ name. The work of LWF grounds us in mutuality, particularly as we accompany our companions in Tanzania and others throughout the world facing economic, environmental, and political instability.

Council of Nicaea – 1700th Anniversary

This year marked the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, a foundational moment in Christian history that gave us the Nicene Creed—our shared statement of faith across most Christian traditions. As part of this global commemoration, churches and interfaith partners reflected on the enduring significance of ecumenical dialogue and Christian unity.

In our region, this anniversary was honored through interchurch gatherings and shared

prayers across denominational lines. These celebrations served as a timely reminder that, while we may worship in different ways, we are united in confessing one faith, one baptism, and one Lord of all. The legacy of Nicaea calls us not only to remember our theological history but to commit ourselves to greater cooperation in the work of justice, peace, and reconciliation in our own time.

Advocacy

Serving as the Voice of Justice

As the body of Christ, we are called to not only proclaim the Gospel but to actively engage in advocating for justice and equity in the world. This year, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod has continued to strengthen its advocacy efforts both locally and nationally, working together with our ecumenical partners, interfaith neighbors, and the broader Lutheran community to advocate for those who are most vulnerable in our society.

One of the key areas of focus has been **immigrant rights and comprehensive immigration reform**. Our congregations have joined efforts in advocacy campaigns to ensure fair treatment of immigrants and refugees, as well as to provide sanctuary and support for those in need. In collaboration with local interfaith and social justice organizations, we have been part of rallies, letter-writing campaigns, and lobbying efforts aimed at changing harmful policies and creating more welcoming communities.

This year, we also saw a continued push for **climate justice**, with the church advocating for stronger environmental protections and a more just transition to sustainable energy. As stewards of God's creation, we are committed to reducing our environmental impact and standing up for communities disproportionately affected by climate change, particularly those in marginalized areas.

Together with the **ELCA Advocacy Office**, we have been actively involved in national and state-level campaigns to ensure that our faith-based values are reflected in public policy.

How You Can Get Involved:

I encourage all congregations to continue participating in our advocacy efforts, whether it's through local campaigns, national initiatives, or by getting involved in the ELCA's **Advocacy Action Network**. Your voices matter in the halls of government and the streets of our neighborhoods. Visit elca.org/advocacy to learn more about how you can join us in advocating for justice, or contact our office for specific ways to engage in local initiatives.

Together, we are God's hands and feet in the world, calling for justice and mercy in all places and at all times.

Panel Discussion on Immigration

In February, assisted by our Synod Attorney, The Rev. Kim Lengert, Esq. we convened a panel discussion around the new administrations executive orders around sensitive spaces. Historically churches, school, and hospitals were considered off limits for ICE enforcement. Executive orders from the Trump administration changed that, so many of our church leaders were wondering about their rights as churches and as communities that seek to protect and provide sanctuary spaces. As we continue to adjust to this new administration and the new normal, we will likely be seeing more of these sessions as we explore ways we can effectively minister to our communities.

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania

This year, we have continued our strong partnership with the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) (lutheranadvocacypa.org), which has been a critical voice in advocating for policies that reflect our faith values of justice and compassion.

One of the highlights this year was attending the Bonhoeffer Symposium, where the focus was on ending Christian Nationalism. We were privileged to hear from Amanda Tyler, the executive director of Christians Against Christian Nationalism. Her insightful presentation sparked deep reflection on how our faith calls us to resist the growing influence of Christian Nationalism in our society and to affirm the separation of church and state as a foundational principle of our democracy.

We also celebrated the success of **Lutheran Day at the Capital**, an event that brought together hundreds of advocates from across the church to meet with elected officials and share how they are working to create just and compassionate communities. The day was a reminder that advocacy is not just a matter of policy—it is about living out our faith through tangible actions that transform lives.

LAMPa's advocacy continues to focus on issues such as racial and economic justice, climate action, affordable housing, and immigrant rights. Their tireless efforts support our collective voice in the legislative process, and they help us as a church to discern how to best advocate for the common good. As we move forward, it is vital that we remain engaged in this important work, continuing to be a prophetic voice for justice in the public sphere.