

**REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE
SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD, ELCA
SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2025**

1. Nominations from the floor shall be made at the time of the first report of the Nominating Committee during the first business session of the Synod Assembly for all positions to be elected at this assembly.
2. The 2019 Churchwide Assembly changed the definition of “Clergy” to include both Ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors) and Ministers of Word and Service (deacons). Therefore, Ministers of Word and Service (deacons) are now eligible to be nominated for Ticket 1. Deacons are no longer eligible for lay positions.
3. A reminder that a person making a nomination from the floor must immediately present to the Assembly office a copy of the nominee’s biographical information, and a picture of the nominee. This nomination form may be completed on-line and sent as an email attachment to the registrar, Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, at coutterbridge@sepa.org. The form can be found on the synod’s website, ministrylink.org.

This year we will be electing a Vice President of the Synod, as well as people to serve on Synod Council. The Vice President of the synod is one of the lay voting members of the Churchwide Assembly. Whoever is elected as our vice president will be attending the Churchwide Assembly as a voting member from this synod.

From the Constitution, By-laws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod:

S8.20. Vice President

†S8.21. The vice president shall be elected by the Synod Assembly; the vice president shall be a layperson. The vice president shall be a voting member of a congregation of this synod. The vice president shall not receive a salary for the performance of the duties of the office.

S8.21.01. The vice president may serve no more than three terms consecutively.

S8.22. The vice president shall chair the Synod Council.

S8.22.01. The vice president shall be an *ex officio* voting member from the Synod to the Churchwide Assembly. In the event that the vice-president is unable to attend the Churchwide Assembly an additional nominee for the appropriate lay panel shall be made by the Nominating Committee.

TICKET 1: SYNOD VICE PRESIDENT (1 lay person to be elected to a term ending 2029)

NAME

Ms. Cheryl Lafferty

CONGREGATION

Redemption, Philadelphia

TICKET 2: SYNOD COUNCIL, CLERGY (Two rostered ministers to be elected for terms ending 2028)

NAME

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia

The Rev. Jonathan Steiner

CONGREGATION

Upper Dublin, Ambler

Trinity, Lansdale

TICKET 3: SYNOD COUNCIL, DELAWARE CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2028)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Ms. Lisa Fortwangler	St. John, Folcroft
Dr. Sherrell Mickens	Christ, Upper Darby

TICKET 4: SYNOD COUNCIL, NORTHEAST/NORTHWEST PHILADELPHIA CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2028)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Ms. Mari-Beth Fetsick	Faith, Philadelphia

TICKET 5: SYNOD COUNCIL, UPPER MONTGOMERY CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY MAN (One lay man to be elected for a term ending 2028)

NAME	CONGREGATION
There are no nominations from the Committee	

TICKET 6: SYNOD COUNCIL, LAY YOUNG ADULT REPRESENTATIVE (One lay person to be elected for a term ending 2028) A person of any gender identity may be nominated for this seat.

The term “young adult” means a voting member of a congregation who is between the ages of 18 and 30 at the time of election or appointment for service.

NAME	CONGREGATION
Ms. Syndey Geyer	St. Andrew, Perkasio
Ms. Irene Rajarigam	Grace, Drexel Hill

TICKET 7: SYNOD COUNCIL, YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE (One lay person to be elected for a term ending 2027)

A person of any gender identity may be nominated for this seat.

The term “youth” means a voting member of a congregation who has not reached the age of 18 at the time of election or appointment for service.

NAME	CONGREGATION
Mr. Bennaiah Bennie	Faith-Immanuel, East Lansdowne

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

TICKET 1: SYNOD VICE PRESIDENT (1 lay person to be elected to a term ending 2029)



LAFFERTY, CHERYL (F-W): Senior Program Director, Philadelphia Academies. Inc. B.A. from University of Maryland, Baltimore County. M. Div. from Palmer Theological Seminary. Redemption Lutheran Church, Philadelphia. Congregational Deacon at Redemption NE Philly; past Council President; part of Forward Together in Faith committee; Adult chaperon/chaplain for South Dakota Mission Trip 2016; past SHYG/JYG planning committee member; Led congregational Youth Gathering trips in 2006, 2009, 2012; multiple years as Synod Assembly voting member/visitor/worship leader; Feast of Justice former Chairperson/current board member; past member of Rotary International (NE Sunrisers Club); Habitat for Humanity; Fostering Hope NE Philadelphia.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts:

- Empathy - Listening to others, connecting with/understand their POV, experiences and feelings
- Commitment to justice/equity – an essential requirement of my faith
- Organizational Leadership- running meetings, working with volunteers and systems
- Strategic Thinking – looking ahead with courage, objectivity, big-picture viewpoint
- Public speaking – whether with large groups or one-on-one

Serving as council president, board chairperson, executive director, and now as Senior Program Director, I've learned to lead organized, impactful meetings, addressing challenges or disagreements, and coming together with staff and volunteers to serve others. Such work shouldn't be done without being in community with others, listening to their needs, dreams, and concerns and learning to empathize with people from all backgrounds - for me, this is where a commitment to equity and justice is rooted. I've grown into a comfortable public speaker, not afraid to cast a vision and then help map out the strategic steps to achieve it.

TICKET 2: SYNOD COUNCIL, CLERGY (Two rostered ministers to be elected for terms ending 2028)



RIVERA-GARCIA, NELSON (M-P): Professor of Theology & Ethic, United Lutheran Seminary. M.Div. from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, S.T.M. from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Ph.D. from Temple University, Philadelphia. Upper Dublin Lutheran Church, Philadelphia. Synod Council, SEPA Synod, January 2015- completing unfilled term Editorial Committee, "Fe en Acción" e-Journal [ELCA], 2024-Executive Faculty Council, United Lutheran Seminary, 2024-Chair of the Globalization, International Studies & Global Ecumenism Task Force, ULS, 2024-Lutheran (ELCA) – Roman Catholic (USCCB) Dialogue, 13th Round, 2022;

Secretary of the Board of Directors for Select Learning, 2024 Mentoring Program, Hispanic Theological Initiative, 2014, Advisory Committee, Institute for Religion and Science at Chestnut Hill College, 2012 Participant, The Clergy Letter Project, 2006.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: As teacher and pastor, I study the Scriptures, especially for the task of proclamation. I keep up-to-date with publications on doctrinal and constructive theologies and studies in ethical theory. As writer, I contribute to journals, published a couple of books, including a handbook for pastors (in Spanish), and translate liturgical resources for the Church. Often I serve as guest preacher and presider in SEPA Synod congregations and beyond. These are things for which I have a specific call: to teach, preach, administer the Sacraments, form leaders, engage in ecumenism, mentor graduate students, and walk with others in their life journeys. I'm well organized and focused on the task at hand.

I believe in the importance of diversity in Church and society, which may be pursued in different ways, from diverse ethnic identities to gender inclusiveness, varied social classes, educational preparation, etc. I have taught in theological seminaries for over 25 years. I believe in the need to encourage, equip, and support others for the tasks of ministry. I have done work for the ELCA in various capacities, mostly as consultant, translator, and editor of congregational resources. My personal and professional experiences have been shaped by this vocation to serve God and neighbor through the ministry of Word and Sacraments, providing pastoral care, and through scholarship as well. I love teaching the faith, conversing with people, and reading. I consider my vocation as a teacher as an extension of the same call that I first received as an ordained minister. After 37 years of ordination, I cannot see myself in any other capacity or job but working for the Church.



STEINER, JONATHAN (M-W): Associate Pastor, Trinity, Lutheran Church, Lansdale. B. A. from University of Maryland, Baltimore County. M.Div. from Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. Associate Pastor - Faith Formation and Fellowship focus, other broad duties as pastor; DEM and Associate to Bishop in SD - Supervise 8-12 new starts and specialized ministries, work with 200+ congregations on Stewardship, Outreach, and Visioning, West River (western 1/2 of SD) liaison to congregations, liaison between ELCA-synod-congregations; Graceful Hills Parish - took on solo call as first call, developed a partnership with a nearby congregation with no called pastor to form a parish that still continues; Work with numerous community outreach programs at the congregation, synod, and ELCA levels; Heavy focus on Indigenous neighbors - especially the Lakota people of South Dakota; Experience in helping congregations or ministries form new 501c3's to take on particular aspects of ministry better; Passion for helping

congregations network with each other, their communities, and the wider church

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: Some gifts I bring are:

- Building a Sense of Community;
- Innovation/Creativity;
- Participant in the Larger Church
- Interpret Theology;
- Recruit & Equip Leaders

I identified these gifts in my last discernment process. I believe ministry flourishes when built upon mutual trust and a sense of belonging. I have helped synod members and congregations see their role in the wider church as a blessing.

My experience in the SD Synod was wonderful and challenging. Knowing the diversity of our communities and congregations can lead to many differing opinions and visions, I feel called to help individuals and communities dream together about how God calls us to be the body of Christ in the world today.

Allowing the Spirit to lead us can be a difficult, yet bountiful process. Rooted in our Lutheran theology, we trust God to be with us and reform us into a new creation.

TICKET 3: SYNOD COUNCIL, DELAWARE CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2028)



FORTWANGLER, LISA (F-W): Retired Librarian. B.S. Ed. from Kutztown University. M.S. from Drexel University. St. John Lutheran Church, Folcroft. Member of Church Council (many years), currently Council Secretary, member of Worship & Music Committee, Altar Guild, Women of ELCA, Secretary of WELCA, Sunday School Teacher. Member of Delaware Conference, Treasurer of Delaware Conference. Delegate to SEPA Synod Assembly 2018-. Member of church choir and other group choirs. Librarian Folcroft Public Library 2013-2017. Interested in all sciences. Spaceflight and Astronomy.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: My love for the Lord and professing that love to others. I bring part of my librarian training, that of organization. Passion for teaching Sunday School and WELCA meetings. My passion for music and bringing that to the choir and church service. My knowledge of Parliamentary actions to council and church meetings.

I have always striven to take my God given talents into my workplaces. By helping students, Dr.'s and other staff, I would fulfill this action. As a by product of my work, I would go above and beyond what my job to help others. I have always thought this to be part of my gifts. I would do the same for my church. Whenever asked to serve, I would step up and do my best to do God's work. I keep in contact with church members, work in Sunday School, and other events.



MICKENS, SHERRELL (F-P): Owner Mickens Early Learning Academy. M.S. Ed. From Drexel University. M.S. Ed. from Gwynedd-Mercy University Ed. D. from University of Pennsylvania. Christ Community Lutheran Church, Upper Darby. currently serve as the vice president of our church council and in the past I served as president of our church council. I am a member of our personnel committee. In the past I have served on the finance committee and I was the director of our sunday school program. I often volunteer on serveral church events. I have been a voting member at our synod assembly for the past two years, As a member of my sorority I volunteer on several service projects that better our community. I volunteer at the Delaware County Community College's food pantry. I am an advid runner often racing in events

that raise money for breast cancer research.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: Deuteronomy 10:12 requires us to fear the Lord, to walk with Him, to love Him, to serve Him, and to obey the Lord. I would bring all five of these gifts to the synod council and would utilize these gifts to serve the synod.

I have used these gifts in service to my church in my past roles as a Sunday School Director, Vacation Bible School Leader and teacher, Confirmation Mentor, Church Council Member, Church Council President and Vice-President, and volunteer on numerous church projects and committees. In my career I have worked as an educator helping families, children, and staff reach their full potential. I have engaged in missionary work in Managua, Nicaragua. I have used my five gifts as standards to direct my behavior and motives when engaged with others at church, at work, and in the community.

TICKET 4: SYNOD COUNCIL, NORTHEAST/NORTHWEST PHILADELPHIA CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2028)



FETSICK, MARI-BETH (F-W): Lead Teacher, NEYMCA. B.A. from Kutztown University. Faith Lutheran Church, Philadelphia. North/East Conference Volunteer.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: I'm nurturing, organized, determined, loyal, and passionate. I like to help others thru my church. I like finding solutions to problems and applying them to see results.

I am a deacon at my church. I fill in for my pastor when he is on vacation and serve as an altar server

TICKET 5: SYNOD COUNCIL, UPPER MONTGOMERY CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY MAN (One lay man to be elected for a term ending 2028)

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GEYER, SYNDEY E. (F-W): Personal Care Assistant – Autistic Support, Pennridge High School. B. A. from Temple University. St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Perkasio. Served as an assisting minister at St. Andrew's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Was involved in SEPA Youth when I was in high school, was involved with our church youth group in middle school and high school, Served as acolyte and cross bearer in middle school and high school, Worked at Bear Creek Camp as a counselor for summer camp and winter camp. I participated in Keystone Opportunity Center Sleepout for the Homeless in high school.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: 1) Helping those in the community, 2) Giving of my time and energy, 3) Leadership in small groups of youth, 4) Motivating others, 5) Providing a safe space for others to tell their story or struggles

Giving my time and energy in church was very important to me as a child because I wanted to be involved with the service in some way. Assisting in ministry was the best way to do that for me, and I hope to continue to do so in terms of youth ministry or Sunday school teachings. In my day-to-day job, I help and care for those who do not have the same opportunity as most people in communicating and participating in daily tasks. I use my gifts to help and encourage those to reach their goals and overcome struggles in life.



RAJARIGAM, IRENE (F-P): Commercial Loan Specialist, Wells Fargo Bank N.A., B.S. from University of Pittsburg. M. B. A. from Eastern University. Grace Lutheran Church, Drexel Hill. Vice President of church council (2024 to present). Community outreach, Christian Education.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: Stewardship: I am committed to helping our congregation and synod to use our talents to serve God, our church, and our community. Speaking/Writing: I look forward to engaging with our greater synod, through my speaking and writing, to have candid and collaborative discussions on the values and initiatives we align ourselves with. Young Adult Outreach: My hope is to bring young adults (back) to church and make it a safe and welcoming space for everyone. Service: I look forward to get directly involved in community

service efforts and initiatives and encourage our congregations to make this a part of their personal ministry.

Learning: I hope to help foster a space where people feel comfortable with questions and help to grow in deepening our personal relationships with Christ.

I enjoy being involved in fundraising and community events. I have had the opportunity to lead Vacation Bible School several years ago and more recently, I led our church bake sale to raise funds for our church right before our 100th anniversary celebration. It was deeply fulfilling to bring our church and local communities in these ways.

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BENNIE, BENNAIAH (M-P): Student, Springfield High School. Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church, East Lansdowne. Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church Children Ministry President 2020-2022, Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church Youth President 2022-present; Drexel Hill Middle School Student Council member and president, Drummer at Church.

Spiritual and/ or Personal Gifts: Bennaiah is a leader and lives in a household of leaders, including his mom and dad who have leadership responsibilities at Faith-Immanuel and their jobs. Ben is also serviceable. He has been serving in different roles at church and school.

Bennaiah preached his first sermon at Faith-Immanuel when he was just 12 years old. He is a lay reader, and preaches occasionally at Faith-Immanuel and at Clearview United Methodist Church, his Aunt Doris's congregation. Bennaiah has expressed his desire to attend seminary to be trained to serve as a pastor.