

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD  
OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

*Ponder Anew*  
**May 30 & 31, 2025**

**FIRST SESSION – Friday morning, May 30<sup>th</sup>**

The 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod began with Morning Prayer at 9:30 a.m., led by Pr. Linda Manson, Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, and co-Director of Evangelical Mission, and the Rev. Karl M. Richard, pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran, Springfield, and Secretary of the Synod.

**ORDER FOR THE OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY**

At 9:55 a.m. Bishop Bryan J. Penman and Vice President Tracey A. Beasley led the Order for the Opening of the 37<sup>th</sup> annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**GREETING AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The Rev. Fritz Fowler, lead pastor of our host site, Trinity Lutheran, greeted the Synod Assembly, and acknowledged that we are gathering on the land of the Leni Lenape people, who have resided here previous to the time Europeans came to this continent, with the hope that we will work for healing and justice for the Indigenous people who first occupied this land.

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Bishop Penman welcomed the voting members and visitors present at this Assembly, offering a particular welcome to those for whom this is their first Synod Assembly. He then expressed his thanks to those who have taken leadership roles in coordinating and working this Assembly: Ms. Carrie Schwab, Synod Assembly coordinator; Ms. Cynta Outerbridge, Database manager and Registrar; the Rev. Joseph (Joey) Klinger, parliamentarian; the Rev. Raymond Miller, chair of the Committee on Elections, and the Rev. Rebecca Schanely, former chair of this Committee; the Rev. Jennifer Casey, chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel; Ms. Emily Valentine, chair of the Nominating Committee; the Rev. Meagan Esterby, chair of the Worship Planning Team.

Bishop Penman welcomed and thanked Mr. Iain Chester, Executive Director for Innovation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as our churchwide representative, and Deacon Tammy Devine, Principal for Divine Coaching, who will lead the Assembly in Prayer & Ponder Anew spiritual practices.



- + Candidacy Committee
- + Interim Pastors
- + Bridge and Supply Pastors
- + Generosity Team
- + Communications Team
- + Transitional Development Ministry Team, and
- + Vitality Team
- + Gather Philly
- + Inclusive Communities
- + Youth and Young Adult Ministry events
- + Anti-Racism Team
- + Urban Ministry Task Force
- + Care of Creation
- + Our Lilly Grants teams for Love Revolution & Faith Alive
- + Forward Together in Faith Grant Team
- + Urban Ministry Grant Team
- + Synod Hunger Ministry Team

Particular thanks were expressed to the outgoing chair of the Candidacy Committee, the Rev. Paul Neff, and the incoming chair, Ms. Lisa Pressley, and the Rev. Rebecca Schanely, previous chair of the Committee on Elections, and the new chair, the Rev. Raymond Miller.

Bishop Penman recognized the Committee of Deans for the many hours they spend caring for clergy and congregations, and guiding congregations that are in transition through the process of calling another rostered minister:

- + The Rev. Julie DeWerth, Lower Montgomery Conference
- + The Rev. Nathan Krause, Lower Bucks Conference
- + The Rev. Noah Hepler, Central Philadelphia Conference
- + The Rev. Christopher Franz, Chester Conference
- + The Rev. Marie Sager, Delaware Conference
- + The Rev. Daniel Eisenberg, newly elected, Northeast/Northwest Philadelphia Conference, and former dean, the Rev. Joey Klinger.
- + The Rev. Bill Coleman, newly elected, Upper Bucks Conference, and former dean, the Rev. Erika Wesch, who now serves as assistant to the bishop for formation.
- + The Rev. Matthew Finney, newly elected, Upper Montgomery Conference, former dean the Rev. Christopher McKinstry

Thanks were extended to the Rev. Marcia Bell, who served many years as the Director for Mobility, and the Rev. Wayne Shelor, who had served as the Director of Interim Ministry. Both

of these areas have been placed in the portfolio of the Rev. Karen Sease, the Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations.

### **WELCOME TO NEW ROSTERED MINISTERS**

Bishop Penman invited those Rostered Ministers who are new to Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod since last Assembly to come forward and state their name, and where they are serving. These new ministers include:

- + The Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook – Program Director, Faith Alive Initiative:  
Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer
- + The Rev. Ian Clements – newly ordained pastor, called to Centennial, Kimberton
- + The Rev. Kevin Compton – pastor at St. Paul, Red Hill
- + The Rev. Carl Filer – pastor at Emmanuel, Pottstown
- + The Rev. Paula Lebo – Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation
- + The Rev. Paisley LeRoy – pastor at St. Peter, Chester Springs
- + The Rev. Linda Manson – Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, and co-Director for Evangelical Mission
- + The Rev. Taylor Walker – pastor at Zion, Spring City
- + The Rev. Lamont A. Wells – Exec. Dir. Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities
- + The Rev. Leah Woehr-Grande – lead pastor at Grace, Royersford

### **REPORT OF THE REGISTRAR**

Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, Registrar, was brought forward to bring the Report of the Registrar and certify a quorum.

Total number of Voting Members: 435

Total number of Voting Members registered and in attendance as of this report: 330

Number of Voting Members needed for a quorum: 218

Bishop Penman thanked Ms. Outterbridge and **declared a quorum is present.**

### **REPORT OF THE SECRETARY**

The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, noted that the proposed program for the Assembly had been posted on MinistryLink as a part of *The Bulletin of Reports*. He moved its adoption.

**The Assembly adopted the program as presented.**

He then presented as information the Rules of Procedure as printed in *The Bulletin of Reports*. Secretary Richard highlighted the limitations on submissions to Reference and Counsel, and the process for nominating persons from the floor to the various tickets before the Assembly.

By common consent, the Assembly approved the following rule: "The Synod Assembly shall limit each speaker from the floor to two minutes, alternating *for* and *against* whenever possible,

and allowing someone who has not spoken on a particular issue from the floor to speak before someone speaks a second or additional time."

The secretary encouraged the voting members to clearly identify themselves by their full name and congregation when addressing the Assembly so that we can correctly record who is offering amendments or motions.

Secretary Richard reported that the Synod Council approved the minutes of the 36<sup>th</sup> annual assembly on September 19, 2024. They are available in the Bulletin of Reports, Section 6, Report of Synod Council, pages SC – 7 to SC – 49.

Secretary Richard reminded the Assembly that all times are approximate, as things sometimes move more, or less swiftly than the time originally allotted, and that it is the responsibility of each voting member to be present for each part of the Assembly so they can vote, act, or contribute as necessary or appropriate.

He presented as information the reports of the various committees, task forces, organizations, and institutions of the Synod.

## **REPORT FROM THE ELCA CHURCHWIDE OFFICE**

Mr. Iain Chester, Executive Director, Innovation, ELCA, was invited to present the report from the Churchwide Organization. Mr. Chester has served with the ELCA Churchwide Organization over the past nine years in a variety of roles, including as Manager for Network Engagement with ELCA World Hunger. During his time with ELCA World Hunger, he worked with a network of over 2,500 congregational leaders across the ELCA working toward a just world where all are fed.

*N.B. – videos of this, and all presentations made to the Assembly, are available on the synod website [ministrylink.org](http://ministrylink.org), and on YouTube.*

Mr. Chester brought greetings from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, the Church Council, and the whole of the Churchwide Organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "God's Love Made Real." Bishop Eaton has called the Church to consider how we can do just that. It is accomplished in many ways, some grand and noticeable, but often in small ways by people we may never know, but who reach out and offer support in time of need.

As part of the presentation of the Report from the Churchwide Office, Mr. Chester noted the reality that "God's Love Made Real" comes to pass by means of the financial offerings we make to the Church. The money we place in the offering plate in our local congregations gets shared with Synod to support ministry in the region. And a portion of the money shared with the Synod goes on to support the work of the Churchwide organization, making it possible for us to assist people around the world whom we will never know, but who need to see God's love made real.

In the past year, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod shared \$759,617 in Mission Support with the Churchwide organization.

The money sent to the Churchwide organization supports new Mission Starts, missionaries around the world, Companion Synod relationships. It enables our Ecumenical Relationships, allows us to draft new Social Statements and create worship resources, and supports our work for advocacy and racial justice. Other ways in which God's love is made real through the offerings of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to the ELCA include:

### **ELCA World Hunger Appeal**

Having been in existence for 50 years, the World Hunger Appeal is active in 62 countries around the world, including the United States of America. Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod gave \$275,000 to this work in the past year.

### **Lutheran Disaster Response**

LDR responds to crises following natural disasters and in the midst of human conflicts in 53 countries, including the United States of America. Gifts from Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to the Churchwide organization make this work possible.

### **Representation at the Churchwide level**

God's love is also made real in the way in which people show up to serve. There are many people from Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod who serve in the agencies and units of the ELCA. Among them are:

Mr. Emmanuel Alves – ELCA Committee on Appeals

The Rev. Sarah Anderson – the ELCA Nominating Committee

Ms. Tracey A. Beasley – Church Council, and ELCA Executive Committee

Ms. Thelma Jacks – Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

The Rev. Gwendolyn King – Church Council, and Co-Chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Mr. Frank Roth – Portio Benefits Board

### **2025 Churchwide Assembly**

The triennial assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be held in Phoenix, AZ, from July 28 through August 2. The theme of the Assembly "Church for the Life of the World." This year marks the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, where the Nicene Creed was formulated, and this theme was inspired this Nicene Creed's confession that we look for "the life of the world to come."

### **Social Statement**

Among the topics to be discussed will be the proposed Social Statement on Faith and Civic Life, which was requested by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee, WI. This statement offers ways for how we can be church together, for the sake of the world.

### **Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church**

The Assembly will receive recommendations from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church. This Commission was established at the direction of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, with the recognition of the need to restructure our Church considering declines in membership

and resources, and with a particular charge to work on dismantling racism in our denomination. Some of the recommendations have been enacted by Church Council. Others will need the assent of the Assembly. There are other aspects of this commission's work that are not yet complete and will need to be addressed as we continue to move forward, discerning how God is calling us to be the Church in the different cultural landscape we face today.

### **Election of Secretary and Presiding Bishop**

There will also be an election of a new Secretary for our Church, and for a new Presiding Bishop. Both Bishop Eaton and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer's terms end this year, and neither is seeking another term. Several potential candidates for each of these offices have been pre-identified, and their biographies are available to read prior to the Assembly.

In addition to the provisions to come from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, there will also be many other constitutional provisions to come before the Assembly for consideration and approval. There will also be other items placed before the voting members to determine what we as a Church will do. Many of these proposals deal with how we can stand with the poor and the marginalized. We are living in a time of strife and struggle, of hurt and pain.

This is a time of divisiveness, anger, and fear. It is a time of great suffering in our world. Mr. Chester encouraged the attendees of the Synod Assembly to explore the ELCA Resources for Advocacy and Engagement to see how their congregations can become involved in the work of restoration and justice in their communities, being Church, for the Life of the World.

Mr. Chester showed the attendees a video from Bishop Eaton. He concluded by thanking the members of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod for all the ways in which they are helping to show God's Love Made Real.

Mr. Chester concluded by sharing thoughts he had regarding our theme, "Ponder Anew." These are two words that are not common in everyday speech. But he was considering how these words work to the idea of innovation. As opposed to "Ponder Anew" which are not common words, innovation is so common it has become a buzzword. It conveys something that is moving us forward. The word anew is perhaps the simplest definition of innovation, in that it simply means "in a new way." In his work with innovation, he strives to help people dream and grow, putting into practice ideas that can become the creative future. He posed two questions to the Assembly:

What does it mean to Ponder? and  
Who will we ponder with?

### **REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

Bishop Penman called on Ms. Emily Valentine, Chair of the Nominating Committee, to bring the report of the Committee before the Assembly.

Ms. Valentine noted the following as she made her report.

1. Nominations from the floor shall be made at the time of the first report of the Nominating Committee during the first business session of the Synod Assembly for all positions to be elected at this assembly.
2. The 2019 Churchwide Assembly changed the definition of “Clergy” to include both Ministers of Word and Sacrament (pastors) and Ministers of Word and Service (deacons). Therefore, Ministers of Word and Service (deacons) are now eligible to be nominated for Ticket 2. Deacons are no longer eligible for lay positions.
3. Again, a reminder that a person nominated from the floor must immediately present to the Assembly office a copy of the nominee’s biographical information, and a picture of the nominee. These nomination forms are available from the Assembly pages.

This year we will be electing a Vice President of the Synod, as well as people to serve on the Synod Council. The Vice President of the synod is one of the lay voting members of the Churchwide Assembly. Therefore, whoever is elected as our vice president will be attending the Churchwide Assembly as a voting member from this synod. If the person elected is unable to attend, an alternate lay voting member will be selected to fill this seat.

The Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod state that when there is no incumbent, the Nominating Committee shall nominate at least two persons for vice president. Over the past 6 months the Committee has had the position of vice president posted for members of the Synod to submit potential nominees. The Committee has also intentionally sought out persons to stand in nomination for this office. There have been direct conversations with our current vice president with five people. At the time of the deadline for the nominating process, only one of these felt comfortable having their name placed before the Assembly. Some determined they would not seek this office. Others were still discerning but were not comfortable making a final decision prior to the deadline for the Bulletin of Reports. Naturally, the Nominating Committee cannot put in nomination any who have not agreed to serve. There is the ability to receive nominations from the floor, at which time any of those who had been in conversation with the current vice president, or any others who may feel a leading to this position, may be placed in nomination. With this in mind, we consider:

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

**NAME**

**CONGREGATION**

Ms. Cheryl Lafferty

Redemption, Philadelphia

*The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.*

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #1 closed and further declared **Ms. Cheryl Lafferty elected.**

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

**NAME CONGREGATION**

The Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia Upper Dublin, Ambler

The Rev. Jonathan Steiner Trinity, Lansdale

*The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.*

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #2 closed and further declared **the Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia and the Rev. Jonathan Steiner elected.**

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

**NAME CONGREGATION**

Ms. Lisa Fortwangler St. John, Folcroft

Dr. Sherrell Mickens Christ, Upper Darby

*The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.*

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #3 closed.

**TICKET 4: SYNOD COUNCIL, Northeast/Northwest Philadelphia CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2028)**

**NAME CONGREGATION**

Ms. Mari-Beth Fetsick Faith, Philadelphia

*The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.*

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #4 closed and further declared **Ms. Mari-Beth Fetsick elected.**

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

**NAME CONGREGATION**

There are no nominations from the Committee.

*The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.*

Pr. Karen Sease placed in nomination

Mr. Phillip Richard Grace Pottstown

As there were no FURTHER nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #5 closed and further declared **Mr. Phillip Richard elected.**

**TICKET 6: SYNOD COUNCIL, LAY YOUNG ADULT REPRESENTATIVE (One lay person to be elected for a term ending 2028)**

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

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

**NAME CONGREGATION**

Ms. Syndey Geyer St. Andrew, Perkasio

Ms. Irene Rajarigam

Grace, Drexel Hill

*The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.*

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #6 closed.

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

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

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

**NAME**

**CONGREGATION**

Mr. Bennaiah Bennie

Faith-Immanuel, East Lansdowne

*The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.*

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop penman declared Ticket #7 closed and further declared **Mr. Bennaiah Bennie elected.**

Bishop Penman thanked Ms. Valentine for her report.

#### **Address by the Vice President-elect**

Bishop Penman called upon Vice President-elect Cheryl-Ann Lafferty to make a few remarks to the Assembly. She shared that she has been a life-long Philadelphian, and a life-long Lutheran. She never thought that she would be standing here as the Vice President of the Synod, but God did what God does. When approached about standing for this position, Ms. Lafferty was not certain that this was the role she should assume. But she felt God nudging and pushing her. Ms. Lafferty spoke with Vice President Beasley about the actual responsibilities of this role, and Vice President Beasley was very generous with her time and her insights. After prayerful discernment, she allowed her name to be placed in nomination.

Through her many life experiences, both in the church and in the “secular” world, the Vice President-elect has gained skills and abilities for leadership with a heart for justice. She has learned to get things done, while taking care not to lose God’s desire in the process. She is both excited and humbled to be elected to this office, and she looks forward to where God will lead us as we serve together.

#### **MISSION SPOTLIGHTS**

Throughout the Assembly various ministries on our territory were highlighted. At this time there were video presentations on the efforts of the Care of Creation Ministry Team, and the work of Lutheran Settlement House, one of our Lutheran Social Ministry Organizations.

#### **PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

Bishop Penman invited Deacon Tammy Devine to come forward. Deacon Devine is the Principal for Devine Coaching, is passionate about walking with God's people. Devine collaborates with thought leaders to facilitate personal and communal growth toward living and leading well through coaching. Devine is credentialed as a PCC Coach, certified as an End of Life Coach and serves the ELCA as Coordinator of Generosity Ministries, is the Principal for Devine Coaching, coaches with Clergy Life Coaching, Life of Faith Initiative. Devine is the facilitator of Segment 2 Stewardship and Discipleship coaching. She previously served as the ELCA Wellness Manager with Portico Benefit Services.

Deacon Devine led the Assembly in a time of intentional spiritual reflection prior to the recess for lunch. During lunch there were two workshops offered; one by Mr. Chester on Innovation; one by Deacon Devine on Spiritual Practices.

*The Assembly stood in recess until 2:10 p.m.*

## **SECOND SESSION – Friday afternoon, May 30<sup>th</sup>**

Bishop Penman called the Assembly back to order following lunch and the workshops.

### **REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON REFERENCE AND COUNSEL**

Bishop Penman called on the Rev. Jennifer Casey, pastor of Holy Trinity, Wallingford, and chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel, to make the report.

Pr. Casey noted that one resolution was submitted to the Committee prior to the April 30 deadline. No late submissions were received. The submission made was a resolution regarding the provision of childcare at Synod Assembly and other Synod events. The resolution received asked the Synod to provide childcare at the Assembly and other Synod Events. The Committee on Reference and Counsel is placing before the Assembly a substitute resolution in place of the original proposal, calling for the creation of a task force to make appropriate recommendations on this issue for the next Assembly. While the entire substitute resolution is printed here, Pr. Casey only read the "Be it Resolved" clauses to the Assembly, as they are the portion the voting members of the Assembly will be debating and on which they might vote.

#### **Resolution on Establishing a Task Force for Childcare**

WHEREAS Jesus said, "Let the children come to me," and calls us to welcome children and those who care for them into all spaces and places in the church, and

WHEREAS we, in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, work to welcome people at all stages of life and remove any barriers to their full participation in the life of the church, and

WHEREAS participation in synod events is often limited to those, clergy and lay, who have no need of childcare or those with access to childcare, and

WHEREAS this means that the voices of those who are in the midst of raising children are absent from conversations and the gifts of people called to parenting are kept from sharing them with the whole church, and

WHEREAS, providing care for the children of participants in synod events would make these events more accessible to parents of young children,

**SA25.05.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT** the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod values parents with young children and recognizes the very real struggles regarding participation in Synod Assembly and other synod events alongside their responsibility for caring for their children, and be it further

**RESOLVED** that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod affirms the intersectionality of the vocations of parenting and church life by explicitly welcoming children who need to attend synod events under the care of their parents, and be it further

**RESOLVED** that the Synod Council establish a task force of not more than 9 persons, at least 3 of whom shall be parents of young children, to develop guidelines for synodical event childcare, in alignment with Pennsylvania state law and SEPA child protection policies, with the intent that such childcare be available by the 2026 Synod Assembly, and be it further

**RESOLVED** that a report from the task force be made to Synod Council by its February meeting for Council to determine whether the logistical supports are in place for childcare to be viable by the 2026 assembly, and be it further

**RESOLVED** that all ministries and congregations of this synod be encouraged to find ways that they can support those in their own communities who need childcare to live out their call from God in service to the church and our world.

The Committee on Reference and Counsel Recommends adoption.

Following a second to the Committee's resolution, Bishop Penman invited Pr. Casey to speak to this resolution.

Pr. Casey stated that the Committee on Reference and Council affirms the value and importance of the submitted resolution. However, given the timeframe, there was not sufficient time to gather the necessary logistical information to make an informed recommendation regarding childcare.

While Reference and Counsel recognizes the recommendation to form a task force may appear to be dismissive of the original resolution, this is not the intent. Rather, the formation of the task force will give adequate time, within the deadlines set forth in the resolution, to develop a well-informed recommendation to Synod Council.

It is important to Reference and Counsel that at least one-third of the task force members shall be parents, to ensure their voices are not only heard, but intentionally valued and incorporated throughout the process.

Bishop opened the floor for discussion.

Ms. Meg Hazel, Holy Trinity Wallingford, asked if there is any word on cost, and particularly insurance costs, related to this resolution.

Pr. Casey: The issue of cost is why we put forward this substitute resolution because that is a critical item to know. There was not time in our review period to gain that information. We have since learned that the insurance costs are negligible. Other issues are still unclear.

The Rev. Serena Sellers, St. Mark Pennsburg, shared that her daughters, who are now 31 and 32, would be so pleased that this is being taken up, as they had to attend many synod meetings in their day.

The Rev. Dr. Alina Gayeuski, Reformation Media and drafter of the original resolution, spoke in favor of this substitute resolution. While she is a person without children, she sees the need from others who are parents of small children. She quoted from a study the ELCA engaged in partnership with the Barna Foundation and Fuller Seminary that states that teenagers, young adults, and families with young children need to be more highly prioritized. Providing childcare at the Assembly is the bare minimum we could do to embody this priority.

The Rev. Eileen Ruppel-Doan, Reformation Media, also spoke in favor. As part of a clergy couple which has a child, she has asked each year if childcare might be available, and each year she has been told no. While this may not affect many, it affects a significant number of people, and if we want younger people to be involved, they often have children. While it may not be your children, we have a responsibility to each other as the Church.

The Rev. Russ Crouthamel, St. John, Phoenixville, also spoke in favor. How often do we ask for families with young children to be part of our fellowship? And if we do not recognize the need for them to balance the care for their children with their participation, we do not make it easy for them to be a full part of our congregations.

The Rev. Lizette Rios-Sancez, Nueva Creacion, Philadelphia, also spoke in favor of resolution. She says she knows of the need to provide help to people so they can participate. She said that there is a risk when dealing with young children. We do need to be aware of the cost and the need for training, but it is an important issue to address.

The Rev. Brandy Hebert, God's Love, Newtown, spoke in favor of the resolution, but raised a concern regarding timing that the substitute resolution before the house means that there will not be childcare in place for the November Bishop's Convocation, or for some of our younger clergy who participate in First Call Theological Education. She encourages the Synod to see what resources might be available to offer those people so they may be able to procure childcare on their own in order to attend these events.

The Rev. John Heidgerd, Emmanuel, Souderton, moved to call the question. Following a second, the Assembly voted to close debate and move to the vote on the resolution before the house.

**The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution, 289 yes, 5 no.**

Bishop Penman thanked Pr. Casey for the report, and the Committee on Refence and Counsel for its faithful work.

**MISSION SPOTLIGHTS**

The afternoon session began with three Mission Spotlights.

- + The Rev. Mark Sing-Heuer presented on behalf of the Generosity Team what it is to Ponder Anew how we can be generous in the use of our resources, and how we can encourage our siblings in Christ to share generously of all they have as well.
- + Vicar SaraJean Grainson and the members of the recently closed ministry of Community of Love in Oxford asked us to Ponder Anew what it is to be a vibrant ministry. They have closed as a worshipping community but are transitioning to being a Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry. Their “Share the Love Family Boutique” will remain open as a ministry to the people of the area, where they can shop for clothes without cost, avoiding the need to choose between food or clothing.
- + The Rev. Paula Lebo, Assistant to the Bishop, asked the Assembly to Ponder Anew how we can share the timeless story of Jesus Christ in a new time and era. We all have stories of faith, and we need to learn to tell these stories so others may learn of the love of God in Christ. How can we share these stories in a public way so that many may hear?

**AUDIT REPORT**

Ms. Janet Huber Neff of St. Luke’s, Devon, Treasurer of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, presented the Audit Report for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2025.

Treasurer Neff directed the voting members to the audit section in the Bulletin of Reports. She stated she will not be going over every line but will present a summary of the report. If there are other questions she will address them after her presentation.

Ms. Neff began with the Statement of Financial Position for the past fiscal year. She noted that this is a snapshot of where we stood on January 31, 2025.

**Audit Report Details**  
**Statement of Financial Position**  
**Highlights as of 01/31/2025 and 01/31/2024**

	2025	2024
Total Cash and Investments	\$18,413,573	\$12,068,926

Total Assets	\$22,337,569	\$15,859,964
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 235,326
Total Net Assets	\$22,146,343	\$15,624,638
Unrestricted	\$15,539,313	\$10,367,555
With Donor Restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 5,257,083

Our total assets are more than \$22 million, where our total liabilities are just over \$191,000. The liabilities are essentially our accounts payable for the month, and so we are in tremendous financial shape. The assets include both our cash and investments in the amount of \$18.4 million, and our other assets of real estate, trusts, and capitalized leases that make up the remainder of the \$22.3 million we have in total assets. \$15.5 million of these assets are unrestricted, and \$6.6 million have restrictions set by the donor. These monies are in the Fund for Mission, Forward Together in Faith, St. Petri-Hope accounts, and in our cemetery funds for perpetual care of those cemeteries of which we received custody when congregations closed their ministry. The source of the great increase from 2024 to 2025 is primarily the two Lilly Grants we have received, one for the Love Revolution, and the other for the Faith Alive initiative.

**Audit Report Details**  
**Statement of Activities**

	<b>Revenue</b>	
	02/01/24 – 01/31/25	02/01/23 – 01/31/24
Mission Support	\$1,521,842	\$1,501,378
Other Contributions	\$2,336,422	\$1,667,396
Registration Fees	\$ 90,159	\$ 58,558
Investment Income	\$2,770,886	\$1,622,431
Beneficial Interest in Trust	\$ 165,491	\$ 114,664
Proceeds from Property Sale	<u>\$2,909,194</u>	<u>\$ 100,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$9,793,993	\$5,064,427

A piece of good news is that our Mission Support from congregations actually increased this year, by \$20,000. Many thanks to all who made contributions, both personally and through their congregations. While this increase is helpful, expenses continue to climb each year, and so Treasurer Neff encouraged the voting members to see what their congregation gave last year and challenged each congregation to increase their support of the Synod by one percentage point of their congregational income.

We have also received significant gains in our investments this year, and we received proceeds from the sale of the property of two former congregations, Trinity, South Philadelphia, and Bethany, Roxborough.

Our revenues reflect an increase in income of over \$4 million; \$1 million from the Lilly grants, nearly \$1 million from investment income, and \$2.9 million from the sale of properties.

**Audit Report Details**  
**Statement of Activities**

	Expenses	
	02/01/24 – 01/31/25	02/01/23 – 01/31/24
Operating Expenses	\$1,937,827	\$1,668,159
ELCA Proportionate Share (50%)	\$ 760,921	\$ 750,689
Property Management	\$ 246,227	\$ 184,035
Distributions to other Agencies	\$ 91,000	\$ 91,517
Remit to Designated Agency	\$ 31,427	\$ 21,190
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 204,889</u>	<u>\$ 202,092</u>
Total Expenses	\$3,272,291	\$2,917,682

As the income was up for the past fiscal year, so were the expenses.

Operating expenses include salaries, benefits, supplies, travel, Deans, office expenses, and events.

Property management includes expenses to care for the properties of former congregations: the former Bethany, Roxborough, Trinity, South Philadelphia, St. Paul’s, East Norriton, and St. Paul’s, Lansdowne. It also covers perpetual care of four cemeteries: St. James Chalfont, St. John, Quakertown, Trinity, South Philadelphia, and St. Michael, Germantown.

Distributions to other agencies include Muhlenberg College, United Lutheran Seminary, Campus Ministry, Bear Creek Camp, Lutheran Advocacy, and Lutheran Congregational Services.

Grants we make to other organizations include: assistance with seminary loan debt, Forward Together in Faith grants, and Blessed to be a Blessing grants. There are also grants awarded through the Fund for Mission. 5% of the total Fund for Mission balance is eligible to be used for mission. A portion of that goes to the “Mission” portion of our budget; the remainder is available for projects proposed through the Vitality Team and the co-Directors for Evangelical Mission and approved by the Fund for Mission Trustees. As of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, we allocated \$197,279 to the Mission budget, and we distributed \$156,000 from the Fund for Mission, and \$17,268 from the St. Petri-Hope fund for churches and other ministries. These disbursements assisted mission congregations, and eleven “settled” congregations and ministries.

I now present the Audit Opinion from Tait, Weller as follows:

“We have audited the accompanying financial statements of Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (the “Synod”) which comprise the statement of financial position as of January 31, 2025, and the related statements of activities and cash flows for the year then ended, and the related notes to the financial statements.

In our opinion, the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Synod as of January 31, 2025, and the changes in its net assets and

its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

Treasurer Neff then put before the Assembly the following resolution:

**SA25.05.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly receives the Audit reports for the Fiscal Year ending January 31, 2025.**

Bishop Penman asked for questions from the floor of the Assembly. Having none, the vote was taken.

**The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.**

**PRESENTATION OF THE BUDGET**

Bishop Penman then called on Ms. Pia Graham, member of St. John, Ridge Valley, and chair of the Synod Finance Committee, to present the proposed budget for the fiscal year ending January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2027.

Ms. Graham directed the voting members to the proposed budget in the Bulletin of Reports. She shared the overview in the following tables:

Because of the timing of when the Assembly meets, we present a budget for a year into the future. This budget is for the fiscal year beginning February 1, 2026, ending January 31, 2027.

	<b>2026 Budget Income</b>	
	2024 Audit	2026 Budget
Mission Support	\$1,521,842	\$1,600,000
Other Contributions	\$2,336,422	\$ 513,686
Registration Fees	\$ 90,159	\$ 99,256
Investment Income	\$2,770,886	\$1,226,630
Beneficial Interest in Trusts	\$ 165,491	\$ 60,000
Proceeds from Property Sale	<u>\$2,909,184</u>	<u>\$ 700,000</u>
Total Revenues	\$9,793,993	\$4,199,572

Ms. Graham noted that the finance committee strives to be conservative in its estimations. Still, with the increase in Mision Support this past year we are hoping to receive \$1.6 million in the next year.

In Other Income, the amount is lower, as we do not anticipate receiving any grants like we did this past year from the Lilly Foundation.

Registration fees are projected to rise as we have more in-person events each year.

As the markets are in a volatile state, we are anticipating lower returns on our investments.

We project fewer property sales in the coming year than we had in the past, and so that number is also projected to be lower.

**2026 Budget Expenses**

	2024 Audit	2026 Budget
Operating Expenses	\$1,937,827	\$2,193,776
ELCA Proportionate Share (50%)	\$ 760,921	\$ 800,000
Property Management	\$ 246,227	\$ 84,000
Distributions to other Agencies	\$ 91,000	\$ 98,725
Remit to Designated Agency	\$ 31,427	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 204,889</u>	<u>\$ 153,460</u>
Total Expenses	\$3,272,291	\$3,342,501

Expenses are higher as we are in the office more, and inflation is also having its effects. We continue to have costs related to managing the properties in our care until they are either sold or repurposed for new ministries. As we have fewer properties, we anticipate fewer expenses. We anticipate our distributions to other agencies to increase in the next fiscal year. Overall, our anticipated expenses for the fiscal year ending January 31, 2027, are slightly higher than the past fiscal year.

Ms. Graham, on behalf of the Synod Council, placed the following resolution before the Assembly:

**SA25.05.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly adopts the budget for the coming year, Fiscal Year ending January 31, 2027.**

Bishop Penman asked if there were any questions concerning the proposed budget.

Pr. John Heidgerd, Emmanuel, Souderton, noted that multi-year grants must be recorded in the year they are received, even as expenses related to those grants continue to extend for several years after receipt of the funds. He asked how this is reflected in the budget that has been proposed.

Ms. Neff: We recorded as income the \$1 million dollars we received for each of the Lilly Grants, and that is why right now we show a revenue of \$9 million. Over the next five years, if we spend \$200,000 or \$250,000, it will look like we are running a deficit. That is true, but we need to remember that we received this large sum now, and we have it available to draw from to accomplish the purpose of the grant proposals. So, while it will look as though we are overspending, it is because of the way in which we need to record the numbers by accounting principles.

The Rev. Tim Johansen, Temple, Havertown, rose to speak against the budget proposal. If we have received over \$2 million in revenues for the sale of properties, why is the projected amount

of grants to organizations decreasing in the coming year? Pr. Johansen works on the Forward Together in Faith Team and has seen the impact these grants can have for a congregation and its ministries, and it seems that when we are encouraging people to Ponder Anew and innovate, that number should go up, not down.

Ms. Neff: To clarify, the Grants to Organizations are not grants to congregations, they are grants to other organizations that we support. Grants for congregations are run through the Vitality Team and are funded by the resources of the Fund for Mission and Forward Together in Faith. The decrease in this line is not a cut to congregations or ministries of Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

With no other questions raised, Bishop Penman called for the vote.

**The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.**

Bishop Penman expressed his thanks to Ms. Graham, Treasurer Neff, the Finance Committee, and Mr. Martin Schwab, the Synod's Senior Accountant for their faithful work.

He also was pleased to reiterate that for the first time in several years Mission Support has gone up in this Synod. Many thanks to all the congregations who have faithfully sent in their offerings so the work of the Church in this Synod and beyond can continue. His goal is that we grow to 100% congregational participation in Mission Support. "You can give at least a dollar."

Congregational support has increased across the Synod, but Central Conference has increased its support by 10%, and Lower Montgomery has increased by 17%. This makes an impact on how we can resource our ministry in the Synod and around the Church. And over the past five years the Synod has increased its support to congregations by 300%. We are growing in the ways we are walking together to share the gospel.

### **FIRST REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS**

Bishop Penman recognized the Rev. Raymond Miller, pastor of St. Peter, Hilltown, and chair of the Committee on Elections, to bring forth the first balloting.

Pr. Miller called for balloting on **TICKET 6: SYNOD COUNCIL, LAY YOUNG ADULT REPRESENTATIVE.**

The Assembly will vote on one of the two nominees:

Ms. Syndey Geyer

St. Andrew, Perkasio

Ms. Irene Rajarigam

Grace, Drexel Hill

Ballots were distributed, and following the vote, were collected for tabulation.

### **MISSION SPOTLIGHTS**

Two ministries were highlighted at this time.

- + A video was shown on the work of the Love Revolution, one of the two Lilly Grant initiatives our Synod has been awarded.
- + Pr. Thomas Natalini described the work of the new mission venture, the Mindfulness + Church.

## **RECOGNITION OF ANNIVERSARIES**

### **Recognition of Congregational Anniversaries**

Congregations celebrating significant anniversaries were recognized, with members of these congregations present invited forward to be recognized and have a photograph taken to mark this occasion.

<b>325 years</b>	New Hanover Evangelical Lutheran Church, Gilbertsville
<b>175 years</b>	St. Mark Lutheran Church, Philadelphia
<b>175 years</b>	St. Peter Lutheran Church, Riegelsville
<b>150 years</b>	Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion, Philadelphia
<b>75 years</b>	Reformation Evangelical Lutheran Church, Media
<b>50 years</b>	Family of God Lutheran Church, Buckingham

## **PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

Deacon Tammy Devine was invited forward to lead the Assembly through another intentional prayer practice.

## **REPORT OF BALLOTING FOR TICKET 6**

Prior to dinner, Bishop Penman announced the results of the balloting for Ticket 6, which he received from Pr. Raymond Miller, chair of the Committee on Elections.

### **TICKET 6: Synod Council, Lay Young Adult Representative (One to be elected)**

Total Votes Cast: 284

Total Legal Votes Cast: 284

Total Illegal Votes Cast: 0

Number of Votes Needed for Election (Majority of Total Legal Votes Cast): 143

Ms. Irene Rajarigam, 148

Ms. Syndey Geyer, 129

Bishop Penman declared Ms. Irene Rajarigam **ELECTED**

*The Assembly stood in recess for dinner until 7:00 p.m.*

## **THIRD SESSION – Friday evening, May 30<sup>th</sup>**

Bishop Penman called the Assembly back to order following dinner.

Vice President Tracey A. Beasley introduced Bishop Penman and invited him to make his inaugural Bishop's Address to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly.

## **BISHOP BRYAN J. PENMAN'S ADDRESS TO THE ASSEMBLY**

We gather under the theme “Ponder Anew,” from the line from a familiar hymn. “Ponder Anew what the Almighty can do, if with his love he befriend thee.” This is a sacred invitation, which is both urgent, and holy. What is God doing now? What might God do through us if we befriend the world with the same fierce, inclusive love that Jesus shown to us?

We are at a crossroad moment. The landscape of the world has changed. We had better ponder anew how we will be the church in this time.

Studies show the attitudes of adults have shifted. Millennials and Gen Z folk are open to spirituality that hasn't been seen in decades. This provides a unique opportunity for us as the Church if we can focus on loving God and loving our neighbor.

We have heard of the “nones” and the “dones” and we had a reality check, recognizing the Church hasn't always looked like Jesus. But many of these folk are open to exploring spirituality and are open to conversation. Pondering anew means we need to remember that God is still acting, and God is still befriending. And to ponder anew, we need to not presume that what was will always be.

The landscape has shifted drastically. We all feel this in our bones. Practicing Christians have dropped from 45% of the U.S. population in 2,000, to 20% in 2023. Weekly attendance is down. Denominational loyalty is fading. If things do not change, some are predicting the end of the mainline church by 2040.

But spirituality is NOT in decline. According to Barna, 188 million U.S. adults say they are spiritually open. That is one in every three adults looking for meaning, peace, purpose, and belonging. And this is exactly what the Church offers. The landscape has not gone barren; just wild. We need to learn to cultivate it differently. The good news is there is such openness. And this is particularly true about Gen Z, who are those in their 20s.

This is not a crisis. It is an invitation.

Our challenge is that we as the Church are seen as lacking. People do not ask about the ELCA within the whole; they judge on what they see of all Christians. Five impressions people have about the Church include:

1. Irrelevance, hypocrisy, and moral failure – we do not look a lot like Jesus.
2. God is missing in the Church – people are striving to find God in their own way.
3. Legitimate doubt is prohibited – for too long the Church has said it must be right, it must be known, and here are the answers, so people do not feel they can have honest conversations.
4. They're not learning about God. People cannot understand what the pastor is saying, or what the children are learning.
5. They're not finding community.

People leave because they find judgment and hypocrisy. They love Jesus; they struggle with who they see as his followers.

The research names the Church's silence on Christian Nationalism specifically. Our lack of speaking out on the rise of Christian Nationalism and stating that this is not Jesus, is something these people are looking for.

Can we become a Church that reflects Jesus more authentically?

We are not called to defend institutional survival; we are called to ponder anew and respond to this moment with humility, flexibility, and courage.

The "spirituality open" are not strange to us. They are our neighbors and our family. And they want to talk about faith. Of those who are non-Christian, 46% are open, and hold a positive view of Jesus, but not of the church. Many just want someone to walk with them without judgment. They want peace, healing, that doubts are welcome, and that hope is possible.

If we want people to meet Jesus, they must encounter him through us; through our love, our humility, our listening, and our truth-telling.

Four shifts that might help us ponder anew and meet these spiritually open people in this moment:

1. Listening is the new evangelism – we need to get off "transmit" and start receiving the stories and needs of our neighbors without judgement.
2. Peace is the new apologetic – this is the reason we exist.
3. Curiosity is a spiritual practice – people are not looking for certainty.
4. Jesus is still the answer – so let's show them the Jesus who heals, liberates, and loves without condition.

What next steps might we take?

1. Embrace empathy and spiritual back-stories.
2. Create spaces for dialogue, and not just worship service.
3. Offer healing ministries.
4. Train people to listen with curiosity – teach adults and confirmation students to ask better questions and then listen deeply.
5. Invite people to take just one step closer to Jesus and then trust the Spirit to do what the Spirit does.

This is a holy moment for the Church. Not a time to retreat in fear, but a time to move forward in hope. The hymn says, "Ponder anew what they Almighty can do, if with his love he befriend you." How can you befriend those around you? Can we be a church that welcomes the wounded, embraces the seeker, and reflects the love of Jesus? The harvest is still plentiful. Jesus is still beautiful. And the Spirit is still blowing in this place.

## **PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

Deacon Tammy Devine was invited forward to once again lead the Assembly through an intentional prayer practice prior to recessing for the evening.

*The Assembly stood in recess until Saturday morning.*

#### **FOURTH SESSION – Saturday morning, May 31<sup>st</sup>**

The Assembly gathered for worship at 9:00 a.m., with Bishop Peman preaching and the Rev. Dr. Moses Suah-Dennis, co-Director for Evangelical Mission, presiding.

Thank you to the Synod Worship Team: the Rev. Meagan Esterby, Chairperson, Ms. Carolyn Jackson, the Rev. Joey Klinger, the Rev. Kayla Sadowy, the Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott, Deacon Tom Snyder, the Rev. Kevin Tracey, and those who participated in the worship experience: Musicians: Band Leader & Pianist: Yosmar Campanile, Percussion: Mark Campanile, Bass: Michael Donnelly, Guitar: Scott Campanile, Vocalist: Laura O’Kane from *St. Timothy’s Aston* Vocalist: Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, *Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod*

Assistant Minister: Vice President Tracey Beasley, Gospel-bearer: Deacon Dawn Stewart, Lectors: Bennaiah Bennie, Sadie Hanish, Crucifer: Damar Wilson,

Acolytes, Banner-bearer, Communion Assistants, and Ushers: *SEPA Candidates for Ministry*

Musicians: SEPA Choir (34+ members!) Choir Directors: Ms. Carolyn Jackson and Deacon Tom Snyder, Organist: Emily Brands, Pianist: Rev. Diane Gilbert, Percussion: Ricardo Tucker.

Special thanks to Andrea Baxter, director for Worship and Music at our host church, Trinity, Lansdale.

#### **REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT, MS. TRACEY A. BEASLEY**

Bishop Penman called forward Vice President Beasley, thanking her for her twelve years of service as our Synod’s Vice President, her years of service prior to that as a member of the Synod Council, her work at the Churchwide level, and the countless other ways she has been a faithful servant of Jesus and the Lutheran Church for her whole life. Bishop Penman noted that Vice President Beasley’s term comes to an end with this Assembly. Bishop Penman then invited Ms. Beasley to offer her final report to the Assembly.

Vice President Beasley began:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Turn to your neighbor and say, “This is the Day the Lord has Made!”

Vice President Beasley said that she always begins her address with thanks and noted the majority of the people she thanks are volunteers. Vice President is a volunteer position; Synod Council is a volunteer position.

Thank you to all for whom this is your first Synod Assembly.

She then expressed her thanks to all the officers, current members of the Synod Council, previous members of the Synod Council we have served with her over the past twelve years.

Thank you to the Synod Staff, and in particular, thank you to Ms. Yvonne Curtis, for serving alongside her and being such a source of support and strength.

New Synod Council, your first meeting is your orientation next Tuesday, and your first regular meeting will be June 26<sup>th</sup>. This will be Vice President Beasley's last meeting, as Vice President-elect Lafferty will begin her term on July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Ms. Beasley shared that it has been an honor to serve for these 12 years in this role. She has served for 4,380+ days, 624 weeks, 60+ council meetings, and 84+ Executive Committee meetings. She served with four bishops: Bishop Roy Almquist, Bishop Claire Burkat, Bishop Patricia Davenport, and now with Bishop Bryan Penman. V.P. Beasley is grateful for what each has brought to Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, and what they taught her as she became the leader she is. There have been good times and bad times, but she has no regrets.

She has also served with two secretaries: the Rev. Raymond Miller and the Rev. Karl Richard, and two treasurers: Mr. Dick Reimet, and Ms. Janet Huber Neff.

Vice President Beasley said that she had intended to end her service as Vice President four years ago, but Bishop Davenport asked, "Why would you do that? You are a gift!" She then prayed on this, seeking out scripture. It came to her mind that in scripture, 12 is a number that stands for perfection, completion, and divine order. She felt God was telling her, "Not eight years, but twelve years. This is my divine order for you." When we pray, we may not always like or appreciate the answer that God gives us. But, when you are in the Kingdom Business, you do what God calls you to do, and so she remained for a third and final term.

One of Vice President's proudest moments in leadership has come in her work on the board of Thrivent, and now as its Chair. Over the last five years she has given a total of \$50,000 for kingdom work. This money has gone throughout our Synod to our churches and to our social ministry organizations. "I love giving away money for kingdom building! And I thank God for letting me sit at the right table at the right time!" She has eight Action Team cards with her, each worth \$250. If you want one, come talk to her today, or email her, because each of you can get a card!

Over the past twelve years Vice President has worshiped in our congregations, sat in our council meetings, been at anniversary celebrations and pastor's birthday celebrations, dinner churches, bingo days, bingo nights, and so many other events. She then played a video of many of the events she has been part of in her twelve years, underscored by the song "The Goodness of God," by CeCe Winans to share how grateful she is to be a part of SEPA Synod.

Vice President Beasley concluded her remarks with some words for Vice President-elect Cheryl-Ann Lafferty. People say you have big shoes to fill. You do not have any shoes to fill, because you have your own feet and you have your own shoes, and all you have to do, is like the song says, "You just put one foot in front of the other, and lead with love," and you will make God proud, and lead SEPA Synod.

“Until God calls me home to glory, I will continue to be a soldier in the army of the Lord. God bless you.”

The Assembly expressed their deep appreciation to Vice President Beasley with extended applause.

## **SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS**

Bishop Penman called on the Rev. Raymond Miller, to bring forth the next round of balloting.

Pr. Miller called for balloting on **TICKET 3: Synod Council, Delaware Conference Representative, Lay Woman.** (1 to be elected.)

Pr. Miller asked voting members to please circle on your ballot either:

Ms. Linda Fortwanger, St. John, Folcroft, or

Dr. Sherrell Mickens, Christ, Upper Darby.

While ballots were being distributed, Pr. Miller expressed his thanks to all who allowed their names to go in nomination but were not elected. We are grateful for your willingness to serve, and grateful you were willing to be a part of the election process.

The ballots were collected. The results will be shared when tabulated.

### **Recognition of Anniversaries of Rostered Ministers**

Those rostered ministers who are celebrating their 40<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> anniversaries were recognized. Those who were present at the Assembly were called forward for a photograph to mark this occasion.

#### **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrants**

The Rev. Wayne Matthias-Long

The Rev. Dyan M. Lawlor

The Rev. Steven G. Jones

The Rev. Kristina V. Ahlman

Deacon Karen Matthias-Long

Deacon Barbara Piston

#### **25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrants**

The Rev. Karen L. Weber

The Rev. Kay B. Braun

The Rev. Rebecca L. Schanely

#### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrants**

Those celebrating 50 years of ordination were also recognized and given a moment to address the Assembly. Not able to be present were the Rev. Paul Bartlett, and the Rev. Daryl Nelson. Present were:

**The Rev. John Hougen**

“What an impossible task. We are given 5 minutes of fame to witness to God’s grace. 50 years ago, I was afraid if I became a pastor, would I lose myself?”

But he found that ministry did not destroy him; it gave him further clarity of who he is, what he stands for, and where his limitations are. He is grateful for and proud of his international work with the North Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, and the founding of SEKUCO (Sebastian Kolowa University College). He is also grateful for his interfaith work, organizing interfaith teams to address the root causes of violence.

When asked what his faith is, he answers, “Lutheran. Lutheran Plus.”

**The Rev. Dr. Charles Leonard**

“I am giving thanks to Almighty God for this day. Greetings to you, and I ask you to give thanks to Almighty God for 5 decades of service.”

Dr. Leonard referenced John 10 where the One the Father has sanctified and sent into the world said, “if you cannot believe what I say, trust me because of my works.” Dr. Leonard wants this to be true for himself as well. May his works say who he is, and what he is about.

God has blessed him in his work in the parish, in mentoring 10 interns in the congregation, and has blessed him to be a part of the journey of many rostered ministers of this synod through his work at the seminary.

He has worked under seven bishops. He has not agreed with them all the time, but he respects them and prays for them. He asks his congregation to pray for and support our bishop. Do not withhold your financial support from the Synod because you want to hurt the bishop; this does not hurt the bishop; it hurts the whole Church.

Dr. Leonard was blessed to serve in the chaplaincy in the military. He attended four Churchwide Assemblies; served four times, two terms each, on Synod Council, and has served in many Churchwide positions and task forces. But the greatest work is working in the parish – shepherding and walking with the people in the pew and caring for the children to ground them in the faith. Working with children, youth, and seniors is what this ministry is about.

“God has been extraordinarily good to me, and I am deeply GRATEFUL, not just thankful, but Grateful to God for the blessings he has given me.”

**The Rev. Robert Mitman**

“I am just truly a humble parish pastor. My colleagues are scholars and worldwide travelers. I could only dream of the things these folks have done.”

When reflecting on 50 years of ministry, Pastor Mitman quoted Dickens, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

Best – being allowed to be with the people in the worst of times – you aren’t related, but they let you in because they need you.

Worst –the expectations “I want, but you want,” which leads to conflict.

Best – blessed to be at the hospital bed

Worst – being out at all hours at the exclusion of family. Pr. Mitman thought working hard was what you needed to do, but there was a cost.

Best – through word and song and teaching, to teach the name of Jesus. He is our LORD. Jesus is why we are in this business. His love describes what God is like. In the midst of the current shenanigans, what would Jesus say?

Worst – Sunday soccer. And then everything else under the sun.

Pr. Mitman reminded those still active in ministry, “You don’t have to like those who make your life miserable, but you are called to love them.” Fifty years ago, he did not know what ministry would be. God says “Listen. Don’t get all herky-jerky about this. Just listen, and I will tell you where to go.” Serve the Lord with gladness, have a good time if you can, greet people with a smile – it makes them wonder what you are thinking.

“It may be the best of times for you now, or the worst of times, but God calls us to allow Him to pilot us through it all.”

He is grateful for fifty years and prays that we may also be blessed to serve for 50 years and more.

### **REPORT OF BALLOTING FOR TICKET 3**

Bishop Penman read the results for Ticket 3, given to him by Pr. Miller.

Ticket 3: Synod Council, Delaware Conference Representative, Lay Woman  
(One to be elected)

Total Votes Cast: 302

Total Legal Votes Cast: 302

Total Illegal Votes Cast: 0

Number of Votes Needed for Election (Majority of Total Legal Votes Cast): 152

Dr. Sherrell Mickens, 202

Ms. Lisa Fortwangler, 98

Bishop declared Dr. Mickens **ELECTED**.

### **MISSION SPOTLIGHT**

Another ministry of our Synod was highlighted at this time:

- + The Rev. Mycah McNett, St. Luke Devon, and Candidate for ordination to Word and Service, Vicar Grace Markas, described the Young Adult Ministry venture “Gather

Philadelphia.” This ministry is an opportunity for young adults to gather monthly for fellowship and service. Anyone 18 to 35, Lutheran or not, “churchy” or not, who is interested in making connections and exploring faith is welcome.

### **PONDER ANEW SPIRITUAL PRACTICES**

Deacon Tammy Devine was invited forward to once again lead the Assembly through another spiritual practice prior to recessing lunch and workshops.

*The Assembly stood in recess until 2:15 p.m.*

### **FIFTH SESSION – Saturday afternoon, May 31<sup>st</sup>**

Bishop Penman called the Assembly back to order.

### **MISSION SPOTLIGHTS**

- + The Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook, Assistant to the Bishop and Program Director of “Faith Alive” presented a description of this ministry, the second of our Lilly grant projects. This program is about intentionally and creatively making space for children in worship. We need to welcome children in worship as they are, not as they cannot be. Worship is a collective movement, a collective prayer, among us all. This initiative will look different in each context, but it is about involving all in worship, 3-year-olds, 8-year-olds, teens, and all. What does each person (human) need in order to worship as they are?
- + The Rev. Scott Staub of New Hanover, Gilbertsville, presented how this congregation is finding innovative ways to use space, using their space to meet community needs, and gain resources for ministry at the same time.
- + The Rev. Karen Sease, Assistant to the Bishop, and members of the Transitional Ministry Development Team, described how they are re-thinking the way we approach the process for congregations in pastoral transition. Many statistics were shared, noting that the way we have done transition will not work for the situations we face today. The Team is developing a three-track approach, from which congregations can choose what seems best for them. The tracks are:
  - Transformation, where congregations re-imagine their ministry in its current context,
  - Partnership, where congregations consider how they might work with or combine with another congregation, and
  - Resurrection, where a congregation may determine that their current ministry needs to end in order for new ministry to emerge.

### **INTRODUCTION OF CANDIDATES FOR ROSTERED MINISTRY**

Ms. Lisa Pressley and the Rev. Erika Wesch, Assistant to the Bishop for Formation, presented those candidates for ordination who are assigned to the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

Candidates from our Synod who have been approved for ordination since the 2024 Assembly:

- + Ian Clememnts, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and called to Centennial, Kimberton
- + Sister Paula Estornell, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Service
- + Brendan Galvin, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and called to Gloria Dei, Huntingdon Valley.

Candidates from other synods assigned to SEPA Synod for first call include:

- + Tori Callahan Giger, from the Upper Susquehanna Synod, approved for ordination to Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and called to St. Andrew, Perkasio

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**

Bishop Penman called upon Pr. Jenn Casey, chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel, to present a resolution of thanks.

#### **Resolution of Thanks**

WHEREAS it is right at all times and in all places to give thanks for God's grace and mercy, and the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit that bless the people of God to do God's work with our hands;

**BE IT RESOLVED THAT** at the end of this thirty-seventh meeting of the Assembly, we offer our appreciation and thankful applause;

To our Bishop Bryan Penman for leading us to Ponder Anew what the Almighty can do;

To outgoing Vice President Tracey A. Beasley, for her 12 years of faithful leadership as the chief lay officer of the Synod, chair of the Synod Council, and SEPA representative at numerous ELCA meetings and events. We give thanks for your devotion to God and your encouragement that we are #SEPAstrong;

To our Vice President-elect, Ms. Cheryl Lafferty, and for a new era of lay leadership that you bring to our synod. We give thanks, in advance, for all that God will do through your leadership;

To our Synod Council for their support and guidance for our synod;

To our ELCA representative Mr. Iain Chester for attending and representing the larger church holding our synod in prayer during this assembly;

To Deacon Tammy Devine for keeping us grounded in prayer and spiritual practices;

To our worship leaders for their proclamation of the gospel and to the Reverend Meagan Esterby and members of SEPA's Worship Team for leading our prayers and praise;

To Ms. Emily Valentine and members of the Nominating Committee, and to Reverend Ray Miller and members of the Elections Committee, for their tremendous work; and to all who allowed their names to come forward for discernment and election;

To the officers, staff, and volunteers of the SEPA Synod, especially Ms. Yvonne Curtis, Ms. Cynta Outterbridge, Reverend Paula Lebo and the tech team who worked tirelessly to make this 2025 Assembly a success.

To Ms. Carrie Schwab, Assembly Coordinator, and her exceptional work aligning all of the details of this Assembly;

To Trinity Lutheran Church for their hospitality, particularly Reverend Fritz Fowler, Rev. Jonathan Steiner, Director of Operations Miwa Sperring, Digital Worship Coordinator Linda Graeff, Director of Music and Worship Andrea Baxter, Director of Building and Grounds Moises Santiago, Custodians Yasin Kazimi and Guillermo Martinez, and to the people of Trinity and their council who keep saying yes to hosting synod events and their generosity in sharing these lovely facilities;

To SEPA synod’s Women of the ELCA for their sponsorship towards Friday’s snack break and hosting our ingathering for Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Disaster Response;

To all of the other the representatives of all organizations and agencies of the Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Synod who are also present here at this Assembly;

To all participants from the SEPA Synod who offered their energy, skills and time to prepare for, plan, arrange and participate in this Assembly.

And permit me to extend a personal word of thanks to the Reference and Counsel Team members Reverend Lauren Bruno and Mr. Paul Keener. To the committee’s representative from the Bishop’s Office, Reverend Karen Sease for her wisdom and unfailing support and to our consultants for their guidance: Reverend Karl Richard, Secretary of the SEPA Synod and Reverend Joey Klinger, Assembly Parliamentarian.

Bishop Penman asked the Assembly to adopt the Resolution by applause.

**FINAL REPORT OF THE REGISTRAR**

Ms. Cynta Outterbridge was called forward to give the final Report of the Registrar, Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

Total number of ministers of word and sacrament under call	131
Total number of retired ministers of word and sacrament voting	29
Total number of ministers of word and service under call	4
Total number of retired ministers of word and service voting	4
Total number of lay voting members certified*,	
including Council members and Youth/Young Adult	267
<b>TOTAL VOTING MEMBERSHIP</b>	<b>435</b>

\*Certified = Any voting member for whom a signed and duly recorded registration form has been received by the Assembly Registrar by the time this report is compiled.

Total number of persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in the previous total	73
Percent this total is of total voting membership	16.6 %
Number of lay woman voting members	134
Number of lay man voting members	74
Number of Non-Binary voting members	0

Number of Lay Synod Council Members	6
Number of Youth/Young Adult	9

**ACTUALLY IN ATTENDANCE**

Number of ministers of word and sacrament under call registered*	118
Number of retired ministers of word and sacrament registered*	29
Number of ministers of word and service under call registered*	4
Number of retired ministers of word and service registered	4
Number of lay voting members registered*, including Lay Council members and Youth/Young Adult	212
<b>TOTAL REGISTERED* VOTING MEMBERSHIP</b>	<b>367</b>

\*Registered = Any voting member present and accounted for by the Assembly Registrar as being in actual attendance at the Assembly at the time of this report.

Total number of persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in previous total	72
Percent this total is of total registered voting membership	19.6%
Total number of visitors and guests registered	77

**CLOSING OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY**

Bishop Penman recognized the outgoing members of the Synod Council and installed the newly elected members.

He and Vice President Beasley then led the Order for Closing of the Synod Assembly.

The thirty-seventh annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adjourned at 4:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
The Reverend Karl M. Richard, Secretary  
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA