

2018 SYNOD ASSEMBLY REPORT OF THE BISHOP

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Written April 14, 2018

The Reverend Claire Schenot Burkat, Bishop

At the center of our shared partnership in the Gospel, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod exists to “*equip the saints and congregations for the work of ministry, for building up the Body of Christ.*” This report will highlight some of the significant ways in which I have been privileged to serve as bishop throughout the year since our last Assembly in May of 2017. The many other responsibilities - leading worship, preaching, teaching, visiting, meetings with SEPA leaders, global partners, social ministry agencies, ELCA institutions, regional and national gatherings, as well as ecumenical and interfaith meetings - are noted in my report to the Synod Council on a regular basis. As we gather together in Assembly to worship, learn, deliberate, decide and discern, we will celebrate our life together in Christ, and explore the opportunities and challenges of our Lutheran witness today.

Come Holy Spirit!

⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline. ⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.

(2 Timothy 1:6-9)

The two days of Synod Assembly will move swiftly as we worship, pray, deliberate, vote, learn and meet new and old friends from the other 151 congregations of our Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. This 2018 Assembly will be particularly significant as we elect a new bishop. St. Paul’s second letter to Timothy came to mind as I reflected upon my call to the office of bishop twelve years ago, and as I also look forward to welcoming and supporting our new bishop-elect at the conclusion of our Assembly on Saturday, May 5.

God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

We have never been a timid synod, however, these times call for us to confidently claim the power of the Holy Spirit of God; to not be ashamed of the Gospel, or to fear the kind of suffering

that builds character and resilience. This is the time to *show, do, and be* love for our neighbors and the world. Lord knows we all need the Spirit to help us with more self-discipline to accomplish Christ's purpose in this Holy calling.

Come Holy Spirit!

The transition team has completed its work with the uploaded synod profile on our website to help voting members learn about the state of the synod, the congregations, and the leadership challenges and opportunities this synod and other communities of faith will face in the coming decade. Please take some time to review this snapshot of our synod, and be sure to read the job description of an ELCA Bishop as is found in our synod constitution. S8:10-16

https://ministrylink.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/SEPS_Constitution_2017b.pdf

A summary of the bishop's responsibilities is also found in the Mission profile under *Role of the Bishop*.

We are entering the election phase of our discernment process. You can review this at <https://ministrylink.org/2018-assembly-bishop-election/bishop-election/prayerful-discernment-election-bishop/>

The election of a bishop in the ELCA is a process governed by the constitution, bylaws and continuing resolutions of the synod; however, please remember it is also a *call process*. We will all be engaging in prayerful discernment, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all ways and the whole time we are together in Assembly.

I am so pleased to welcome as our Churchwide Representative and the person who will also oversee our bishop election, the **Rev. Wm. Chris Boerger**, Secretary of the ELCA and former Bishop of the Northwest Washington Synod. Secretary Boerger met with our Synod Council in January of 2017 to prepare us for the election of our next bishop, and to discuss the ELCA process and steps required for such an election. Secretary Boerger will be preaching at our opening service. **DeDe Boerger**, Secretary Boerger's spouse will be joining us as they will take a day or two after the Assembly to enjoy Philadelphia.

Other bishops joining us to pray for and watch our election are New Jersey Synod, **Bishop Tracie Bartholomew**; New England Synod, **Bishop Jim Hazelwood**; and Upstate New York Synod, **Bishop John Macholz**.

I'm sure you will engage all our bishops, visitors, guests and supporters from across the ELCA with a hearty SEPA Synod welcome!

Special Gratitude to Ms. Pursch and Mr. Hensil

Let me take this opportunity to thank and bless those leaders who have faithfully served on Synod Council and are not eligible for re-election: **Ms. Susan Pursch** and **Mr. Robert Hensil**. We know the leadership Susan and Bob have given, and we are grateful for the many ways their gifts have strengthened synod ministries. Susan Pursch is a former Vice President of our synod and the key leader and planner of the campaign to build a college in the North Eastern Diocese of

Tanzania for the equipping and training of leaders with sensitivity and advocacy for people with special needs. With the amazing power of the Holy Spirit, in a decade that dream became a university graduating 1,000 each year. Well-done Susan Pursch, good and faithful servant, for your love and commitment to the larger and global church for almost 4 decades! Most recently Susan is chair of the Audit Committee and serves on the bishop's election Discernment Team. Bob Hensil has served faithfully and wisely on the executive committee of the Synod Council, as chair of the bishop's election committee, and has been an invaluable help to the synod and to me personally for several years. Bob has willingly accepted several special assignments for which I have requested his wisdom and process/protocol acumen. Some assignments were particularly troublesome, so I was grateful for his prudence and wisdom on these matters.

Thank you and bless you Susan and Bob, as we say goodbye to many combined years on Synod Council and your strong synod leadership.

In Appreciation of Synod Staff and Volunteers

In and among our learning, discussions, and elections, you will be receiving reports from your elected officers, our Vice President Ms. Tracey A. Beasley, our Secretary Pastor Karl Richard, and our Treasurer Ms. Janet Huber Neff, in addition to this report from me as your bishop.

Please take the time to thank our synod staff and volunteers in advance and at the assembly for the hard work and attention to making everyone feel welcome at our 2018 Synod Assembly.

Rev. Susan Lang is our coordinator for Special Events, which includes the Synod Assembly. Preparations and reservations start a year in advance to make all the many components of this two-day gathering a success. **Ms. Yvonne Curtis**, Director of Operations, **Ms. Cynta Outterbridge**, **Ms. Mercedes Lee**, **Mr. Bill Harp**, **Rev. Rachel Anderson**, **Mr. Martin Schwab**, **Mr. Bob Fisher**, **Rev. Patricia Davenport** and **Rev. Brad Burke**, as well as many other volunteers will all be available to assist you in any way before, during, and after the Assembly.

Reflections – Preparing for Retirement

As I prepare to retire and leave my call as bishop of this synod, I am overwhelmed by the enormous privilege to serve Christ, His Church and Mission, and the people of God during these last twelve years. I have tried throughout this call to *rekindle the gift within me through the laying on of hands, relying on the power of God,⁹ who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.*

Every single day whether it was joyful, painful, frightful or hopeful, I was aware of the power of the Holy Spirit doing more with me, through us, as well as other partners (some highly unlikely), than I could ever have hoped for or imagined. For the first time in 12 years as I looked at my calendar, I counted some of the many activities I engaged in as your bishop. These meetings, trips and events don't even describe the thousands of encounters with people over the years. Some were expected and planned; others were filled with surprises and spontaneity.

So here is a snapshot of my two terms as bishop. Add a dose of the nitty gritty, the scandalous, the painful, the heartbreaking, the mournful, the shocking, and the seriously ridiculous and you get a picture of the ever- changing kaleidoscope of this call.

General Overview of Activities over 12 Years

36 ordinations • 12 Chrism services • 48 Pastor, Deacon and Bishop Funerals • 144 Deans meetings • 65 Synod Council meetings • 144 Staff meetings • 36 Candidacy Committee Gatherings • 11 SEPA Senior High Youth Events • 12 Bishop Convocations • 10 Council Officers Brunch/Gatherings • 12 Meetings with Interims • 12 Meetings with Synod Chaplains • 11 Closing Services for Congregations • 15 Healthy Boundaries Trainings • 12 SEPA Synod Assemblies • 20 Greater Philadelphia Religious Leaders Council Gatherings • 35 Conference of Bishops meetings and Academies • 5 ELCA Youth Gatherings • 22 LTSP Board Meetings • 4 ULS Board Meetings • 22 Muhlenberg Board Meetings • 10 Christian Churches Together Meetings and Events • 10 Lutheran/Episcopal Coordinating Committee Meetings • 5 ELCA Churchwide Assemblies • 9 Other ELCA Synod Assemblies • 5 Synod Trips to Tanzania • 3 Synod Trips to Israel and Palestine • 1 Synod Trip to Germany • 1 Ecumenical trip to London, Istanbul, Rome and Geneva

Too many to count - Worship services, sermons, installations, speeches, synod conference meetings, congregational meetings, Pastor and Deacon gatherings, church council meetings, social ministry meetings, advocacy meetings and events.

Here is the overview of this past year.

SPRING 2017

2017 Synod Assembly Theme – *For Such a Time as This: Reforming Hearts through Racial Justice*

At the 2016 Assembly, we commemorated the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, so we were free in 2017 to examine and discuss how the ELCA, and especially SEPA Synod, might continue to be a reforming church, and what kinds of reforms matter most for “*Such a Time As This.*” After last summer’s Churchwide Assembly, two of the resolutions getting traction in our synod were African Descent Lutheran Lives Matter, as well as the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.

We set this theme as more than just important *but* urgent if we are to be the racially, culturally, generationally, politically, and economically diverse church we seek to become. It was a shock and heartache to learn of the Pew Research study listing the ELCA as 97% White. Thus, we chose as our 2017 theme, *For Such a Time as This: Reforming Hearts through Racial Justice*. Because we have a newly developed anti-racism team, and because we are more racially diverse than most synods in the ELCA, and because in this synod we have 30 rostered leaders of color, mostly Black (some retired, some deployed, some chaplains), and because we have an active African Descent Lutheran Association (ADLA) Philadelphia chapter, and a Black Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM), and a Black Synod Vice President—we discerned that we are poised to tackle the toxic issue “America’s original sin” – racism.

The opportunities to discuss how we might learn about the unjust consequences of racism in our congregations and our everyday lives were deliberately and prayerfully considered. In all, there were 11 opportunities during the Assembly for participants to grow in understanding, to practice discussing this difficult issue, and to find ways to involve our leaders and congregations in making an impact in our synod. We do better when we know better.

Ms. Judith Roberts, Director for Racial Justice in the ELCA was our keynote speaker and led us through an anti-racism session and exercise, as well as a forum. **Ms. Prairie Rose Seminole**, Director for the American Indian Alaska Native Ministries of the ELCA joined us to lead a forum on the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery. **Rev. Lamont A. Wells**, President of the national ADLA and DEM for Metro NY Synod also attended to lend support and accompaniment. Our anti-racism team led a forum (twice) and did two very informative and inspiring presentations on Saturday.

The worship team under the excellent leadership of **Rev. Jennifer Ollikainen**, looked for a hymn that could lift up the urgency of time for deep repentance, intentionally listening, dismantling racism and bigotry, respect for one another, and reconciliation through the cross of Christ. Not surprisingly we did not find such a suitable song in our Lutheran hymnals, so we commissioned a new hymn to be written. The hymn is called *Now is the Time* by **Paul Friesen-Carper**, a musician living in NJ. SEPA congregations had free use of it throughout 2017.

Saturday morning we held a service of repentance and reconciliation developed by our worship team. White leaders read the confession and litany of repentance. **Dean Carlton Rodgers** preached an excellent sermon and prayerfully wove the components of the service together. **Rev. Erika Wesch** led the liturgy, which concluded with anointing for reconciliation (eight stations mixed races of anointers, lay and clergy.)

The antiracism team led two ½-hour presentations. One was a film on the red lining of Black neighborhoods and how Black GIs were denied access to new suburban developments that welcomed returning White GIs. I recommend this documentary highly: *Race the House We Live In* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW764dXEI_8 Three White people from the anti-racism

team gave witness to their increasing understanding of what White privilege means and looks like: **Rev. Suzie Folks, Ms. Janet Bischoff** and **Rev. Chris Weidner**. **Janet Bischoff** received a standing ovation. She was courageous, compelling and very candid.

And of course, we celebrated blessed, informed and did the business of the synod in Assembly.

- During the opening worship we officially welcomed all our ministers of Word and Service to the new roster and blessed them as deacons. Many of the retired Associates in Ministry, Diaconal Ministers and Deaconesses came back for this blessing.
- Our vice president, **Tracey A. Beasley**, was unanimously re-elected
- **Dean Jayakiran Sebastian and Seminarian Leah Woerhr-Grande** spoke about the new seminary along with a short video introducing the new school and new president-elect.
- We introduced the approved candidates for consecration and ordination: Ministers of Word and Service – **Shirley Keiter** and **Rachel Bailey**; Ministers of Word and Sacrament – **Louis Tillman, IV, Micah Krey, Leah Worehr-Grande**, and **Chris Glod** approved for entrance to the ELCA roster from another religious tradition.
- Our only resolution this year was on welcoming refugees and immigrants, and supporting LIRS.
- We recognized ordination anniversaries and congregational anniversaries.
- Former bishop, **Rev. Roy Almquist**, celebrated his 50th anniversary of ordination, as did **Rev. Robert Linders**, pastor of St. Paul's Doylestown. They both addressed the assembly.
- The budget was passed, our officers spoke.
- Elections were held for new members of Synod Council and other Synod Committees.
- We blessed quilts sewn and collected by our synod WELCA for LWR.
- We blessed **Pastor Lydia Posselt**, who won the young preacher contest and then travelled to preach at the LWF closing worship in Namibia.
- **Ms. Judith Roberts** gave the ELCA report and showed Presiding Bishop Eaton's address to the Synod Assemblies.

With Gratitude

Many thanks from a grateful Synod go to our officers:

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley, Secretary Pastor Karl Richard, and Treasurer Janet Huber Neff. To our ELCA Parliamentarian, **Pastor Larry Smoose; Pastor Laura Tancredi**, chair of the Nominating Committee; **Pastor Ray Miller**, chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel; **Pastor Rebecca Schanely**, chair of the Committee on Elections; **Ms. Sue Massey**, chair of the Finance Committee; **Mr. William Graham**, coordination of Pages and all Synod Council members who assisted with registration. **Mr. Thomas Salber** and **Ms. Robin Alderfer** onsite nurses; **Pastor Jennifer Ollikainen**, chair of Worship Committee and a team of more than 50 people who led the worship services over the two-day Assembly—we are most appreciative.

Pastor Susan Lang ably coordinated all the many details, made the arrangements, and navigated all the issues in putting together an Assembly. Thanks to **Ms. Cynta Outerbridge** our Synod Registrar and Statistician for her dedication to this important work. **Mr. Bob Fisher**, the communications team and **CCI Communications** for the excellent coverage. And to our entire Synod staff who together made this Assembly run well and seamlessly: **Pastor Brad Burke, Ms. Yvonne Curtis, Pastor Patricia Davenport, Mr. Bill Harp, Ms. Dionne Jackson and Mr. Martin Schwab**. Thanks to **Pastor Rachel Anderson** who provides administrative support to the Forward Together in Faith Campaign at Synod Assembly and throughout the year.

Summer 2017

North Eastern Diocese-Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

In June of 2017, I traveled to the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania to visit our companion synod. This trip to our companion diocese was my fifth and final visit as bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. **Pastor Brad Burke** managed all the logistics as our Global Mission liaison, as he formed close connections and working relationships with **Bishop Stephen Munga** and the diocesan staff. **Ms. Yvonne Curtis** travelled to Tanzania for the first time. I asked her to join us to see firsthand the role of the ELCA bishop in Tanzania in preparation for orienting the new bishop to our important global partnerships.

Some of our itinerary included:

- Worshipping with the diocesan staff and touring the diocesan radio station.
- Visiting the Children's Home and Irete Farm.
- Learning from Vice Chancellor Dr. Anneth Munga and the staff about the latest developments at SEKOMU the university we helped start outside Luchoto. I was asked to lead the gathering in prayer and remembrance at the very spot where a guard was shot to death while defending students from the brutal attack that occurred last September while our SEPA team was visiting.
- We traveled several hours to Tanga to visit a Maasai mission that is a sub-parish of Makorora. We visited, worshipped, and danced with the people. I greeted several young people that I had baptized on another visit. That is the beauty of our continuing companionship; we can truly be sisters and brothers to one another as Christ brings us together in Word, Sacrament, Service and Fellowship.
- We spent one morning visiting Mikanjuni Parish in Tanga and touring the nursery school they built with their SEPA partner - St. Luke Lutheran Church in Devon.
- We visited Korogwe Parish, where I placed the cornerstone in 2008, and we had a truly extraordinary conversation with the congregation about the changing realities of ministry in both Tanzania and America. They wanted to know what we are doing to engage these new realities, which led to a surprisingly lively conversation about what we are doing with bravenewchurch.org! The Spirit really is up to something unexpected and amazing.
- We enjoyed gift giving and a farewell dinner with the Head Office staff at Tumaini.
- Sunday I preached at Cathedral Church in Lushoto, Tanzania. In the afternoon we made the six-hour trip back to Arusha.

We ended a wonderful week visiting our friends in the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania by visiting the natural beauty of the Tanzanian landscape at Ngorongoro Crater & Lake Manyara National Park. We happened to be there during the peak of the bird migration season, seeing thousands of pelicans and Yellow-Billed Storks along the banks of the lake! Thanking God for our partnership with the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania.

Islamic Convention

After my return from Tanzania I only had one day home to sleep, unpack and pack again for my visit to Chicago with Imam Anwar Muhaimin as we were asked to speak at the Islamic Society of North America's 54th (ISNA) Convention. Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton was receiving an award for interfaith leadership on behalf of the ELCA by the national Muslim community for the partnership the ELCA has forged with ISNA in the years since 9/11. The ELCA created a much-appreciated curriculum called "My Muslim Neighbor." The Ecumenical and Interfaith unit of the ELCA asked me and two other bishops to share the ways we are cooperating and collaborating with the Muslim community in our synods. My colleague and co-convenor of the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia, **Imam Anwar Muhaimin** who is Executive Director of the Quba Institute and Mosque in Philadelphia accompanied me to share our report on Muslim/Lutheran/Inter-religious activities in Philadelphia. **Bishop Richard Jaech** of the Southwestern Washington Synod, and **Bishop Wayne Miller** of the Chicago Area Synod also spoke at the banquet Sunday night about their synod's relationship with the Muslim community.

United Lutheran Seminary - ULS

United Lutheran Seminary opened officially this past summer on July 1, 2017, in the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation. ULS is the newest graduate and professional school of theology with the deepest roots, celebrating 344 years of continuous Lutheran theological education on the Philadelphia and Gettysburg campuses. With the complete realignment of staff, faculty, student full tuition reimbursement, and a reprioritizing of budget expenses, ULS in its first semester had a record first professional degree enrollment of 68, in the very first semester with 7 advanced degree students. Newly elected **President Theresa Latini** assumed her leadership traveling between the two campuses as well as relating to two ELCA Regions (7&8) that includes a combination of 15 synods. Previously, Region 7 synods supported Philadelphia, and Region 8 synods supported Gettysburg. Now the challenge of forming a new entity, with its own culture geared toward 21st century challenges, will truly be the start of a reformation in theological education for the ELCA and ecumenical partners.

I was elected to serve on the Board of Trustees at this new school for the remainder of my term as bishop. **Mr. Chris Mondics**, a member of Holy Communion Lutheran Church in Philadelphia and an Inquirer and international journalist also represents SEPA on the board. In many ways it was truly remarkable that in 18 months we were able to merge the two schools legally, corporately, free up money for full tuition.

National African Descent Lutheran Association and National Union of Black Episcopalians Convention

For the first time, the National African Descent Lutheran Association and the National Union of Black Episcopalians held a joint conference at the Crown Plaza Hotel in Cherry Hill, as well as worship services in Philadelphia and Bala Cynwyd from Saturday July 22 to Wednesday July 26,

2017. Everyday there was inspiring worship and preachers, informative and challenging speakers, interesting workshops, and plenty of fun and fellowship with celebratory banquets. Together, Lutherans and Episcopalians lifted up a shared remembrance of Black Church history, while forming new friendships and networks formed among Black Lutherans of ADLA and Black Episcopalians of UBE.

Many thanks and much appreciation to the planners of this historic conference - **Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells**, President of ADLA and **Ms. Tracey A. Beasley**, Treasurer of ADLA. The Episcopalian planners were **Rev. Kim Coleman, Canon Jill Mathis, Rev. Betsy Ivey, Rev. Martini Shaw and Canon Annette Buchanan**, President of UBE. Hundreds of faithful Christians were blessed by their hard work and collaborative efforts.

ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod was well represented at the first ever ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering. Held in Atlanta, GA, August 6-10, 2017, nearly 900 pastors, deacons, and bishops from across this church gathered for a time of worship, learning, inspiration, affirmation, and fellowship. Those in attendance from SEPA include: **Deacons Allison Wilcox and Rachel Bailey; Pastors Regina Goodrich, Gwen King, Lydia Posselt, David Oppold, Nancy Wiseman, Mary Konopka, Julie Bergdahl, Kay Braun, Sandra Brown, Moses Dennis, Dee Littleton, Fritz Fowler, Brad Burke, Pat Davenport and me.** The gathering participants were offered 56 different workshops over three days, as well as hands-on learning and serving opportunities in the Atlanta area throughout the gathering. By all accounts this was an important gathering of colleagues, and another expression of how we are church together. The hope is that the next Rostered Ministers Gathering will be in 2020, as the ELCA moves to a potential three-year gathering cycle: year 1- Churchwide Assembly; year 2- Rostered Ministers Gathering; year 3- Youth Gathering, etc.

Philadelphia March to Repudiate White Supremacy

On August 12, a horrific demonstration of hate in Charlottesville, Virginia, led by White Supremacists, Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazis, gathered for a “Unite the Right” rally that ended in a violent confrontation with counter protestors, three deaths, and more than 30 injured. Our nation was shaken by displays of blatant racism not seen in public or in the media for decades. We mourned the deaths of **Heather Heyer** murdered in a car homicide, and two officers with the Virginia State Police killed in a helicopter accident while trying to control the crowds; **Lieutenant Jay Cullen and Trooper-Pilot Berke M. M. Bates.** The following week, marches and rallies were held all over our country to repudiate White Supremacy in all its forms and iterations. I decided to join the march in Philadelphia on Wednesday Aug 16th, organized by an interfaith advocacy organization called POWER, along with clergy, lay leaders, and those who want to make visible our rejection and disgust of the increase of White Supremacy groups in our country, in Pennsylvania, and in the Metro Philadelphia area. This gathering of approximately 2,000 was significantly multi-racial, interdenominational and interfaith. We gathered outside Congregation Rodeph Shalom Synagogue, marched down Broad Street to Arch Street United Methodist Church near City Hall, and then listened to speakers at the church offering courage, hope for a better day, and practical ways to end organized and systemic racism in Philadelphia,

and in our own spheres of influence. We were well represented by Lutheran clergy and lay leaders.

Fall 2017

Conference of Bishops (September 30 - October 5)

Twice a year the 65 synodical bishops of the ELCA, the Presiding Bishop and the Secretary of the ELCA meet in the Chicago area for a five or six-day meeting of the *Conference of Bishops (COB)*. In addition, the bishops gather in January in another part of the country or world for a continuing education event called the *Bishops' Academy*. Every two years, (now three years) we meet in August for the Churchwide Assembly along with the voting members from SEPA Synod elected at Synod Assembly. In addition, bishops are encouraged to attend the ELCA Youth Gathering held every three years.

Bishop's Convocation – “On the Road, Again.”

The theme - *On the Road, Again* - this year's convocation held at Bear Creel Mountain Resort in Macungie, PA reminded us that God's people are always on the move! The word “synod” itself means *on the road together*. Pastors and Deacons have been called like the seventy to share the Good News, traveling together to every town, city and place where Jesus is sending us. For this year's convocation we had two accomplished guides to equip and cheer us along our appointed paths.

Approximately 100 pastors and deacons gathered for time away for worship, renewal, refreshment, continuing education, and connection with colleagues, and socialization.

Ms. Beth Lewis, President and CEO of 1517 Media, shared how in the face of rapid changes in religion, lifestyles and technology, we can make the radical shifts necessary to proclaim a grace-filled Gospel using portable resources and practical solutions in reaching generations new to the Christian message.

Pastor Ruben Duran, ELCA Director for New Congregational Development, led us in an exploration of how Christ goes before us to prepare the way, meets us when we are out and about, and changes us when we least expect it. He shared with us tools to equip God's people to be “detectives of divinity” as they are called and sent on the road.

Several of our own SEPA leaders shared their “Out and About” ministries and how to get them started. Something new this year, on Friday we learned from each other how to set up “**Relation Stations**” along the way.

Lutheran Charities

In an email sent by Ms. Marian Baldini, CEO of KenCrest and Chair of the Lutheran Charities Appeal Board of Directors, she announced the difficult decision that the Lutheran Charities Appeal, as we have known and supported for forty years, was dissolved at the end of 2017. As each one of the social ministry organizations supported by the Lutheran Charities grew enough to sustain their own development departments, it became untenable financially to have paid staff

continue promoting Lutheran Charities as an overall umbrella for the relatively small amounts of financial assistance gathered each year and then divided equally among the agencies the contributions received. Three years ago, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod departed our memberships from the Board because our business office and synod staff was also too small to continue processing the Lutheran Charities gifts. The Lutheran Charities website has an explanation and message about this decision.

Bear Creek Camp

In December of 2017 I met with **Mr. Dan Scharnhorst**, Executive Director of Bear Creek Camp for an end of year review. I am pleased to share with you that Bear Creek camp under Dan's leadership has had a 68% increase in SEPA summer camp attendance since 2012, and an overall attendance of 1093 for the 2017 summer season. This is an incredible ministry of faith formation and fun for children and youth, as well as an opportunity for young adult leadership training. I hope every congregation will consider sending children to Bear Creek Camp and to support this ministry with prayers, volunteers and financial gifts. Let us all congratulate and bless the staff of Bear Creek for their enthusiasm and faithfulness to raising up new generations, who learn in a natural environment, and in worship and service, appreciation for the triune God; the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Advocate.

Winter 2018

ELCA Bishop's Academy

This year for the first time our ELCA Bishop's Academy was held in Vancouver British Columbia, hosted by the bishops of the ELCIC (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada). The theme this year was First Nations People: Spirituality, Theology, and Reconciliation. The first speaker was **Ms. Prairie Rose Seminole**, ELCA Program Director for the American Indian, Alaska, and Native Ministries. Prairie Rose attended last year's Synod Assembly and presented a forum on the Doctrine of Discovery. She led us through a poignant and at times heartbreaking exercise that helped us understand the systemic genocide of millions of Native Peoples in North America over 300 years through the spread of diseases, violent conflicts, damaging federal laws, forced assimilation, sending children to residential schools hundreds of miles from home, where they never saw their parents again, and seizure of land and water rights, all and more of these atrocities contributed to devastation and dismantling of Native People communities and culture.

The second day we heard from **Dr. Martin Brokenleg**, professor, author, Anglican priest, and member of the Rose Bud tribe. He led us in a theological discussion and reflection on the spirituality and family systems of Native Peoples. In the afternoon we visited the Vancouver Museum of Anthropology, an amazing collection of art, totems, weavings, cloth, masks and other works by Northwest Coast First Nations People and other indigenous people in North America.

The third day the **Rt. Rev. Mark McDonald**, the first Indigenous Anglican bishop on North America led us in discussion about the Truth and Reconciliation Project. He raised a compelling question: *What happens when oppressed people/victims reclaim their humanity?* This is the core work of systemic reconciliation.

On Sunday we visited local congregations. I attended Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Richmond. We were warmly welcomed and blessed by Word, sacrament and fellowship.

First Call Retreat

Last year the bishops of Region 7 decided to end the Regional First Call Retreat that spanned 7 synods. The reasons were compelling; the ELCA Regional Coordinator positions were eliminated which meant our coordinator, **Pastor Peggy Wuertele**, who organized the event with a talented group each year, would not be available. It was too expensive to continue, and some of the assumptions about the event and the workshops needed revamping. Last summer **Pastor Brad Burke** and I appointed a team to review our current expectations of first call ministers and to design an educational/theological retreat to meet the needs of our congregations and our rostered leaders. Because I am leaving office, I stepped out of the planning process and only re-entered to attend the newly revised retreat. The event was held at Crossroads Retreat Center in New Jersey. By all accounts the event was well received although some adjustments still need to be made. From our synod alone we had 32 people, 16 First Call participants and 16 leaders. Each of the sessions was team-taught. Five competencies were reviewed that will be the basis for goal setting for each pastor and deacon. The competencies include: Leadership, Wellness, Administration, Mission and Vision, Mentorship and Systems.

The overall feedback by the participants, and thoughts of the planning team were that it was a wonderful and successful event. The participants love that it had a much more collaborative, collegial feel to it than the past events, and felt that the materials shared and areas emphasized were very worthwhile. All in all, people were happy with the retreat and found it valuable.

Conference of Bishops- (March 1 – March 4)

This was my last Conference of Bishops (COB) meeting after attending three times a year for 12 years.

Here are some highlights of this meeting.

- Region 7 bishops, which includes Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, New Jersey Synod, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Metro NY Synod, Upstate NY Synod and Slovak Zion Synod met to make seminarian assignments. SEPA received three seminarians, **Lauren Heywood, Danny Phelps** and **Daniel Smith**.
- On Thursday night, we welcomed **Bishop Pedro Suarez**, newly elected bishop of the Florida-Bahamas Synod, and said farewell to **Bishop Ray Tiemann** (Southwestern Texas) and **Bishop Rick Hoyme** (Northwest Synod of Wisconsin).
- With the retirement of **Mr. Phil Harris** as ELCA General Counsel, **Mr. Tom Cunniff** fills that position. We welcomed the new Associate General Counsel, **Ms. Aja Favors**, who comes to this position from the Mission Investment Fund and the ELCA Foundation.
- **Secretary Chris Boerger** thanked the COB for its continued support and reminded them that a new Secretary will be elected at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. Other reports followed each day with time for discussion and break out groups on occasion.

- On Friday night the Conference bid farewell to **Bishop Rick Hoyme** (Northwest Synod of Wisconsin), **Bishop Mary Froiland** (South-Central Synod of Wisconsin), **Bishop Felipe Loada-Montanez** (Caribbean Synod), and **me. Bishop Tracie Bartholomew** and **Bishop Jim Hazelwood** did the honors of thanking me for my service as bishop and **Bishop Elizabeth Eaton** presented me with gifts from the Churchwide organization.
 - **Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton** gave her report concerning a variety of topics. She closed her report by sharing her openness for re-election at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly and received a standing ovation.
 - There will be 11 bishop elections this year, with at least 6 newly elected bishops. There will also be a Vice Presidents' Gathering at the churchwide offices in the fall of 2018, and they are looking at a Bishops Assistants and Associates' Gathering early in 2019.
 - We heard a report and welcomed our new ELCA Treasurer, **Ms. Lori Fedyk**.
 - We met with the ELCA Seminary Presidents for discussion about future trends in Theological Education.
 - We discussed the proposed Word and Service Entrance Rite.
- Sunday, March 4**
- At our Sunday morning worship, **Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton** was our preacher, and COB Chair, **Bishop William Gafkjen**, was presider.
 - After worship, we heard the Report of the Vice President by **Mr. William Horne**.
 - Before lunch, the COB said farewell to **Ms. Beth Lewis**, President and CEO of 1517 Media (Augsburg Fortress), who is retiring. She has served for 16 years in that role. The COB met the new President and CEO, **Mr. Tim Blevins**.
 - I left the COB (my last one) two days early to get back to SEPA Synod to address the issues at ULS.

United Lutheran Seminary Update

Since the middle of February, I have spent countless hours attending to a controversy related to the former president of United Lutheran Seminary, the Rev. Dr. Theresa Latini, that escalated on social media and new outlets.

I have a dual role in this controversy in that my call is a bishop of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, with responsibility for oversight and pastoral care for all our rostered leaders, candidates for ministry, as well as for the synod leaders and congregations. I also serve as a member of the Board of Trustees of the United Lutheran Seminary. In that capacity I have served for several years through three presidents, two presidential search committees, and the hard, often grueling work of creating one seminary with two campuses, as task that has been discussed in various way for more than 150 years.

The controversy arose when the seminary community and board learned, after Dr. Latini was called, of her past involvement in an anti-LGBTQ+ organization called OneByOne. The group promoted the theory that some LGBTQ+ people can change their sexual orientation through a process that is sometimes called "reparative" or "conversion" therapy. Dr. Latini later strongly disavowed this organization. After listening sessions, and reviewing ULS community complaints and support, the board decided she could no longer continue as president of ULS.

Prior to the board's action, I left the Conference of Bishops two days early in order to meet with our LGBTQ+ pastors and seminarians. I wanted to hear first-hand from our pastors and seminarians how this news impacted their trust in the seminary and my leadership as their bishop. Fifteen pastors and seminarians came on very short notice. For this I am grateful. I feel the conversation was extremely respectful and compassionate. I invited Audrey Thonvold, Executive Director of ReconcilingWorks and who is also a spiritual director, to Philadelphia to help facilitate and guide the process for this meeting. She led a care-filled, grace-filled, and truth-filled guidance day-long conversation.

The Candidacy Committee of SEPA Synod, Director, **Deacon Allison Wilcox**; chair, **Pastor Sarah Stobie**, and a member of the committee, **Pastor Noah Hepler**, wrote a letter to every candidate in SEPA Synod assuring them of the support and accompaniment of our Candidacy Committee with the encouragement to speak their truth in Christian love.

The ULS Administration, Board, faculty, staff and students are also involved in serious and painful conversations and calls for action to address incidents of racism on the campus, direct, indirect, and systematic.

These issues will be a continuing challenge for the foreseeable future. I pray the actions we take, the lessons we learn, the repentance sincere, and the courage to make changes necessary to honor and respect all people personally and institutionally, will be the gift given to future generations of seminarians created from the hard and honest work we commit to now.

On a positive note, we have the largest incoming class in 20 years (110 students).

For more information and regular updates from ULS visit:
unitedlutheranseminary.edu

Spring 2018

Congregation Council Officers Brunch and Gathering

The annual Council Officer Brunch was held Saturday March 17, 2018, at the Brossman Center of ULS. Approximately 100 participated representing nearly 50 congregations. We had lively and engaging conversations in plenary and in small groups.

March in Washington, D.C. April 4, 2018

SEPA Synod leaders and friends from the Jewish, Quaker and Presbyterian communities attended this historic rally to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the assassination of the **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** and to end Racism in the nation's capital on Wednesday, April 4. **Vice President Tracey Beasley** secured a large coach bus to drive to the Rally on the National Mall.

Appreciation and Thanks

Conference Deans

The work of the **Committee of Deans** is critical to the effective functioning of our synod, particularly as we are working with fewer synod staff than in previous years. In addition to monthly meetings to discuss congregational transitions, mobility for rostered leaders, and current issues facing leaders and congregations, we meet annually in retreat for scripture, prayer, worship, and time reflecting on and discerning God's direction for our work. Their services to our synod are invaluable assets to staffing our missional priorities. This past year we said goodbye to **The Reverend Carlton Rodgers** who completed his second term as dean of the Central Philadelphia Conference and thanked him for this time of service as dean.

Deans who served in 2017 and 2018 since last year's assembly are:

The Rev Marcia Bell, Director of Mobility

The Rev. Julie DeWerth, Lower Montgomery Conference

The Rev. Paul Sorcek, Lower Bucks Conference

The Rev. Carlton Rodgers, (**The Rev Regina Goodrich** newly elected, Central Philadelphia Conference)

The Rev. Ron Wesemann, Chester Conference

The Rev. Leslie Richard, Delaware Conference

The Rev. Jane Marston, Northeast/Northwest Philadelphia Conference (Newly Elected)

The Rev. Carolann Hopcke, Upper Bucks Conference (Newly Elected)

The Rev. Rebecca Schanely, Upper Montgomery Conference

The Rev. Christian McMullen, Interim Ministry Dean

The Rev. Marcia Bell serves as **Director of Mobility** on a part time basis, to assist me and **Mr. Bill Harp**, with the administrative and confidential work of the Committee of Deans. **The Rev. Donna Wright** serves as chair of the Transitional Ministry Team.

Synod Staff

The synod staff deserves kudos, congratulations and prayers for serving this Church with resilience, patience, tenacity, good humor and commitment to God's mission on our territory. Please join me in thanking the staff for their tireless efforts and love for Jesus Christ, His Church and the people of God in the ministry we share together.

Ms. Yvonne Curtis - Our Director of Operations makes sure the internal side and office of the bishop runs smoothly so the assistants to the bishop and I can be out in the conferences and congregations equipping, supporting and encouraging our synod leaders. She organizes my work and schedule, oversees the operation of the office and staff, and deftly handles the many demands that come our way every day.

Mr. Martin Schwab - Our business office is overseen and managed by the excellent leadership and watchful stewardship of our Senior Accountant, Martin Schwab.

Pastor Patricia Davenport - continues to serve as our Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop. She brings her contagious faith to the many ways we are being challenged to attend to evangelical outreach and the proclamation of the Gospel in these new times.

Pastor Brad Burke - serves as our Assistant to the Bishop for Youth, Young Adult Ministry and Spiritual Formation, and is the creator/director of BraveNewChurch.org. Brad also serves as our liaison to the Tanzania Companion Team.

Mr. Robert Fisher - Assistant to the Bishop for Communication and Mission Interpretation has been recognized by the Religion Communicators Council (RCC) for his work as a synod communicator.

Our Administrative Staff: **Mr. Bill Harp, Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, and Ms. Mercedes Lee** have demonstrated their willingness to adapt to the necessary changes in our office. Please welcome **Mercedes** as she joined our team March 1. They come together with a strong faith commitment to our shared ministry, collaboration in all areas, and a sense of pride and competence in managing the many day-to-day challenges and opportunities that come our way. **Pastor Rachel Anderson** works part time as the administrative coordinator for the Forward Together in Faith Campaign, and serves part time as pastor of St. John's in Amler.

The Rev. Susan Lang works part time to coordinate major synod events, most importantly, Synod Assembly and the Bishop's Convocation for rostered leaders.

Please take time to thank our synod staff members as you greet them at Assembly for their excellent work as they serve our synod graciously and willingly, motivated by their love for Jesus Christ and His Church.

My appreciation for the support and guidance I have received in leading this synod are extended to the **Synod Council**, and especially to the Executive Committee: **Ms. Tracey A. Beasley** (Vice President), **Pastor Karl Richard** (Secretary), **Ms. Janet Neff** (Treasurer), **Pastor Laura Tancredi**, **Mr. Emanuel Alves**, and **Ms. Lisa Hand**. These leaders and other volunteers bless our work and make it possible for us to share ministry broadly, deeply, and faithfully. Please

thank them during the Assembly for their volunteer service to our Lord and this synod. May Christ continue to bless them with enthusiasm and energy for continued witness to His Church.

YOU...the people of God

As I conclude this report with gratitude for the Synod Staff, Committee of Deans, Synod Council, officers, and executive committee of the synod, I want to add my profound thanks and appreciation for the thousands of faithful Christians, the clergy, deacons, and lay leaders who lead and attend worship services, volunteer as council members, in altar guilds, as musicians and choir members, as Sunday school teachers, in youth ministries, property, stewardship, evangelism, and Christian formation committees, outreach ministries, future planning teams, and the countless other ways and places people show their love for Christ, His Church, and their neighbors.

Without these saints, there would be no congregations. And without these congregations sharing their resources, expertise and people with the larger church, there would be no synod. And without synods, congregations, and people supporting our Churchwide organization there would be no national ELCA. And the work and gifts shared by the ELCA supports the Global Lutheran expression, the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation. And without the grace, love and power of God the Creator, Christ our Redeemer, and the Spirit our Advocate and Helper, there would be no *One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church!*

So as I take my leave from this office as bishop I thank, bless and love you all for the amazing ways, means, and reasons you support this Lutheran witness we call the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.

We can do so much more together than we can ever do alone.

It has truly been all of you who have taught me the truth of these words.

Looking forward to being with you at the SEPA Assembly May 4-5 at Franconia Mennonite Center in Harleysville, PA

With and in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Claire S. Burkat". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Reverend Claire S. Burkat, Bishop