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ASSISTANT FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Grace to you and peace!

I want to begin my report by saying thank you. When I picked up my life and moved to this Synod in late January, I did so with some trepidation. Starting something new is always anxiety-producing. These last few months of getting to know you and being welcomed into the community have renewed my spirit. Some have asked what it's like to move from being a bishop to being an assistant and I have said, with firm confidence: GLORIOUS!

Our theme, Ponder Anew, has had me thinking about these questions:

How can we as the staff of the Office of the Bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod better communicate with you?

What are the best ways for us to get information to you?

What can we learn from each other?

How can the message of God's love, grace and mercy be made real through our work together?

How can we be in partnership more fully through the work that I have been called to do?

I am thankful to be using some gifts that I have not been able to exercise for several years. One of the gifts that I bring to the table is a holy (and healthy) curiosity. I ask questions. You may even get annoyed by the number of questions I ask! I do so for the sake of the good work we do together.

Being an outsider has advantages. I see things with new eyes, and I am prompted to ask questions that, with any luck, give us an opportunity to think about whether change needs to happen or whether we can stand firmly on the processes we have relied on through the years.

I look forward to continuing to build a relationship with you and to pondering alongside you as we look toward the future of our ministry together and in the communities to which God has called us.

I want to thank Bishop Penman for this opportunity and my colleagues on the staff for their warm welcome. May God continue to open our hearts to the holy presence we long for.

With you, in Christ,

The Rev. Paula Lebo

ASSISTANT FOR CONGREGATIONS

Committee of Deans

“He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” – Ephesians 4:11-12

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he did not imagine a synod structure with deans. But in Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, our Committee of Deans is essential to how the Office of the Bishop seeks to equip the saints of our congregations for the work of ministry. Deans are frequently the first point of contact for congregations and rostered ministers in their conference, serving as deployed staff of the synod. They facilitate regular gatherings of rostered ministers in their conference, support the call process, and provide pastoral care and visitation for congregations and rostered ministers in their conference including installations and services of holy closure.

In addition to these duties within the conference, deans gather with the Bishop and other staff for meetings of the Committee of Deans. This gathering is to “advise and assist the Bishop and to confer with the bishop as to the needs of the church on the territory of the several conferences (S12.01.14).”

While the Committee of Deans continued monthly conference reports and call process updates, much of our conversation has focused around the need for a new approach to pastoral leadership transitions. The transition work was being directed by the affordability and availability of clergy, and we did not have good resources in place to help congregations assess the direction of their own missional energy in the midst of those changes. Congregations were mourning the loss of full-time pastoral ministry and/or wondering if they were no longer desirable places when only one or two candidates were available to interview. Questions about what is God calling us to do were getting drowned out by concerns about the budget and worries about how many candidates said yes to interviewing with the call committee. We started dreaming of a process that would help congregations discern their next chapter of ministry while giving them agency to choose a path forward. Please see the report of the Transitional Ministry Development team for more updates on these conversations.

The Committee of Deans roster is as follows:

- Central Philadelphia conference – Pastor Noah Hepler
- Chester conference – Pastor Chris Franz
- Delaware conference – Pastor Marie Sager
- Lower Bucks conference – Pastor Nathan Krause
- Lower Montgomery conference – Pastor Julie DeWerth
- NE/NW Philadelphia conference – Pastor Dan Eisenberg
- Upper Bucks conference – Pastor Bill Coleman
- Upper Montgomery conference – Pastor Matt Finney
- Bishop – Pastor Bryan Penman
- Synod Staff – Ms. Yvonne Curtis, Pastor Linda Manson, Pastor Karen Sease, and Pastor Moses Suah-Dennis

Each dean is elected to serve a three-year term and may serve no more than two consecutive terms.

Thanks to Pastor Joey Klinger (NE/NW), Pastor Chris McKinstry (Upper Montgomery), and Pastor Erika Wesch (Upper Bucks) who have concluded their service as deans since the 2024 Synod Assembly. We’re also grateful for the other members of the Committee of Deans who concluded their service in the past year: Bishop Patricia Davenport, Director of Mobility Pastor Marcia Bell, Director of Interim Ministry Pastor Wayne Shelor, and Assistant to the Bishop for Youth and Young Adults Pastor Stacey Kyle-Rea.

If you or your congregation need assistance for prayer, resources, or supportive conversation, please reach out to your dean or to me.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Karen M. Sease
Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations
ksease@sepa.org

TRANSITIONAL MINISTRY DEVELOPMENT TEAM

*“Ponder anew what the Almighty can do if with his love he befriend you.”
From Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, ELW 858 v.3*

Since the 2024 assembly, TMDT has spent the year discerning how God is calling us to do a new thing with transitional ministry in Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Our synod first pioneered intentional interim ministry in the early 1990s by specifically recruiting interim pastors, creating a formal interim cadre, and writing our first handbook for how to move a congregation through a pastoral leadership transition. Since then, the Transitional Ministry Development Team has worked to manage the transition process used by SEPA congregations, continuing to hone and tweak to retain best practices. We believe God is now calling our synod to pioneer a new interim format that can more readily address the needs of our rapidly changing church landscape. Pastors are transitioning faster than in previous eras of ministry. The average pastorate in our synod is currently about 5 years. Additionally, the affordability and availability of clergy is encouraging many congregations to rethink their models of ministry. And the inertia of institutional support is no longer enough to propel mission forward in many of our congregations. New resources are needed to address these culture shifts.

With our *Ponder Anew* resources, we want each congregation to have agency as they chart their course forward on one of three paths:

1. Choose **Transformation** – This process places an intentional focus on congregational vitality. Congregations engaging in this path will integrate = our synod’s vitality programming, strengthening their connection to God, one another, and their community. With renewed clarity of purpose, they become more attractive ministry sites for future pastoral candidates.
2. Choose **Partnership** – Taking the partnership path, congregations will explore the spectrum of what’s possible when we choose to help congregations work together. Exploring alternative leadership arrangements and networking with other Lutheran and Full Communion partners, we will attempt to create configurations of ministry that make multi-site work for our pastoral leaders and congregations. While this approach may feel innovative, partnership has been the norm for much of Christian history including our American Lutheran history of circuit riding.
3. Choose **Resurrection** – For the congregations who choose resurrection, this path means acknowledging that their current ministry is drawing to a close. But we are Easter people. Just as Good Friday is not the end of the story, resurrection brings new beginnings. We

will celebrate the vital ministry that has been and dream about where God is leading next. Congregations on this path will explore how God is calling them to live in a new way—beyond their building, in an emerging community, or through the birth of a brand-new ministry. No congregation will be alone as they discern the path of resurrection.

Whichever path a congregation chooses, TMDT will be a resource for the Council, the Office of the Bishop, Deans, and interim leaders as they develop an individualized transition plan tailored to the needs of each congregation. This plan will keep the transition process moving forward while addressing challenges along the way.

TMDT typically meets every other month as a whole team, by Zoom to accommodate people from across the synod, though the group has committed to monthly meetings between our January 2025 retreat and the May 2025 assembly so we could be ready to share how God has been leading our team to innovate. Many thanks to Teri Lanan and the people of Trinity-Lansdale for hosting our team-building retreat this year! In addition to preparing our *Ponder Anew* resources, TMDT has used our meetings to reassess the purpose, values, and goals of transition ministry in SEPA and make sure that our new interim process is aligned with those markers. We look forward to unveiling these new resources by Fall 2025, housing them on the synod's website so every congregation can access transition support as needed as they imagine the future God calls them into.

We also give thanks for the work of our TMDT subgroups. One team is working on a pre-transition discernment process that will help shape the individualized transition plan for each congregation. This group was originally tasked with creating resources as more congregations are shifting from full-time to part-time pastoral leadership during the interim period or as it begins. Then, the subgroup realized that this was part of a bigger need for congregations to have a more wholistic picture of the scope of their transition, so they expanded their work in accompanying congregations in preparing for their interim time. The other task force continues to work on resources and best practices for Exit Interviews. TMDT is preparing for a more thorough practice of reflective conversation at the end of every transitional experience. Our goal is modeling the importance of closure in the transition period, to name both the good and the difficult, to thank people, and to release what cannot be changed as we continue moving forward. We hope these evaluation materials will be simple, effective, and empowering for the congregations and leaders that engage this process.

The future work of the Transitional Ministry Development Team will focus on launching the *Ponder Anew* resources by Fall 2025, then incorporating feedback from participating congregations and leaders as we strengthen and refine the process. As we move into Spring 2026, we will likely find a need to retune our existing documentation that comprises a mobility profile and may need to create new documents for congregations to share their transition learnings.

Members of TMDT include a mix of pastors and laypeople, including some who have interim ministry training and some who have experience with a recent rostered minister transition. Many thanks to *Pastor Sandra Brown, *Pastor Ghislaine Cotnoir, Dale Herbranson, Rich Hollenbach, Cari Kramer, *Teri Lanan, Pastor Dayle Malloy, *Karl McClellan, *Pastor Janet Peterman,

Pastor Maeve Schurz, Pastor Karen Sease, *Pastor Wayne Shelor, Pastor Amy Smith, and Pastor Kevin Tracey. (An asterisk* denotes that a team member has completed interim training.)

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

The Rev. Karen M. Sease
Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations
ksease@sepa.org

ASSISTANT FOR FORMATION

Candidacy Committee Report to the 2025 SEPA Synod Assembly

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.

Nearly 40 people are in contact with the synod 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 Ian Clements and Brendan Galvin who have been approved as candidates for Minister of Word and Sacrament! Congratulations to Sister Paula Estornell who has been approved as a candidate for Minister of Word and Service!

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), the Rev. Sarah Anderson-Rajarigam, Jonathan Bagby, Sara Calderon, the Rev. Jenn Casey, Lucille Hall, Bobbie Hoffman, Lisa Pressley, the Rev. Thomas Rusert, and Nancy Stevens. Recent transitions have left two seats currently vacant.

- We're grateful for these leaders who ended their time with the candidacy committee this year: Deacon Kathie Afflerbach, the Rev. Bill Coleman, the Rev. Paul Neff (outgoing chair), Pastor Karen Sease (outgoing staff) 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, the Rev. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath, and Deacon Allison Wilcox.
- A special thank you to Bishop Bryan Penman for his care for our candidates, his vision for new leadership, and his support for the committee's work.

The committee meets 4-5 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,

Ms. Lisa Pressley
Candidacy Committee Chair

The Rev. Karen M. Sease
Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations (outgoing staff)

and, The Rev. Erika Wesch
Assistant to the Bishop for Formation

Assistant for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

The two and a half months I have been back in the Southeastern PA Synod have been very busy. I have been meeting with our leaders both rostered and lay as well as my colleagues on staff and Bishop Penman. Over this next year, I will be working to shape and implement an ongoing

emphasis on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. This emphasis will contain some programmatic components. I will be working over the summer to assemble a team to collaborate with me on this work. It is my intention to launch the program at Southeastern PA Synod Assembly 2026. It is my honor and privilege to serve our synod, and I know that together we can make a difference.

Rev. Linda Manson

DEM responsible for Strategic Ministries and Congregational Vitality; also, Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

Directors of Evangelical Mission

There have been two unique road-markers along my 24 years journey in SEPA Synod/ELCA. I began as a seminarian candidate for ordained ministry, synod called mission developer/pastor, a congregation called pastor, and Bishop appointed Co-Director for Evangelical Mission (Co-DEM). The first road-marker was the bulletin board poster in the lobby of the Wideman Center that advertised SEPA Synod as the *mission minded synod* of the ELCA during my 2001 first year as a seminarian at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia (LTSP/ULS).

Pastor Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg words: ...*the church must be planted (Ecclesia Plantanda) in every age*, quoted by SEPA Synod 2012 DEM, the Rev. Claire Burkat in her introduction remarks when Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church was received as SEPA Synod's newest congregation at the 2012 Synod Assembly was the second road-marker. These two road-markers influenced my understanding of SEPA Synod's vision and mission as a seminarian/candidate, a mission developer/pastor, a candidacy committee, committee on discipline member and now as Co-DEM responsible for Missional Leaders and New Ministries across our beloved Synod.

The Mindfulness Plus Church referenced in Bishop Penman's synod by the numbers report session was SEPA Synod first new ministry start in over half a decade, due in part by the Covid-19 Pandemic. The DEM arranged and supported January 2024 internship placement of Vicar Sarajeon Grainson at Community of Love, Oxford as a TEEM (Theological Education Emerging Minister) Candidate made the transition and ongoing transformation of ministry happening there possible. The Latinx New Ministry Exploration led by Seminarian Daveis Ventura, June 1-November 30, 2024, was completed and core recommendation for future work, when a leader becomes available.

Bishop Penman's election to the Office of Bishop, the ensuing transition did not change the trajectory of the increased support provided to Synod Authorized Worshipping Communities (SAWC), Strategic Congregations, the missional leaders we inherited from DEMs before us and

those we started after we were called February 1, 2023. The required ministry site reviews for SEPA Synod/ELCA supported SAWCs, and Strategic Congregations deferred for years due to turnovers in the DEM position, were completed as of March 31, 2025. SEPA Synod's SAWCs (Arabic Speaking + other Middle eastern Peoples, Kairos Communities, the Mindfulness Plus, the Well) and Strategic Congregations (Grace-Broomall, Mediator-Philadelphia, Nueva Creacion, St. Michael-Kensington) are all ELCA-CCL compliant.

It is truly a blessing to welcome Pastor Linda Manson back to SEPA Synod as Co-DEM, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Vitality + Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The DEMs accompaniment, equipping, and resourcing of the Synod's Vitality Team, missional ministries, strategic congregations, and leaders is vibrant. We envision continuing to build on inherited, newly started ministries, and called missional leaders as we pounder anew ways of being church in the 21st century—Lutherans Together, Loving God, and Neighbor. Bishop Davenport's venture into the Holy Experiment of contracting with two pastors with congregational calls to share the DEM responsibilities has been transformative. The DEM portfolio is shared between Synods and ELCA Churchwide offices. The synodical Bishop prescribes the DEM Synod responsibilities while the ELCA-Churchwide portfolio is peer-focus. We are honored to serve in this ministry that links congregations, synods, and churchwide offices—all three expressions of the ELCA.

Rev. Dr. Moses S. Dennis, D. Min

DEM Responsible for New Starts and Missional Leaders + Pastor, Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church.

Rev. Linda Manson

DEM responsible for Strategic Ministries and Congregational Vitality; also, Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

Director of Faith Alive



The Faith Alive Initiative is designed to equip and encourage congregations to provide a wide welcome to children in our worship spaces. We do this through Worship Learning Lab events, walking with congregations through creating a welcome statement for children and families, providing mini grants to ministries that are creating spaces in their sanctuaries for children, and

exploring together what it means to be a church that lives out Jesus' call to "let the children come to me and do not stop them". (Matthew 19:14)

Children are naturally curious and looking for ways to interact with the world around them. Worship is the time of the week when a whole community of people is gathered to listen, sing, and connect with their faith. We do a lot of work to make sure adults are provided resources and now we want to ensure children have the resources they need as well. Through this initiative we will embrace a spirit of curiosity and play as we explore how we can meet the needs of the children in our midst as they encounter worship.

Save the Date!

Worship Learning Lab – Saturday, November 22

This will be a day to experiment, play, learn, and lean into curiosity as we discover the ways we can engage children in our worship. Speakers, workshops, and practical resources will be curated for all congregational leaders to use in their worship with children.

Submitted by
The Rev. Annemarie H. Cook
Program Director, Faith Alive Initiative

Director of Love Revolution



The revolution is underway.
Loving God. Loving neighbor. It's a revolution of love.

A revolution the world desperately needs.

Revolutions take time. They are hard work. The powers that oppose love do not yield easily. But God's love perseveres and inspires our loving response. And so, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (SEPA) of the ELCA is at work helping congregations navigate and thrive amid the rapidly changing context of ministry in the 21st century.

I joined the Love Revolution as Director last September. Pastor Kayla Sadowy was chosen as our Grant Evaluator a short time later. We have been inspired and guided by Bishop Penman and the others who provided the vision for this Lilly Endowment "Thriving Congregations" grant. Four of our congregations were chosen to be a part of the first wave of the Love Revolution: Faith-Immanuel, East Lansdowne; Zion, Spring City; St. John's, Ridge Valley; and Good Shepherd, King of Prussia. Coaches drawn from among ELCA coaching leaders and local mentors support the work of each of the congregational teams.

The Love Revolution invites us to *Ponder Anew* by examining and experiencing a changed way of seeing and understanding the church. "Church" too often has become synonymous with a building, an institution, and programs. The revolution helps us to understand that *we* are the church among the people we meet every day. It's about building listening and relationship skills. It's about experiencing God's love through ancient tradition paired with modern practice. It's about being reminded that in baptism we are grafted into God's unfolding love story with all of creation. It's about a renewal of our baptismal vows to

- **"live** among God's faithful people,
- **hear** the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper,
- **proclaim** the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- **serve** all people following the example of Jesus, and
- **strive** for justice and peace in all the earth,"

all with a conscious and careful sense of cultural humility, and our eyes open to how racism and colonialism have distorted our understandings in the past.

Planned and supported by a dedicated Curriculum Committee, two events have taken place. The Love Revolution was launched during the synod's Fall Learning Day last October at St. Luke, Devon. Vibrant worship was followed by an excellent keynote address by Bishop Dwayne Royster, Executive Director of Faith in Action, who reminded participants that all people are created in God's image and challenged us to change the world so that "everybody gets to live their full, best lives." Three afternoon workshops helped us to consider how we might "Live Faithfully."

In March, the Wave 1 congregational leadership teams met around the theme of "**hearing** God's word and sharing in the Lord's Supper." After a land acknowledgment delivered by Bishop Penman, keynote addresses by the Rev. Dr. Pamela Lightsey, Associate Professor of Constructive Theology at Meadville Lombard Theological School, and Vance Blackfox, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and founder and director of Other + Wise, a cultural education and immersion program, helped us to consider how we might hear God's word in fresh and unexpected ways.

Sara Melton, Managing Director of Organizing for POWER Interfaith, provided excellent training in 1:1 conversation. Interspersed throughout, participants experienced a variety of spiritual practices as ways to listen for God's word in our lives. The day concluded with an example of "Dinner Church" led by Pastor Lauren Bruno from St. John's, Ridge Valley.

This summer, the Love Revolution Advisory Team will retreat to plan upcoming events and cohort gatherings, including the **Proclaim Retreat** in the fall, the synod's Fall Learning Day (Loving Neighbor), and the **serve** and **strive** gatherings in November and January respectively.

There are several ways you and your congregation can be a part of the Love Revolution:

- Pray for the congregations and the synod staff that are living out the first wave of the revolution. Prayer changes things!
- Participate in SEPA's Fall Learning Day in October (particular date and location to be announced).
- Check out the resources on the SEPA website (sepa.org) by clicking the Love Revolution button. Videos and print resources from the first two events are available.
- Stop by the Love Revolution table during assembly, grab some swag, and have a conversation!
- No later than about this time next year, consider applying to be a part of Wave 2! Applications are available on the website.

Be a part of the revolution!

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Rick Summy
Love Revolution Program Director

Anti-Racism Team

Anti-Racism Team SEPA Synod Annual Report for May 2025 Assembly

*God, Grant that this tragic midnight of man's inhumanity to man
will soon pass and the bright daybreak of freedom and
brotherhood will come into being. ~ The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

The Anti-Racism Team (ART) is a group of volunteer peer educators committed to the work of anti-racism and justice. This team originated 20 years ago. Some of the current members of the team have been doing this work the entire time.

The team supported the launch of the Love Revolution in October. Deacon Kathie Afflerbach, who serves on both ART and as a member of the Love Revolution Curriculum Committee, was asked to put together a presentation on Implicit Biases for the event. The whole team met with Deacon Afflerbach to give feedback and to make suggestions for updated videos to include. Pastor Jane Marston stepped up at the last minute to fill in for another member of the curriculum committee who had other pastoral responsibilities at that time. Other ART members were also present at the launch. In addition, ART leadership participated in the ELCA Racial Justice check-in, which took place on Zoom.

In the last year the Anti-Racism Team has offered educational opportunities for Rostered Leaders twice. Unfortunately, both opportunities were cancelled due to low registration. Our biggest hope for 2025 is that Rostered Leaders will take up their mandate for Anti-Racism education and find time to attend one of our next opportunities. In the meantime, we are looking to ourselves, increasing our knowledge base, and asking the question: What can we do to make our educational experiences better for all involved?

The Team facilitates a Facebook group (SEPA Anti-racism Team) and invites people to join. For those who are already members, please invite others. Also, we are always looking to add members to our team, so if you have any interest, please contact us at antiracism@sepa.org

In March the ART Team was overjoyed to welcome back our colleague The Rev. Linda Manson who serves as Co-Director of Evangelical Mission SEPA Synod and co-worker in this sacred work as Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. Pastor Manson has already met with the ART Team.

We offer many thanks to Bishop Penman for his support and advocacy of this important justice work. We look forward to continue serving God and the SEPA Synod in the future.

Your servants in Christ,

The SEPA Synod Anti-Racism Team

The Rev. Dr. Susie Folks, Co-Chair
The Rev. Gwendolyn King, Co-Chair
Deacon Kathleen Afflerbach
Janet Bischoff
Chase Ferguson
Fern Hagedorn
The Rev. Kathleen Harkness
The Rev. Jane Marston
The Rev. Raymond Miller
Karen Paulus
The Rev. Serena Sellers

Addendum:

Several of our members are recommending books that they believe are helpful in learning more about Anti-Racism and related issues.

Janet Bischoff suggests:

Her commentary tells us that she is so grateful for the voices of these dedicated Christian scholars as we face a changing America, an America that has never really faced its own true history.

Jim Wallis The False White Gospel: Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith, and Refounding Democracy

Kristin Kobes du Mez Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation

Robert P. Jones The Hidden Roots Of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future
----- White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity

Jemar Tisby The Spirit of Justice: Stories of Faith, Race, and Resistance

Timothy Snyder On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century

Ray Miller suggests:

African American History

Dunbar, Erica Armstrong, Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., The Trials of Phillis Wheatley

McGill, Joseph, Jr. & Herb Frazier, Sleeping with the Ancestors: How I Followed the Footprints of Slavery

Thomas, James R., A Rumor of Black Lutherans: The Formation of Black Leadership in Early American Lutheranism

“Philadelphia: The Great Experiment,” History Making Productions, documentary,
13 episodes, available at WPVI-TV/6abc or YouTube

Anti-Racism

Hayes, Stephen R., The Battle for Bonhoeffer: Debating Discipleship in the Age of Trump

Yacovone, Donald, Teaching White Supremacy: America's Democratic Ordeal and the Forging of Our National Identity

Karen Paulus suggests:

Angela T. !Khabebe, ed., Call to Allyship: Preparing Your Congregation for Leaders of Color

James H. Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree

David Greenberg, John Lewis: A Life

Gwen King suggests two older films: “42” and “The Great Debaters.”

AFRICAN DESCENT LUTHERAN ASSOCIATION (ADLA) – Philadelphia Chapter



Report of the African Descent Lutheran Association (ADLA)/Philadelphia Chapter to the 2025 Assembly of the SEPA Synod

This year, our activities began at the 2024 SEPA Synod Assembly. We had two tables in the Mission Corridor that were staffed by Sister Elaine Brown (Membership Coordinator) and Sister Sandra Jeter (Chapter Member). They distributed membership applications, and shared Chapter information and “treats” with the passersby. There were photographs from Chapter events on the table along with two **huge** “Thank You” cards for our outgoing Bishop Davenport, for everyone to sign. ADLA/Philadelphia Chapter was “in the house”!

The following month, the Chapter was invited to write a letter of support to accompany the proposal for the ***Love Revolution: Love God, Love Neighbor*** grant. A portion of our letter stated:

We are blessed with a diversity of churches in the SEPA Synod and there is a commitment, on the part of individual members, to anti-racism training, with the help of our Synod’s Anti-Racism Team. Yet, the need to address post-colonialism and emphasize anti-racism education exists at the congregational level. The understanding, of all people being created equal, goes back to our baptismal promises, where there is no racism, sexism or gender inequality.

As you know, the Lilly Foundation awarded a grant to our Synod!!!

In November 2024, ADLA/Philadelphia Chapter sponsored “Remembering The Reverend Jehu Jones, Jr. (1786-1852).” Rev. Jehu Jones was the first African American Lutheran pastor to be ordained in this country (1832). “Without the support or backing of any board or agency, Rev. Jones began working to establish a black Lutheran church in 1834. . . . St. Paul’s Colored Lutheran Church was dedicated on May 1, 1836.”¹ It was located in what is now the Society Hill section of Philadelphia, PA.

The service was held at Mediator Lutheran Church and was attended by members of several Philadelphia Lutheran and non-Lutheran congregations. It included a Liturgy of Libation, lively hymns, guest musicians – Dr. Jack Drummond (violin), Renee K. Robinson-Way

(musician) and Parvis Dior Stevenson (soloist) – and an inspirational sermon, “Faithfully Continuing in His Calling,” preached by Rev. Regina Goodrich.

We were blessed to have Bishop Penman and Young Bro. Paul with us to witness the Recognition of Congregational Volunteers.

Honoree

Sis. Lina Baker
Bro. Frank Graves
Sis. Mary Sharp Lewis
Bro. Preston McDaniel

Congregation

Reformation Lutheran Church
Grace Lutheran Church, West Phila
Mediator Lutheran Church
St. Mark’s Lutheran Church

And there was a special person recognized – a clergyman with years of service to God and the Lutheran Church – Rev. Arthur A. Gilbert. He is a Vietnam Veteran, and the former pastor of St. John’s and Grace Lutheran Churches; both in West Philadelphia. During his clergy career, he served as a pastor, pastoral counselor and hospice chaplain for 30 years.

Our next event honored and celebrated the legacy of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It had been scheduled for January 19, 2025 but was postponed to February 2, 2025, because of the snow storm. The service was held at Christ Lutheran Church in Oreland, PA. Since the “King Service” is co-sponsored with the SEPA Synod, several Synod Staff Members provided leadership during the service, including:

The Rev. Julie DeWerth
Pastor, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Dean, Lower Montgomery Conference

The Rev. Axel Kaegler
Pastor, Christ Lutheran Church (**host Church**)

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

The Rev. Stacey-Kyle (Skyle) Rea
Assistant to the Bishop for Youth and
Young Adult Discipleship

The Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis
Pastor, Faith Immanuel Lutheran Church
Co-Director for Evangelical Mission

Beautiful music throughout the service was rendered by the choir of Faith Immanuel Lutheran Church, East Lansdowne, PA. Bishop Penman gave Reflections/Greetings. The Rev. Dr. Mona Fitch-Elliott, of the New Jersey Synod, brought The Word of Life. Her theme was “Persist, Insist, Resist!” Rev. Lamont A. Wells was an extraordinary Master of Ceremony.

At this service, Mother Marion S. Lampkin – 97 years young! – was recognized. She was an active member in several congregations and denominations prior to joining Reformation Lutheran Church, in 1982. She was active in Lutheran Church Women and ABL (The Association of Black Lutherans) – a predecessor organization to ADLA. She served as a charge nurse at the Hopkins Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Wyncote, PA. for 18 years.

This brings us full circle. Several voting members and visitors in this Assembly are also members of ADLA/Philadelphia Chapter. Both Bishop Penman and Bishop Davenport are lifetime ADLA members! Again, we have two tables in the Mission Center, staffed by Sister Elaine Brown (Membership Coordinator) and Sister Sandra Jeter (Chapter Member), with membership applications, information about our Organization and “goodies” for everyone!! Please stop at the table and become acquainted with us.

Chapter activities and events for the coming year are being developed.

Submitted by:

Dr. Addie J. Butler, President
Rev. Sandra Brown, Secretary
Sis. Tracey A. Beasley, Treasurer
Sis. Elaine Brown, Membership Chairperson
Rev. Lamont A. Wells, Consultant

Source

1. Johnson, Jeff G., Black Christians: The Untold Lutheran Story, St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House, 1991, page 134.

Bishop's Convocation

BISHOPS CONVOCATION 2025 ASSEMBLY REPORT

Committee Chair: Kathleen Kerin

Committee Members: Rev. Mukesh Cheedie, Yvonne Curtis, Rev. Meagan Esterby, Rev. Brandi Hebert, Cynta Outterbridge, Rev. Stacey-Kyle Rea, Rev. Jonathon Steiner.

The theme for the 2024 Bishops Convocation held November 14-15th was *Ponder Anew*. The Convocation committee met multiple times throughout 2024 beginning in February to contemplate possible venues and the needs and concerns of our synod's clergy and their congregations. Following the installment of our bishop-elect, Reverend Bryan Penman, the committee met with Bishop Penman and received additional direction and insight that guided our work.

In the Fall of 2024, the committee confirmed The Alloy in King of Prussia as the venue and secured Malcom McKinley from Credence and Co. as the facilitator for the Convocation. Mr. McKinley developed a customizable series of workshops for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod utilizing open space technology. The series of workshops focused on clergy led small group conversations discerning approaches to various 21st century ministry challenges ministers and their congregation's encounter. Additional logistics were finalized in late fall and invitations were mailed and emailed to all clergy. A sincere thank you to Susan McDonnell at Lutheran Church of God's Love in Newtown, PA for providing graphics and design and to Synod staff Cynta Outterbridge and Rev. Stacey-Kyle Rea for coordinating registration and facilitating communication via the Synod. The Convocation team is grateful to all clergy who participated and assisted with our closing worship.

Sixty-eight clergy participated in the day-long Convocation. Bishop Bryan Penman received a comprehensive report from Mr. McKinley following the Convocation to aid in his discernment and leadership of our Synod. A follow-up survey was sent to all participating clergy, and that information will be used to develop the 2025 Convocation.

Respectfully submitted,

Reverend Kathleen Kerin, Chair
Reverend Meagan Esterby
Reverend Brandi Hebert

Care of Creation Ministry Team

A resolution was passed at the 2024 SEPA Synod assembly establishing a Care of Creation Ministry Team at the synod level. Several meetings of interested parties for the Care of Creation Ministry were held in the summer of 2024. In February of 2025 the synod council approved the membership of the Care of Creation Ministry Team. We acknowledge that we do not have representation from the central Philadelphia conference or BIPOC congregations. We encourage

interested people from those congregations to contact the synod Vice President or Bishop.
Actions of the team so far include:

- Monthly Care of Creation Updates
 - Articles of interest
 - Upcoming events
 - Advocacy opportunities
 - Resources
 - Do you have something to submit? Email joybaxter@gmail.com
 - Subscribe here: <https://sepacareofcreationministry.co.page/1n2j5>
- Workshops
 - Meadows and Native Plants on Church Grounds Workshop - August 2024 by zoom, notes on how to establish a native meadow on church grounds are available
 - House of Worship + Solar - March 2025 by zoom, recording and slides available
 - “Called by Faith: Caring for Creation” presentations at four congregations by Creation Care Ambassador, Joy Baxter.
- Care of Creation Microgrants established
 - Nine microgrants up to \$1000
 - Two funding cycles: June 30th, 2025, and Dec 31st, 2025, deadlines
 - Recorded information session held May 6th 7pm on microgrants and example lighting upgrade project
 - Applications are available on the Care of Creation Ministry page of Ministry Link

In 2025 the team plans to administer the new microgrants, continue monthly Care of Creation updates, provide a Fall workshop on environmentally friendly options for upgrading heating systems, reach out to and include more congregations in the ministry, deploy more Creation Care Ambassadors for talks in congregations, and more.

Team members:

Dr. Joy Baxter, co-chair	St. Paul's, Ardmore
Mr. Ken Anderson, co-chair	Evangelical, Durham
Ms. Aimee Hillegas	St. John's, Phoenixville
Ms. Janet Bishoff	St. Paul's Glenside
The Rev. Tom Lang	St. Andrew's, Perkasio
Dr. John Connors	God's Love, Newtown
Mr. Brooke Alderfer	St. Peter's, North Wales
Mr. Bert Glenn	St. John's, Melrose Park
Mr. Zenas Savage	Emmanuel, Pottstown
Mr. Richard Hollenbach	Faith, Montgomeryville

Submitted by Dr. Joy Baxter & Mr. Ken Anderson, co-chairs

Forward Together in Faith

Forward Together In Faith - (FTiF) 2025 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 awarded 104 grants, 3 synod drawings, and 26 MAP/CAT assessments, equaling \$313,372.04 since 2015. By making funds available, the FTiF grants continue to support new initiatives that reflect the campaign's 4 pillars, assisting congregations to act on their new endeavors.

This past fall, the FTiF grant team reviewed 17 grant applications of which there were 15 eligible requests and 2 ineligible requests. We were excited and thankful for the opportunity to award all 15 eligible grant requests for a total of \$53,084.

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 2024, (funds distributed in 2025) - \$53,084

<u>2024-2025</u>	<u>Awards Granted – 53,084</u>			
	Agustus	Trappe	\$2,829.00	Communicating
	Lutheran Church of the Resurrection	Yardley	\$2,500.00	Communicating
	Redeemer	Penndel	\$1,650.00	Equipping
	St Andrew's	Perkasie	\$1,580.00	Equipping

	St. John's	Melrose Park	\$5,000.00	Equipping
	St. Timothy	Fox Chase	\$2,000.00	Equipping
	University Lutheran	Philadelphia	\$10,000.00	Equipping
	Community of Love Lutheran Church	Oxford	\$5,000.00	Innovating
	Faith Immanuel	E. Lansdown	\$5,000.00	Innovating
	Reformation	Mt. Airy	\$3,000.00	Innovating
	St. Mark's	Conshohocken	\$5,000.00	Innovating
	St. Peter's,	North Wales	\$1,400.00	Innovating
	The Welcome Church	Philadelphia	\$2,400.00	Innovating
	Grace	Broomall	\$5,000.00	Networking
	St. Andrew's	Audubon	\$725.00	Networking

Grant applications for 2025 will open shortly after Synod Assembly and are due by Sep 30, 2025. Respectfully submitted by Ellen Daneke, Forward Together in Faith, Chair

Generosity Team

2025 Generosity Team Report (Pr. Mark-Singh-Hueter, Chair)

The synod Generosity Team works to support the synod by encouraging and educating congregations and members in generosity and stewardship.

That's about living out our faith – how do we wisely manage what God has entrusted to us?

That's about a joyful response – we love as God first loved us, and are generous in response to a generous God.

And that's about our common mission – our generosity and wise stewardship helps us to BE the church, as congregation, synod, and churchwide.

Members of our Generosity Team learn and grow, and bring ideas back to the team.

We had two of us attend the annual Stewardship Kaleidoscope multi-day training event last year.

Several members took the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising course.

In the past year, we provided some training and help.

Resources and ideas on financial stewardship were shared at synod assembly, and several consultations.

Highlighting that stewardship is not just about money, a Spiritual Gifts workshop was led for two congregations. *That 2 ½ hour workshop is available for other congregations – just ask.*

We have multiple events and offerings coming up. Look for these and more at the Generosity Team table at synod assembly, or reach out to the team.

1 – Fall Programming Workshop, Thursday August 21 2025, 7pm, a hybrid event at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jamison – sharing one excellent resource for congregational use, and one “plug and play” fall stewardship program to highlight your own ministries and opportunities.

2 – Spiritual Gifts Workshop – a 2 ½ hour workshop offered to congregations or conferences.

3 – The 2026 Generosity Extravaganza, Saturday January 24 2026 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale with the theme, “Engaging Generosity: A Roadmap for Vitality.” See more about this excellent, inspirational, and practical opportunity at the end of this report.

4 – Congregational consultations on request.

Being wise stewards helps us grow and thrive as followers of Jesus. It also helps us work together – as synod and churchwide – to do so much more than we could possibly do on our own.

Here are some highlights regarding where our offerings to the synod go:

- Partnerships (34%) – churchwide ministries, United Lutheran Seminary, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA, Bear Creek Camp, and local ministries
- Mission and Vitality (22%) – resources to start and redevelop congregations, equipping assistance (including youth and young adult ministry, Tanzania companion synod)
- Office of the Bishop (29%) – helping our bishop, the pastor to the synod, provide leadership and oversight, including the work of the committee of deans, finance and development office, communications and information technology.
- Leadership (5%) – raising up, equipping, connecting, and nurturing rostered and lay leaders for “the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4)
- Administration (11%) – yep, rent, utilities, insurance, office expenses, all needed.

SEPA Synod sends 50 cents of each dollar received to the churchwide organization for ministry nationally and globally.

Some ways those ELCA offerings are used (use QR Code for a Video): →

- Grow the ELCA in the United States
- Grow the Lutheran church around the world
- Provide coordination and support for churchwide ministries
- Support and develop current and future leaders in the ELCA
- Invest in technology and communications



- Provide governance and leadership
- Grow and sustain financial resources
- Address social issues and work for justice

These are not just great ministries we support. These are ways that WE get to be part of what GOD is doing in our communities, nation, and world. How awesome is that?!?

Thanks to our Generosity Team for learning and growing together and for helping to guide our focus and ministry. Members this past year include: Rev. Karen Sease (SEPA rep), Rev. Phil Krey (secretary), Rev Anthony Scott, Mr. Carl Reitz, Ms. Doreen Kinzler, Rev. Kathleen Kerin, Rev. Kayla Sadowy, Ms. Kimberly Malcolm, Mr. Thomas Rutter, and Rev. Larry Smoose leading the Extravaganza Team.

We meet 4-5 times a year, alternating between in-person and zoom meetings. If you'd like to find out more about us, or want to join us, please contact me (Mark Singh-Hueter).

As promised, here's more information about the 2026 Extravaganza event:

The Northeastern and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synods are planning a 2026 Generosity Extravaganza for January 24, 2026 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Lansdale PA. The theme of the event is ***Engaging Generosity: A Roadmap for Vitality*** and will feature keynote speaker The Rev. Dr. Andrea Walker. 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. In this role she had responsibility for the ELCA's mission in nine countries on the continent of Africa, and the island nation of Madagascar. These responsibilities included traveling to oversee the relationship with Lutheran Churches in these countries, including budgets, projects, programs and missionary personnel.



Before taking on this position, she served as pastor of St. John's in Summit, NJ for nine years. There she worked with the congregation through engaging stewardship education to bridge the gap of a sizable deficient.

Other workshop leaders include the Director of Congregational Stewardship for the ELCA, the Rev. Tim Brown; the Rev. Heidi Neumark, and Anne Marie Harder-Cook who will talk about Engaging Children in Generous Habits along with other regionally and nationally known leaders in stewardship and vitality.

The cost per person is only \$50 with an opportunity to have a team of five people from the same congregation for \$200. Seminarians and first call pastors can attend FREE. These very favorable rates are possible because of a generous grant from SOLI (Stewardship of Life Institute) which is a foundation of United Lutheran Seminary (ULS).

"We would like every congregation in both synods plan to send a team to this event," said the Rev. Larry Smoose, chair of the Extravaganza team. Based on the feedback from congregations attending previous events, it is one of the finest opportunities to gain practical, immediately

useable strategies to improve congregational generosity and vitality. In addition to the keynote, each participant will be able to attend three of the nine available workshops.

Inclusive Communities



Inclusive Communities Committee Report for 2025 Synod Assembly

The mission of the Inclusive Communities Committee (ICC) is to create events, training, workshops, fellowship, and connections focused on LGBTQIA+ inclusivity within the congregations, communities, organizations, committees, and rosters of the SEPA Synod.

This committee serves as a vital hub that unites initiatives and efforts already established throughout the synod. By creating a centralized space for collaboration, we aim to enhance and build upon existing work related to inclusivity across (SEPA).

We recognize the importance of fostering an environment in which diverse voices are heard and valued, and we are committed to growing equity and representation within the committee.



In 2024, the ICC hosted the 6th annual In God's Image (IGI) event at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Ardmore. The Rev. Dr. Karyn L. Wiseman served as preacher and keynote speaker, preaching a powerful sermon about the hemorrhaging woman and the importance of inclusion. She also shared insight from her new book, *Queering the Pulpit: A Sexegetical Approach to Preaching an Inclusive Word*. We had a chance to share in communion, learn from one another on topics like advocacy, the RIC process, and terminology, and spend time in fellowship and prayer.

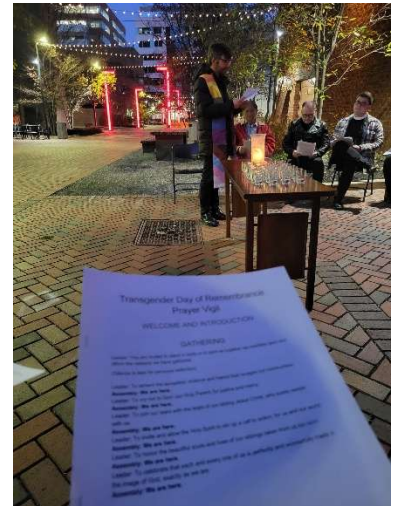
Please save the date for this year's event on October 4th, 2025 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lansdale with a performance by Flamy Grant! Another upcoming event is our annual pride

worship service. This year, we'll worship on June 22nd and we look forward to seeing you there!

During Lent this year, the ICC intentionally lifted up queer voices on social media to celebrate queer joy in the midst of the changing realities of our world. We heard from rostered ministers and lay people here in SEPA on what queer joy looks like for them and why it is so important. If you aren't following our socials, please do! You can find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/sepainclusivecommunities>.

We are working across the synod to continue to lift up ways to participate in meaningful advocacy, prayerful witness, and inclusive connection. If you would like some support in building more inclusive communities and/or to participate in the work we do, please send us an email at inclusion@sepa.org.

Pr. Daniel Eisenberg (he/him) & Pr. Kevin Tracey (he/him)
Co-chairs, ICC



Vitality Team

Vitality Team Report to 37th Synod Assembly 2024

Submitted by: Rev. Bradley Gow, SEPA Synod Vitality Team Chair

As Chair of the Vitality Team, I am honored to share with you a glimpse into the Spirit-led work taking place across our synod to cultivate vibrant ministries and new communities of faith. I stepped into the role of chair last year when the Rev. Bryan Penman began his call as Bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. With gratitude for his faithful leadership and continued support, the team has been able to build on a strong foundation and keep vital ministry moving forward.

Our team is made up of gifted and passionate leaders from across the synod who bring a wealth of experience in congregational life, mission development, and ministry innovation. Each of them contributes meaningfully to our shared efforts:

Vitality Team Volunteer Members

- **Rev. Kayla Sadowy** – Grace, Broomall
- **Rev. Sandra Brown** – Interim Ministry

- **Mr. Tom Salber** – Prince of Peace, Philadelphia
- **Mr. Wayne Goerlich** – Good Shepherd, Southampton
- **Rev. Nathan Krause** – Redeemer, Jamison
- **Rev. Brendan Galvin** – Gloria Dei, Huntingdon Valley
- **Ms. Hannah Knauss** – Messiah, Downingtown
- **Rev. Jane Marston** – Tabor, Philadelphia
- **Rev. Paul Jann (Retired)** – Reformation, Media
- **Rev. Kathleen Harkness** – Trinity, Pleasant Valley
- **Rev. Matthew Ollikainen** – Advent, Richboro
- **Rev. Dr. Eric M. Allison** – Trinity, Germantown
- **Rev. Regina (Gee) Goodrich** – Mediator, Philadelphia
- **Mr. Don Stevenson** – Mediator, Philadelphia
- **Rev. Kevin Tracey** – St. Mark, Clifton Heights
- **Rev. Janet Peterman** – Interim Ministry
- **Seminarian Sarajeon Grainson** – United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia

Mission Developers

- **Rev. Bob Fisher** – Mission Developer, Kairos Communities
- **Rev. Violet Little** – Founding Pastor, The Welcome Church, Philadelphia
- **Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel** – Co-Pastor, The Welcome Church and The Well, Philadelphia
- **Rev. Lyzette Rios-Sanchez** – Pastor, Iglesia Luterana Nueva Creación, Philadelphia
- **Rev. Tom Natalini** – Mission Developer, Mindfulness + Church, Montgomery County

New Ministry Starts & Vital Congregations

One of the most visible aspects of the Vitality Team's work is helping to launch and support new communities of faith. These ministries are made possible through strong partnerships between local congregations, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, and the wider Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Each represents a creative and contextual expression of the Gospel, often reaching people and places that traditional congregations may not.

- **The Welcome Church**

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

A church without walls, The Welcome Church gathers along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Philadelphia, ministering with people experiencing homelessness and offering worship, pastoral care, and advocacy.

ELCA Support: \$8,880

- **The Well**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel

Rooted in The Welcome Church, this ecumenical women's shelter provides safety,

hospitality, and housing support while offering spiritual sanctuary and companionship for vulnerable women.

ELCA Support: \$12,000

- **Kairos Communities**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Bob Fisher

A network of small, house-based spiritual gatherings that blend worship, service, and community. Kairos offers a flexible model of church for people exploring faith outside of traditional structures.

- **Iglesia Luterana Nueva Creación**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Lyzette Rios-Sanchez

A vibrant Latine faith community in North Philadelphia offering worship, pastoral care, and outreach to immigrants and underserved families in collaboration with several partner congregations.

ELCA Support: \$22,500

- **Mindfulness + Church**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Tom Natalini

Our newest Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community (SAWC), Mindfulness + Church invites participants into contemplative Christian practices and intentional spiritual healing, helping people navigate life's stress and trauma through the lens of faith.

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$10,000.00

ELCA Support: \$22,000

These new ministries are not simply “starts”—they are signs of resurrection life taking root in our synod.

Strategic Ministries

Strategic ministries are faith communities dedicated to serving ethnic minorities, economically challenged neighborhoods, at-risk populations, or congregations whose primary worship language is not English. The Vitality Team, the Funds for Mission Committee, and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod work together to provide guidance, resources, and financial support to the congregations listed below.

- **Atonement Lutheran, Philadelphia (Fishtown)**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler

- **St. Michael's, Philadelphia (Kensington)**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$10,000

ELCA Support: \$10,000

- **Grace, Broomall**
Mission Developer: The Rev. Kayla Sadowy
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$20,000
ELCA Support: \$15,000
- **Mediator, Philadelphia**
Mission Developer: The Rev. Regina Goodrich
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$10,000
ELCA Support: \$15,000
- **Trinity Lutheran, Philadelphia (Germantown)**
Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Eric Allison
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$10,000
ELCA Support: \$21,200

Evangelism Projects

- **The NE/NW Evangelism Project**
This collaborative initiative of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, supported by the Vitality Team, is focused on strengthening evangelistic outreach in the Northeast and Northwest Philadelphia conferences. Funded in part through churchwide mission support, the project is made possible by congregational offerings—empowering local ministries to share the Gospel and nurture vibrant, growing faith communities.
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$5000

New Explorations

These new explorations, reflects the Synod's broader commitment to expanding outreach and fostering inclusive faith communities across the region.

- **Norristown Latine Exploration**
With support from the Vitality Team, the effort in Norristown focuses on engaging the Latine population by assessing community needs, identifying ministry opportunities, and developing meaningful strategies to support and accompany this growing community in faith. **ELCA Support: \$3,500**
- **Arabic exploration**
The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (SEPA) is actively partnering with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to explore the development of an Arabic-language ministry in the region. This initiative seeks to engage Arabic-speaking communities through culturally rooted worship, outreach, and pastoral care. A powerful example of what this ministry could look like is found at First Presbyterian Church of Allentown, where an established Arabic ministry provides spiritual support, social services, and fosters mutual

understanding between Arabic and non-Arabic communities. This collaborative model offers a vision for how such a ministry could take shape within SEPA, rooted in partnership and hospitality.

Orderly Closure of Congregations

The Vitality Team walks alongside congregations through every season of ministry—from their beginnings to their endings, and all the moments in between. While our deepest hope is to see congregations grow and thrive, we also recognize that some communities may eventually discern that their mission has come to a close. When this difficult reality arises, we remain present, offering guidance and care. This past year, several congregations in our synod listed below have concluded their ministry, and we give thanks for their faithful witness.

Pastor Paul Jann, the Bishop's Deputy for Congregational Closures, leads this sacred work of accompanying congregations through the process of closure with compassion and grace. He is supported by Pastor Jane Marston and Pastor Sandra Brown, who bring their own pastoral gifts and deep care to this ministry of accompaniment.

+ St. Paul Lutheran Church, Lansdowne- **June 2, 2024**

50 E Plumstead Street, Lansdowne, PA, United States

+ St. Paul Lutheran Church, East Norriton - **June 9, 2024**

6 Hancock Ave, Norristown, PA,

+ Community of Love Lutheran Church - **May 4, 2025**

117 4th Street, Oxford, PA, United States

What We Do — And How We Can Help Your Congregation

The Vitality Team of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod is here to walk alongside congregations on their journeys of renewal, discernment, and transformation. We understand that vitality doesn't look the same everywhere. In some communities, it may be bold innovation, in others, quiet faithfulness. Our goal is to listen deeply, honor your context, and support you as you take faithful steps forward.

Through coaching, congregational vitality assessments, and intentional accompaniment, we help congregations engage more fully with God's mission. Sometimes this means exploring fresh expressions of being church. Other times, it means guiding a congregation through a graceful and

Spirit-led closure. In all things, we trust the Spirit to work through the faithful discernment of God's people.

Currently, we are partnering with several congregations in different stages of renewal, redevelopment, and Holy Closure. Each journey is unique, and our approach is always pastoral, respectful, and rooted in listening and trust.

Strengthening Congregations Through Partnership

The Vitality Team collaborates with Synod leaders to offer a range of resources and tools tailored to your congregation's needs, including:

- **Vitality Consultations:** Personalized support to help congregations discern their next faithful steps.
- **ELCA Coaching:** Trained coaches accompany leaders and councils, offering guidance, clarity, and encouragement.
- **Orderly Closure:** Compassionate, structured support for congregations discerning an end to their ministry.
- **Congregational Vitality Survey:** A helpful tool for assessing ministry health, energy, and capacity for change.
- **New Ministry Development:** Support for launching innovative ministries that respond to the needs of your community with courage and creativity.

Let's Start a Conversation

If your congregation is exploring questions of vitality, renewal, redevelopment, or closure, we invite you to connect with us. Whether you're seeking coaching, considering a vitality survey, or simply wondering about next steps, we are here to walk with you in faith.

Feel free to reach out to any member of our team:

- **Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis**
Co-Director for Evangelical Mission
mdennis@sepa.org
- **Rev. Linda Manson**
Co-Director for Evangelical Mission & DEI

lmanson@sepa.org

- **Rev. Bradley D. Gow**
Chair, Vitality Team
pastorstpetersville@gmail.com

With Gratitude

We are deeply thankful for the ongoing support from Bishop Penman and the Synod — through your prayers, resources, and openness to the Spirit's leading. Together, we continue to nurture bold, faithful, and life-giving ministry across Southeastern Pennsylvania.

In Christ,
Rev. Bradley Gow
Chair, SEPA Synod Vitality Team