

SECTION D – REPORTS OF SYNOD STAFF AND MINISTRY TEAMS

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Ministry Teams:

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ASSISTANT FOR COMMUNICATIONS

Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation

Grace to you and peace.

A few weeks ago, another person on the staff said, “You keep showing up!” Of course, it was said in jest. And we had a good chuckle. It’s true. I keep showing up and after a full year in this position, I continue to be grateful for our Synod staff, for our congregations, pastors, deacons, lay worship leaders and all those who contribute to our life together as we love God and love neighbor.

In this past year, we have undertaken some larger projects—not the least of which was a completely new website and a Synod logo refresh. Our refreshed logo includes some updated colors and more sleek, modern font. The new website is and will be an ongoing project. We recently “went live” with the new website and have been slowly adding and updating information and re-organizing some of the resources to make a more intuitive experience for those who visit the website. And, many of you will be happy to know that our new URL is www.sepa.org!

As I said, the new website is going to always be a work in progress. We are working on setting up some guidelines for the information that will appear on the website and striving to make more resources available for congregations, leaders and others.

We will continue to use Ministry Link as our e-mail ministry from the Office of the Bishop. That brings me to another project: revamping our Ministry Link e-mail. At the start of this year, we unveiled a new look—which is play off our newly refreshed Synod logo—and a slightly different way of organizing the information we receive for publication. Thank you for all the positive feedback. It's always a bit anxiety producing when you introduce a change. I have appreciated the positive ideas and constructive criticism.

Speaking of constructive criticism...our third project is a communication audit that is being headed up by LEAD Ministry and Deacon Peggy Hahn. Some of you are part of that effort as we seek to find ways to communicate with you that are effective and efficient. I have appreciated the ways in which this audit has strengthened our inter-office communication, which will lead to better communication outward.

Part of my work includes working with both of our Lilly grant initiatives: Love Revolution and Faith Alive. I am grateful for the work we do together on those teams and look forward to welcoming a new cohort in Love Revolution and laying out the blueprint for Faith Alive.

In the coming year, I look forward to a more complete new website, some expanded storytelling in Ministry Link and finding other ways to connect with you through this work.

Peace be yours.

Respectfully,
The Rev. Paula Lebo
Assistant to the Bishop for Mission Interpretation

ASSISTANT FOR CONGREGATIONS

“The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.” – ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations C4.01

Thank you, SEPA congregations, for being places that share the Good News in your community. I am grateful for the ways you continue to show up blessed to be a blessing. You make a difference through worship, pastoral care, teaching, service, and advocacy. Congregations are the primary way that many encounter faith and learn about God.

I have now had the privilege of serving as Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations for over a year. My title changed shortly before the 2025 assembly to reflect changes in my portfolio designed to better support the 140 faith communities in our synod. My daily activities vary depending on the assistance that is being requested. Below are reports about some of my ongoing activities.

Committee of Deans

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

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

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

While the Committee of Deans continue monthly conference reports and call process updates, we have also started developing additional procedures for when congregational conflict is reported. Working with the Rev. Dr. Jennifer Phelps, who is appointed as the Bishop’s Advisor for Systems, we are developing growth covenants that build on the strengths of the rostered minister and congregation to address the current challenges. Our hope is that small interventions earlier in a potential conflict will reduce the number of congregations that find themselves in intractable fights and allow congregational leadership to refocus attention on mission.

The Committee of Deans roster is as follows:

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

Each dean is elected to serve a three-year term and may serve no more than two consecutive terms. Thanks to Pastor Nathan Krause (Lower Bucks) and Pastor Matthew Finney (Upper Montgomery) who have concluded their service as deans since the 2025 Synod Assembly.

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

Fundraising / Grant Writing

“Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold; take my intellect and use ev'ry pow'r as thou shalt choose.” From Take My Life, That I May Be ELW 583 v.2

Our synod depends on a broad base of generosity, combining congregational mission support with donations from individuals who believe in the work we do together to build up Christ's church. The following funds can receive year-round donations.

- Our annual November **All Saints appeal** gives thanks for our ministry together, celebrates what the Holy Spirit is doing in our synod, and invites financial support and prayers for what's next. Gifts to the All Saints Appeal help our synod nurture the next generation of leaders, strengthen vibrant and vital faith formation in our congregations, and support mission development across our metro area. This appeal is one of the funding streams for the SEPA Synod regular budget, usually netting \$40,000-\$45,000.
- We made a special appeal for our new **Hunger Fund** after we gave out the remainder of an estate gift solely dedicated to feeding ministries. Food insecurity in our area rose drastically due to the delay and reduction of SNAP benefits during the November 2025 federal government shutdown. Thanks to your generosity and additional funds authorized by our Fund for Mission trustees, 26 congregations received \$1,000 grants to meet food insecurity needs in their community. These feeding ministries reported increasing numbers of people requesting food assistance and having less food to be able to give them. While churches cannot take on all of the assistance that government SNAP benefits would normally provide, we also trust in a God who can make 2 fish and 5 loaves go a lot farther than anyone anticipated. We mailed these checks knowing that they represent prayers and gratitude from our whole synod for all that congregations are doing to follow Jesus and feed those who are hungry.
- The **Bishop's Fund** assists pastors, deacons and their families during times of distress, financial need, or medical crisis. Customarily, offerings from ordinations, installations, and other services presided over by the bishop are made to this fund.
- Contributions to the **SEPA Youth Scholarship Fund** help cover expenses for youth who would otherwise not be able to participate in synod youth ministry events due to financial burden.

Join others in giving to these funds at <https://ministrylink.org/donate/> or by contacting Senior Accountant Mr. Martin Schwab at mschwab@sepa.org or 267-323-3754.

In order to meet congregational demand for resources and training, we have also been writing grants to further expand our funding streams. Our Love Revolution and Faith Alive programs are the results of previous grants. New grant proposals since the 2025 assembly include:

- SEPA was awarded \$20,000 in January 2026 from Wartburg Seminary's **The CaSTLE Project** (Country and Small Town Lived Ecclesiology), supporting rural and small town ministries. As we imagine congregations excited and equipped to share ministry with Synod Authorized Ministers, our proposal serves to enrich SAM and lay leader training by supporting the congregations they will be called to serve. SAM leadership invites not just the SAM to live into their baptismal vocation but the whole congregation as all the baptized live into the ministries they once reserved for a pastor. While SAMs participate in training and formation programs that already exist at ELCA seminaries, SEPA's program will empower congregations to live out the ministry they were called to in baptism, developing help these new SAM leaders and their congregations grow together in faithful, shared ministry.
- On May 18, 2026, SEPA will submit a \$2.5 million dollar proposal to the Lilly Endowment for their **Exploring Christian Practices initiative**. Our proposal will create space for young adults to discern God's presence in their lives and cultivate meaning, purpose, and connection.

We are not raising money for the sake of building up bigger bank accounts, but in order that our congregations and synod have the resources we need for the mission we are called to.

Generosity Team

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” – Matthew 6:21

SEPA's generosity team functions primarily as a stewardship education resource for congregations and leaders. We provide synod-wide trainings like the Generosity Extravaganza hosted January 24, 2026 at Trinity, Lansdale. And we support leaders attending other stewardship trainings like the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising offered by the Lake Institute and Stewardship Kaleidoscope. I serve as the staff person supporting this team chaired by Pastor Mark Singh-Hueter. A more detailed report of our work together can be found elsewhere in the bulletin of reports.

Transitional Ministry Development Team

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

Since last year, TMDT has continued working on the Ponder Anew resources we proposed at the 2025 assembly. This process was designed to support congregations through the following culture shifts: (1) Pastors are transitioning faster than in previous eras of ministry. The average pastorate in our synod is currently about 5 years. (2) Additionally, the affordability and availability of clergy is encouraging many congregations to rethink their models of ministry. (3)

And the inertia of institutional support is no longer enough to propel mission forward in many of our congregations. Our process is designed to give each congregation agency as they move forward on one of three paths:

1. Choose Transformation – This process places an intentional focus on congregational vitality. Congregations engaging in this path will integrate = our synod’s vitality programming, strengthening their connection to God, one another, and their community. With renewed clarity of purpose, they become more attractive ministry sites for future pastoral candidates.
2. Choose Partnership – Taking the partnership path, congregations will explore the spectrum of what’s possible when we choose to help congregations work together. Exploring alternative leadership arrangements and networking with other Lutheran and Full Communion partners, we will attempt to create configurations of ministry that make multi-site work for our pastoral leaders and congregations. While this approach may feel innovative, partnership has been the norm for much of Christian history including our American Lutheran history of circuit riding.
3. Choose Resurrection – For the congregations who choose resurrection, this path means acknowledging that their current ministry is drawing to a close. But we are Easter people. Just as Good Friday is not the end of the story, resurrection brings new beginnings. We will celebrate the vital ministry that has been and dream about where God is leading next. Congregations on this path will explore how God is calling them to live in a new way—beyond their building, in an emerging community, or through the birth of a brand-new ministry. No congregation will be alone as they discern the path of resurrection.

Even though resource development has been slower than we’d hoped, some interim leaders have already started using these concepts and have been helpful in testing initial documents.

TMDT typically meets every other month as a whole team, by Zoom to accommodate people from across the synod. Members of TMDT include a mix of pastors and laypeople, including some who have interim ministry training, some who are Bridge pastors or Interim Consultants and some who have experience with a recent rostered minister transition. Many thanks to *Pastor Sandra Brown, Dale Hebranson, Rich Hollenbach, Pastor Tim Johansen, Cari Kramer, *Teri Lanan, Pastor Dayle Malloy, *Karl McClellan, *Pastor Janet Peterman, Pastor Maeve Schurz, Pastor Karen Sease, Pastor Amy Smith, and Pastor Kevin Tracey. We are also grateful to the following members that have concluded their service with TMDT – *Pastor Ghislaine Cotnoir and *Pastor Wayne Shelor – and are now serving in other ways. (An asterisk* denotes that a team member has completed interim training.)

Preaching, Worship Leadership, and Congregational Consulting

Throughout the year, I am invited to visit with congregations and learn more about your ministries. Some invite me for regular pulpit supply or preaching as part of a sermon series. Some want to hear updates on how their mission support is used for ministry in Southeastern Pennsylvania and across the ELCA. Others have invited me for a topic that meets their unique

needs. Please reach out at ksease@sepa.org to schedule an opportunity for me to be with your congregation.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Karen M. Sease
Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations

ASSISTANT FOR FORMATION

Candidacy Committee Report to the 2026 SEPA Synod Assembly

*Think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.
Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. - 1 Corinthians 4:1-2*

The Candidacy process for rostered ministry within the ELCA honors and celebrates the diversity of gifts, experiences, and skills that people bring to ministry. The goal of the process is to ensure that candidates are equipped to serve in a variety of contexts for a church that is flexible, compassionate, and responsive to the ever-evolving needs of God's people. Candidacy aims to foster leaders for a vibrant church that bears witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.

Eighteen people are in communication with SEPA's synod office discerning the possibility of Candidacy or are active candidates in the process. We celebrate with those who were approved (the final step of the Candidacy process) since the last assembly, Sarajeon Grainson and Samantha Menapace, both candidates for Minister of Word and Sacrament!

It's an honor to work with the diverse team of people that serve on SEPA Synod's Candidacy Committee, comprised of rostered ministers and lay people of various ages, genders, races, and sexualities. We are grateful for their time, dedication, and commitment to our candidates and the Church. Please thank the following leaders:

- SEPA's Candidacy Committee: The Rev. Dr. Sarah Anderson-Rajarigam, The Rev. Jenn Casey, Minister Bobbie Hoffman, The Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood, The Rev. Joey Klinger, The Rev. Dr. Charles Leonard (ULS representative), Ms. Lisa Pressley, The Rev. Becky Resch (the ELCA's Candidacy and Leadership Manager for Regions 7 & 8), and Ms. Nancy Stevens.

- Leaders who have concluded their ministry with the Candidacy Committee since last year’s synod assembly: Mr. Jonathan Bagby, Ms. Sara Calderon, and The Rev. Thomas Rusert.
- Heartfelt thanks to Bishop Bryan Penman for his participation and support for the Candidacy Committee’s work and his care for our candidates.

Included in the list of important partners in the work of Candidacy are all SEPA congregations, rostered ministers, and lay people. Please prayerfully consider people with gifts and skills for ministry within your community and encourage them to nurture their development as leaders of the church. Please also add candidates and the Candidacy Committee to your prayers of intercession throughout the church year.

We’re excited to report that SEPA Synod was selected as one of ten synods to participate in the launch of a reimagined Candidacy process. In February 2026, Bishop Penman and Pastor Erika Wesch attended the ELCA’s training for the reimagined process at the churchwide office in Chicago. In early April, the ELCA decided to pause the launch of the process for about one year to finalize some rubrics and other aspects. Stay tuned for an update at next year’s assembly!

Respectfully submitted,

Ms. Lisa Pressley
Candidacy Committee Chair

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

Directors of Evangelical Mission

SEPA Synod mission-oriented mind-set and American Lutheranism Patriarch Pastor Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg assertion that *...the church must be planted (Ecclesia Plantanda) in every age* were lifted in my 2025 DEM report as anchoring road-markers in my 25-years journey in SEPA Synod. The ELCA Commission on a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) vision of making God’s love real through participating in the process of creating “*...a world experiencing the difference God grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation*” has been on my mind since I left the 2025 ELCA Church-wide Assembly that elected the Rev. Yehiel Curry as presiding bishop. This vision of making God’s love real through available and envisioned means mission is one that we must own through practice. We are a church body at the crossed roads of transformation from what was to becoming a church that remains faithful to our identity, vision, missional purposes.

A Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) in the ELCA has (among other synodical and churchwide responsibilities) the task of identifying, equipping, resourcing, accompanying, and

managing mission leaders. This happens through the process of discerning both existing and emerging opportunities, transforming existing ministries and starting new ones. SEPA Synod is blessed to have Pastor Linda Manson and I sharing the portfolio DEM. Pastor Manson primarily relates and work with our Strategic Congregations-SCs (Grace, Mediator, St. Michael, and Trinity) and I am responsible for Synod Authorized Worshipping Community-SAWCS (Kairos Communities, the Mindfulness Plus Church, The Welcome Church, The Well, and newly organized Love Boutique/Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry/SAOM) and emerging ministries—like new explorations. SCs, SAWCs, CAOMs/SAOMs are ministries that SEPA Synod and the ELCA partner in resourcing. The partnership between these congregations/ministries and SEPA Synod/ELCA involves different levels of accountability, including, but not limited to annual reviews, covenants of support, and periodic site reviews.

The process of conducting Ministry Reviews of all SEPA Strategic Congregations and SAWCS began in 2025 and is expected to be completed by this summer. These reviews are utilized by ELCA Christian Communities and Leadership (CCL) Unit to assess the vitality of these ministries and to make determination for the continuation or discontinuation of funding. Our equipping and resourcing of leaders of SEPA Strategic Congregations and SAWCs in 2025 also included attending the ELCA-CCL DEMs Spring/March and Fall/October Gatherings, the Fall/November Mission Leadership Training Conference in Chicago, and Region 7 DEMs and Missional Leaders Retreat. Weekly/monthly check-ins and other consulting continue to be valuable part of our shared ministry and leadership responsibilities.

The shared ministry and leadership aspect of the DEM responsibility extends to the CCL DEMs community and ecumenical partnerships as well. Pastor Manson and I serve on different working committees in the CCL DEMs Community.

The Arabic Speaking and other Middle Eastern People ministry exploration began in 2025 was made possible through a partnership between SEPA, the CCL-ELCA, and the Philadelphia Presbytery/PCUSA. CCL-ELCA evangelism grants supported evangelism projects in SEPA in 2025.

I referenced the ELCA CRLC envisioned commitment of God’s love made real through a missional commitment of creating “...***a world experiencing the difference God grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation***”. Bishop Curry lifted the ELCA’s strategic commitment to strong connections across the different expressions of the ELCA as one means of living into this reality. He emphasized the reality that the ELCA already has what it takes to strengthen these connections. He made these remarks during his greetings remarks at the CCL DEMs Gathering held March 9-12, 2026, at the Lutheran Center, Chicago, IL.

The mission oriented mind-set and accompanying history of leadership (past and present) embodying this commitment makes SEPA a resourcing synod for other synods in the ELCA. I accepted this call of serving as Co-DEM in 2022 aware of responsibilities associated with this role given the opportunity I had to serve under the supervision of Bishop Claire Burkat and Bishop Patricia Davenport as my DEMs and our Bishops. Bishop Penman, with whom I briefly served as Co-DEM, inherited this legacy and is strengthening and expanding SEPA missional

commitment of being Lutheran Together, Loving Jesus, and serving neighbors. The Love Revolution and Faith Alive initiatives are examples of SEPA's missional commitment and visionary leadership.

I am humbled by the opportunity and associated responsibilities of connecting and resourcing ministries entrusted to me, pastor Linda Manson, our fellow DEMs in the CCL-ELCA DEMs community, and all the other leaders we serve along with across SEPA, CCL-ELCA, and ecumenical partners. May this season of resurrection and soon coming Day and Season of Pentecost reminds of Jesus'/Holy Spirit's presence with us individually and collectively as we live our faith and serve together now and in the future.

Rev. Dr. Moses S. Dennis, Dmin
Co-DEM and Assistant to the Bishop for New Starts and Emerging Ministries.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11

This scripture continues to be a favorite as it offers me guidance for my life but also give me words to share with the Strategic Ministry Congregations, and all other congregations of this synod.

While I still feel as if I'm finding my way in this call, I remain excited about what God is up to here in the Southeastern PA Synod and I am honored to be a part of this ministry.

Over the past year Pastor Moses Dennis and I have been busy with our ELCA commitments which I will not rename here. In addition to the items mentioned previously, I also serve as Co-Dean of the DEMS of Color, and I am the Leader of the DEM Spiritual Care Team. For SEPA Synod, I also serve as the Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging which includes be the staff person who relates to many SEPA Synod Teams.

I have been very busy meeting with our Redevelopers, Deans, Conferences and many congregations that are actively engaged in the Vitality Process. I have been learning about their ministry contexts and evaluating their impact on the communities they serve.

Meeting with Pastors, Lay Leaders and congregations to discuss what Evangelism and Congregational Vitality looks like in their contexts has been very helpful in revealing some specific ways our messaging needs to change and has led to the creation of some guides for the congregations of our synod. The Holy Conversations Guide has been rolled out and will soon be available on the synod website I hope to offer more learning opportunities during the next year.

If you know of a congregation that needs assistance with Evangelism, Vitality or a congregation that is looking for new ways to be engaged with their community, please reach out to me! I look forward to continuing our work in discernment of where and to what we are being called to as we move into the future as church together with the understanding that we

are ALL made in the Image of God (Imago Dei)! These are exciting (and often trying) times AND God is on the move, and the Holy Spirit is loose. May we continue to be bold enough to listen and follow.

Pastor Linda Manson
Co-Director for Evangelical Mission and
Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

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

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

Rev. Linda Manson

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

Director of Faith Alive



The Faith Alive Initiative is designed to equip and encourage congregations to provide a wide welcome to children in our worship spaces. We do this through Worship Learning Lab events, walking with congregations through creating a welcome statement for children and families, providing micro grants to ministries that are creating spaces in their sanctuaries for children, and exploring together what it means to be a church that lives out Jesus’ call to “let the children come to me and do not stop them”. (Matthew 19:14)

Faith Alive has had a wonderful year! We gathered for our first Worship Learning Lab on January 10 and welcomed over **60 people from over 30 congregations** to a day of learning and idea sharing. Thanks to Lutheran Church of God’s Love in Newtown for hosting us!

Our Program Director, Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook, has been visiting congregations throughout the synod to consult, celebrate, and share Faith Alive with communities of faith who would like to learn more about welcoming children to worship more fully.

In addition to these activities, our Leadership Team has worked hard to create a process for congregations to make changes to their worship that are aimed at welcoming children.

We cannot wait to introduce you to that process in January 2027.

For the rest of the year, we will be offering a bible study for congregations with preschools, coordinating some free webinars to support the existing efforts congregations are making to include children, offering micro-grants to congregations, and planning our next Worship Learning Lab.

Save the Date!

Worship Learning Lab – Saturday, August 15

Brosman Center, United Lutheran Seminary, Philadelphia

Join us as we explore child development, learn about the various styles of children’s sermons, and practice those styles to see what might work best in our contexts and with our skills.

More details about speakers and registration will be coming soon!

Submitted by

The Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook

Program Director, Faith Alive Initiative

Director of Love Revolution



The first, most faithful, response to the discovery that we *all* of us are created in God's image, is to listen attentively to someone else, to someone who is not a part of your particular group. It is to commit to God's call to "go" as much or more than our institutional instinct to invite others to "come" to us.

Grounded in God's grace, the Love Revolution embodies love of God and neighbor by gathering and supporting a learning community composed of congregational leadership teams in a two-year process of understanding our baptismal promises—

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

for the purpose of encouraging relationship-based, community-centered, mission-oriented, dynamic ministry.

The revolution is all about learning to "go" as God sends us to go.

Made possible by a generous Lilly Foundation, Inc. "Thriving Congregations" grant, the Love Revolution accompanies cohort congregations on this journey without charge. Our first cohort of four congregations (Good Shepherd, King of Prussia; St. John's, Ridge Valley; Faith-Immanuel, East Lansdowne; Zion, Spring City) has completed the five learning gatherings. Each congregation is now in the process of planning and budgeting for their own ministry project.

Since the last synod assembly, we held our **Proclaim** retreat and our **Serve** and **Strive** gatherings. Among others things, and in addition to the sense of community that grows when we spend intentional time with one another, we learned about: digital ministry, 21st century evangelism, Dependable Strengths, spiritual autobiography, the value of story, demographics (via Mission Insite), understanding our contexts, SMART goals, accompaniment, adaptive leadership, biblical advocacy, experiments, and project design.

It's incredible what we can learn together!

In addition to that, the Love Revolution hosted SEPA's Fall Learning Day, "Who is our Neighbor?" on October 18, 2025, at St. John's, Mayfair. The Rev. Emily Harkins, lead pastor and founding developer of The Dwelling church in Winston-Salem, NC, served as our keynote speaker and led a workshop on "Serving All People." Ms. Julie Frank, director of community outreach for Liberty Lutheran and Lutheran Congregational Services, led a workshop on "Striving for Justice and Peace." The Rev. Linda Manson, SEPA director of evangelical mission and assistant to the bishop for diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, served as our preacher, while the Interfaith Music Project of Philadelphia provided music for worship.

As our four congregations complete their formal work with the revolution, we are looking forward to our second cohort process. We have room for eight congregations this time around.

I am grateful to have wonderful colleagues leading with me in this revolutionary work and want to thank pastors Kayla Sadowy, Linda Manson, Paula Lebo, and Kevin Tracey—as well as all of those who served on our planning team—for sharing their considerable talents and key insights.

Here is how you can be a part of the revolution:

- Pray for the cohort congregations (first and second wave) and the staff charged with leading this grant.
- Check out the resources on the SEPA website (sepa.org) by clicking the Love Revolution button. Videos and other materials are available.
- Stop by the Love Revolution table during assembly and have a conversation.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Rick Summy
Love Revolution Program Director

Anti-Racism Team

Anti-Racism Team SEPA Synod Annual Report for May 2026 Assembly

“A new commandment I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13: 34-35

“You have been told, O mortal, what is good and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice, and love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

These two Biblical verses are strong motivation for the SEPA Synod Anti-racism Team (ART) and at the heart of what we do in our efforts to dismantle systemic racism in God’s Kingdom.

As volunteer peer educators, ART’s commitment to the work of anti-racism, justice, and equity is long standing. A renewed relationship with former SEPA ART member, The Rev. Linda Manson, now SEPA Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, and one of the Directors for Evangelical Mission for SEPA has been very positive.

This year ART has focused attention on updating our curriculum and exploring new ways and approaches to involving others in the work of dismantling systemic racism, increasing personal awareness and knowledge, and supporting community action against injustice to those who have been, are, and continue to be oppressed by white supremacy. The team has continued its support of the Love Revolution, in part through the efforts of Deacon Kathie Afflerbach, who serves on

the Love Revolution Curriculum Committee and is a member of ART and by attending synod wide presentations.

After Synod Assembly last year, ART worked diligently over the summer months to create a six hour online educational experience for Rostered Leaders, to help them complete their mandatory ELCA (every 2-3 years) anti-racism education/training. Although this was completed, implementation of the presentation was placed on hold as the desire to have regional (7, 8, 9) collaboration and co-operation was explored by synod staff. In the fall, ART offered an educational opportunity for Rostered Leaders, but it was open to all. Unfortunately, this opportunity was cancelled due to low registration. During the month of January, ART offered a four session, online book study, led by various members of the Team, on the book “White Too Long” by Robert P. Jones. Although the participating group was small, the discussions and shared insights were stimulating. Sharing a variety of book titles via the SEPA Synod website “MinistryLink”, ART also encouraged congregations to consider doing a book study during Black History Month (Feb).

Joined by colleagues in Northeast PA and New Jersey Synods, members of ART along with The Rev. Manson and Bishop Penman participated in an online Anti-Racist curriculum entitled “A Long Talk-about the Uncomfortable Truth” created by Kyle Williams. On the premise that it takes at least 21 days to cultivate a new culture, Mr. Williams through two online presentations, various resources, videos and conversation helped us look at Systemic Racism in the US and its impact on society. Participating ART members found parts of the 21-day experience to be very powerful. Aspects of this approach may be used in future ART presentations.

As we look to our immediate future ART will be offering a 3 session video study at the beginning of May, using some short videos from the “Facing Race Series” and a TED talk: Racism Has a Cost For Everyone. The Team facilitates a Facebook group (SEPA Anti-racism Team) and invites people to join. For those who are already members, please invite others.

As members of the Anti-racism Team, we consider this “sacred work” on behalf of God’s Kingdom. We are eager for new members to join our TEAM, particularly if you are young, a lay person and identify as male, but all are welcome. If you have interest in joining us in this vital work, please contact us thru antiracism@sepa.org or a member of ART.

We are thankful and appreciate the support of Bishop Byran J. Penman and other members of the SEPA staff in this important justice work, especially The Rev. Linda Manson. We look forward to continuing to serve God and the SEPA Synod in the future and pray for the blessings of the Holy Spirit in our endeavors.

Your servants in Christ,

The SEPA Synod Anti-Racism Team

The Rev. Dr. Susie Folks, Co-Chair

The Rev. Gwendolyn King, Co-Chair

Deacon Kathleen Afflerbach

Janet Bischoff

Charles (Chase) Ferguson

Fern Lee Hagedorn

The Rev. Kathleen Harkness

The Rev. Jane Marston

The Rev. Raymond Miller

Karen Paulus

The Rev. Serena Sellers

The Rev. Linda Manson, SEPA Synod Liaison

**AFRICAN DESCENT LUTHERAN ASSOCIATION (ADLA) –
Philadelphia Chapter**



**AFRICAN DESCENT LUTHERAN ASSOCIATION (ADLA)
PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER**

The ADLA Philadelphia Chapter is in a process of re-organizing and re-visioning. In the past year, we participated in and supported activities in our Synod and beyond.

In the beginning of 2025, Dr. Addie Butler, our Chapter President, participated on Zoom in two national discussions with other ADLA chapter Presidents.

Our chapter was represented at tables at Synod Assembly in the Mission Center, at the City of Philadelphia Juneteenth Celebration as part of the table from Central Philadelphia Conference, and at the SEPA WELCA Convention.

ADLA held a National Assembly in Phoenix preceding the Churchwide Assembly, and Philadelphia was well represented. Our own Sister Tracey Beasley was the event manager, and assisted the National Board with scholarship applications. A number of our members were also delegates to Churchwide.

One of the Elder statesmen of the African American Lutheran Church, the Rev. Dr. Harvard Stephens, passed into glory early in the summer of last year, and thanks to the technology of Zoom, a few of us were able to be virtually present at his homegoing service.

Of course, we co-sponsored the Synod Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration on a snowy day in January, which was held at the Philadelphia campus of the United Lutheran Seminary. The speakers were the Rev. Jennifer Thompkins, from the Metropolitan Wilmington Urban League, and Dr William Hayes, the CEO of Boys' Latin Philadelphia Charter School. Glorious music was provided by Pastor James Scott and the JC Choir. We also honored Dr. Addie Butler for her lifetime of service to the Church, our Synod, and ADLA.

In February, The Rev. Dr. Julius Carroll (formerly of Philadelphia) hosted online a forum on African American Lutheran History, which we were able to participate in. Dr. Addie Butler, former VP of the SEPA Synod AND the ELCA was one of the speakers, as she is part of the living history of African Americans in the ELCA.

March brought a performance of the new play about Alzheimers disease, Unforgettable, which we supported with our presence.

And finally, the Lutheran night of Preaching with Power featured our presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry as the preacher. We were blessed by his presence and his words.

In 2026, we hope to revitalize our chapter, as we have been one of the anchors of ADLA national in the past. Stay tuned for some upcoming events!

Dr. Addie Butler, President
Sister Tracey Beasley, Treasurer
The Rev. Sandra Brown, Secretary
Sister Elaine Brown, Membership Coordinator
The Rev. Dr. Lamont Wells, Consultant

Bishop's Convocation

BISHOP'S CONVOCATION 2026 ASSEMBLY REPORT

Committee Chair: Rev. Kathleen Kerin

Committee Members: Bishop Bryan Penman, Rev. Mukesh Cheedie, Yvonne Curtis, Rev. Meagan Esterby, Rev. Brandi Hebert, Paula Lebo, Cynta Outerbridge, Rev. Jonathan Steiner.

The Bishop's Convocation for 2025 was held at the Desmond Hotel in Malvern, PA on November 12th and 13th. The theme was Love In Motion, Organizing for the Sake of the Gospel. This year the team had more time than it had in the past to consider options for venues and how our Rostered Leaders, Deacons, Synod Authorized Ministers, and Seminarians experience accessibility, accommodations, and efficient use of the location. The Desmond was very flexible and offered a wonderfully hospitable environment where all of our meetings and refreshments were held in an area specifically set aside for those purposes. This was a point of consideration for the Team based on conversations and previous year's evaluations, and Bishop Penman strongly supported curating a budget that stood behind the importance of caring for the leaders of our Synod.

Brother Steve Jerbi, Director of Organizing for Mission Network lead a powerful, innovative, and wise team of engaging presenters. Rev. Yolanda Norton and Alexis Carter Thomas joined in as we spent two days together learning why the work of organizing for the empowerment of communities and people is important for we as faith leaders to engage. While the days were full, time was built in for rest and socializing along with morning devotions and movement. Several opportunities for engaging worship also blessed our time together. Just under 100 leaders joined us; about 20 more than the previous year.

Choosing a theme for Convocation is strongly influenced by what will benefit leaders of faith who are increasingly experiencing political and moral divides, changing attitudes about the Church, and restrictions on the time of folks who do serve in communities of faith. Strong consideration is also given to creating opportunities for rest, building strength, increasing wisdom and then weaving it all together to build a strong chord of leadership. This year, organizing was chosen to give leaders tools to engage the struggles of division and oppression in congregations and their contexts, just as it was playing out across the national stage.

I was honored to work with the members of the Convocation Team. Their faith and grace was always evident in our work together. The Planning Team for the 2026 Bishop's Convocation welcomes you to this Grace-Full leadership. Become part of the team by sending me an email at the address below.

In Christ,
Pastor Kathleen Kerin
Email kathkerin@gmail.com

Care of Creation Ministry Team

Care of Creation Ministry Team Report for 2025

The Synod's Care of Creation Ministry came into being when the 2024 SEPA Synod Assembly passed a resolution creating the ministry. In February of 2025 the Synod Council approved ten members to be on the Care of Creation Ministry Team. We acknowledge that although our team includes men and women from various congregations, our current team does not have representation from the central Philadelphia conference or BIPOC congregations. We encourage interested people from those congregations to contact the synod Vice President or Bishop.

Care of Creation Ministry actions in 2025 included the following:

- Monthly Care of Creation Updates (sent by email)
 - Articles of interest
 - Upcoming events
 - Advocacy opportunities
 - Resources

Do you have something to submit? Email joybaxter@gmail.com

Subscribe here: <https://sepacareofcreationministry.eo.page/1n2j5>

- Workshops
 - “Care of Creation Ministry Microgrants & Lighting upgrades” May 6, 2025
 - “Called by Faith: Caring for Creation” presentations at seven congregations by Creation Care Ambassadors, Joy Baxter or Ken Anderson
- Synod Assembly video: Temple Lutheran, Havertown was highlighted at the 2025 Synod Assembly
- Care of Creation Microgrants

Two funding cycles were held with deadlines of June 30, 2025, and Dec 31, 2025.

 - We received a total of 16 applications in 2025. Of these, 10 were funded, and 5 were deferred until a later funding round. One was rejected, but that project received a Renewable Energy Grant instead.
 - We awarded microgrants for the following projects:
 - Grace Lutheran Church, Wyndmoor \$1,000: Fluorescent to LED lighting upgrade
 - St. John's Lutheran Church, Melrose Park \$840: 6 Energy Star Smart Thermostats projected to save the church \$1,200/yr
 - Faith-Immanuel Lutheran Church, East Lansdowne \$1,000: Fluorescent to LED lighting upgrade

- St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Telford \$940: Purchase and installation of raised garden beds to grow fresh produce for their food pantry.
 - Resurrection, Yardley \$1,000: Update parking lot, road sign and exit lights -- conversion to LED lighting.
 - Ascension, Newtown \$1,000: Upgrade parking lot bollards to LED.
 - Trinity, Lansdale \$1,000: Upgrade lobby lighting to LED
 - Grace, Drexel Hill \$1,000: Upgrade 2nd floor lighting to LED.
 - Grace, Broomall \$736.47: Upgraded Sanctuary and common space lighting to LED.
 - St. Luke, Devon: \$1,000 Upgrade Lighting in Student Wing to LED.
 - New Applications forms for 2026 will be available in March on the Care of Creation Ministry page of Ministry Link. Ten microgrants up to \$1000 are available to be funded in 2026.
- Renewable Energy Grant Program
 - In 2025, the Synod allocated \$50,000 to be used to help synod congregations install renewable energy. The program was to be administered by the Care of Creation Ministry Team.
 - The grants are intended to act as a type of bridge funding for funds expected back from the federal government. The congregations are asked to repay the grant when the federal government rebates are received so that more congregations can be assisted going forward.
 - Two applications were received in July 2025, and both were funded. \$15,000 remains in the grant program.
 - Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in King of Prussia had solar panels installed on their roof, a 35.64 kW system. \$24,000.
 - Church of the Atonement in the Fishtown neighborhood of Philadelphia is having 42.1 kW of solar panels installed together with a battery backup system. \$10,000.
 - A new round of applications will be evaluated this summer, with an application deadline of June 30, 2026.
 - If funds remain after the summer evaluation period, then another round of applications will be accepted in December 2026. It is anticipated that the funds dispersed in 2025 will be repaid in 2027 (following the receipt of funds after the 2026 tax filings congregations make in early 2027).
- Support for Partner Organizations

The Creation Care Ministry also supported the work of partner organizations furthering care of creation awareness, projects and advocacy:

 - Lutherans Restoring Creation \$245
 - PA Interfaith Power & Light \$245
 - Creation Justice Ministries \$50
 - Evangelical Environmental Network \$50

- Resources
The Care of Creation Ministry identified resources to enrich our understanding of the Biblical basis of our calling and responsibility to care for God’s creation through references to study materials in the Monthly updates.

In 2026 the Care of Creation team plans to administer the microgrants, continue monthly Care of Creation updates, provide a Fall workshop on environmentally friendly options for upgrading heating systems, reach out to and include more congregations in the ministry through Connection Call events, deploy more Creation Care Ambassadors for talks in congregations, and more.

Team members:

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

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

February 2026

Childcare Taskforce

See Section D, Addendum 1

Forward Together in Faith

**Forward Together in Faith - (FTiF)
2026 Synod Assembly Report**

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. Isaiah 43:18-19

The Forward Together in Faith (FTiF) team has awarded 120 grants, 3 synod drawings, and 26 MAP/CAT. Since 2015, FTiF team has supported congregations through grants and resources that encourage growth, innovation, and collaboration in ministry. To date, grants awarded total \$371,372.04. These funds help congregations launch and strengthen initiatives that reflect the campaign’s four pillars and support new ministry opportunities.

This past fall, the FTiF grant team reviewed 16 grant applications. Of these, 11 requests were eligible, and 5 were ineligible. We are grateful to have been able to award the 11 eligible requests totaling \$58,000, to support congregational initiatives.

The four pillars of the Forward Together in Faith campaign guide these efforts.

- **Networking** focuses on creating and sustaining partnerships among congregations, leaders, and community organizations.
- **Innovating** encourages new forms of ministry and the development of faith communities, particularly among underserved populations.
- **Communicating** supports training and tools for websites, social media, and other media to strengthen outreach and event promotion.
- **Equipping** provides training for lay leaders, continuing education for rostered leaders, and support for seminarians.

Through these pillars, FTiF continues to empower congregations to grow in faith, service, and community impact.

Grants Awarded for 2025 - \$58,000

Networking	\$5,500	Communicating	\$6,500
Innovating	\$21,000	Equipping	\$25,000

2025-2026	Awarded Grants– \$ 58,000			
	St John's	Mayfair	\$1,500.00	Communicating
	Upper Dublin	Upper Dublin	\$2,000.00	Networking
	St Peter's	Riegelsville	\$3,500.00	Networking
	God's Love	Newtown	\$5,000.00	Equipping
	St Matthews	Chester Springs	\$5,000.00	Equipping
	St. Mark's	Conshohocken	\$5,000.00	Equipping
	St. Timothy	Fox Chase	\$5,000.00	Communicating
	Temple	Havertown	\$6,000.00	Innovating
	Grace	Broomall	\$10,000.00	Innovating
	Holy Trinity	Wallingford	\$10,000.00	Innovating/Equipping
	Resurrection	Yardley	5,000.00	Equipping

Grant applications for 2026 will open shortly after Synod Assembly and are due by Sep 30, 2026.

Respectfully submitted by Ellen Daneke, Forward Together in Faith, Chair

Generosity Team

2026 Generosity Team Report

(Pr. Mark-Singh-Hueter, Chair)

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

God has entrusted to us this good creation to “have dominion” – to be wise managers on God’s behalf. (Gen 1:28) That’s stewardship.

God has given us gifts to use for the common good, for building up the Body of Christ. (1 Cor 12) That’s stewardship.

God continues to provide, for us and through us, what we need to carry out God’s mission, to love God, reflect Jesus, and serve our neighbors. That’s stewardship.

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

We again had two of us attend the annual Stewardship Kaleidoscope multi-day training event last year. This year’s event is much closer, in Baltimore on Sept 21-23, 2026.

<https://stewardshipkaleidoscope.org/>

And more are taking the Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising course.

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

At synod assembly our table provided some resources, printed and digital, for congregational use.

We ran a “Getting Ready for the Fall” stewardship training as a hybrid event, with about 20 people joining in person and another 20 online.

We once again helped present the Stewardship Extravaganza – “Engaging Generosity: A Road Map for Vitality.” *(Much more information at the end of this report.)*

We are excited to invite congregations into an excellent Fall Stewardship program this year.

Congregations are invited to register for “Building a Culture of Generosity,” a series of online meetings, communication resources, and personal help (beginning in August, for a TEAM from your church) designed to “Guide you through your fall stewardship Appeal.” *(A number of our congregations have gone through this in past years, with very good responses.)* Pick up a brochure from the Stewardship Table at the SEPA assembly and get half off the registration price of \$650 for the full program for your church. Click on the QR code for more information about this program.



In addition to this exciting program, please note that congregational consultations are available on request.

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

- Partnerships (33%) – churchwide ministries, United Lutheran Seminary, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA, Bear Creek Camp, and local ministries
- Mission and Vitality (11%) – resources to start and redevelop congregations, equipping assistance (including youth and young adult ministry, Tanzania companion synod)
- Office of the Bishop (47%) – helping our bishop, the pastor to the synod, provide leadership and oversight, including the work of the committee of deans, finance and development office, communications and information technology.
- Leadership (2%) – raising up, equipping, connecting, and nurturing rostered and lay leaders for “the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4)
- Administration (7%) – yep, rent, utilities, insurance, office expenses, all needed.

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

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



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



- Invest in technology and communications
- Provide governance and leadership
- Grow and sustain financial resources
- Address social issues and work for justice

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

Thanks to our Generosity Team for learning and growing together and for helping to guide our focus and ministry. Members this past year include: Rev. Karen Sease (SEPA rep), Rev. Phil Krey (secretary), Rev Anthony Scott, Mr. Carl Reitz, Ms. Doreen Kinzler, Rev. Kathleen Kerin, Rev. Kayla Sadowy, Ms. Kimberly Malcolm, Mr. Thomas Rutter, and Rev. Larry Smoose leading the Extravaganza Team. Both Rev Kerin and Rev Sadowy have stepped down because of increased commitments, so we are very open to new Generosity Team members. We meet 4-5 times a year, alternating between in-person and zoom meetings. If you'd like to find out more about us, or want to join us, please contact me (Mark Singh-Hueter).

Report to the Synod – Engaging Generosity: A Road Map for Vitality *(by Larry Smoose, the one who brought everyone together and helped us make this excellent event happen)*

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod and Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod collaborated on a “Stewardship Extravaganza” planned for January 24, 2026 with the theme: Engaging Generosity: A Roadmap for Vitality. The Rev. Dr. Andrea Walker, a nationally renowned keynote speaker led off with an engaging and personalized presentation that included ways of growing generosity in an urban church. There were eight additional workshops designed for lay and rostered leaders not only of our synods, but also from other nearby synods as well as other denominations. The focus was on practical, congregational strategies that can be implemented in congregations, helping to create a new approach to stewardship focused on generosity and vitality as two sides of the same coin.

A generous grant from S.O.L.I. (Stewardship of Life Institute) as well as sponsorships from ULS – The Larry House Fund, Advent, West Chester, Calvary, West Chester, God’s Love, Newtown, Reformation, Media, St. Luke, Devon, St. Matthew, Springfield and Trinity, Lansdale enabled us to keep the cost very affordable – only \$50 a participant,

with seminarians and first call pastors attending free. The volunteers and staff of Trinity, Lansdale were tremendously supportive and made the event flow easily.

Workshops included Giving as Worship: Reframing Generosity in Congregational Life, led by Dr. Walker; Children are Generous by the Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook; The Landscape of Religious Giving: Trends and Best Practices for Meaningful Engagement, taught by the Rev. Meredith McNabb; Laying the Foundation: Leading Change to Navigate Church Property Transitions by The Rev. Peter Beeson; Collaborative Ministry, a conversation about 6261 Ministry Communities, led by Deacon Kat Tigerman; A Conversation about Best Practices in Congregational Generosity, by the Rev. Dr. Philip Krey; Narrative Budgets: Telling the Story Behind Each Line Item, led by the Rev. Lexy Steinle; and The Psychology and Theology of Giving: A Dialogue of motivating factors that cause people to contribute, donate, and give, by the Rev. Dr. Quintin Robertson.

Because of the low cost many congregations sent teams of 3-4 lay leaders along with their pastor(s) providing crucial congregational support for new ideas that came from the event. About 150 attended and the speakers and workshops were well received.

Inclusive Communities

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

This committee serves as a vital hub that unites initiatives and efforts already established throughout the synod. By creating a centralized space for collaboration, we aim to enhance and build upon existing work related to inclusivity across (SEPA). We recognize the importance of fostering an environment in which diverse voices are heard and valued, and we are committed to growing equity and representation within the committee.

In 2025, the ICC hosted the 7th annual In God's Image (IGI) event at Trinity Lutheran in Lansdale. In addition to meaningful worship, community connection, and great workshops on being more welcoming in the name of Jesus- we also hosted musician, Flamy Grant. She shared powerful songs and stories of her life growing up as a closeted gay man deep in the Bible Belt and finding the joy and holiness of discovering drag in recent years.

Please save the date for this year’s event on October 10th, 2026 at Reformation Lutheran Church in Media. Our keynote speaker will be the Rev. Carla Christopher who serves as the primary curriculum developer and project coordinator for the national “Thriving in Ministry”, and “Racial Justice and LGBTQIA2S+ Cultural Competency” training programs through Kindling Faith at United Lutheran Seminary, serves on the national leadership team for ELCA Evangelism, and regularly offers strategic planning consulting support to regional church bodies, nonprofits, schools & universities, and faith-based service organizations.

We hosted the annual SEPA Synod Pride worship service on June 22 and are looking forward to worshiping with you all in June this year! We will also be representing the Synod at the Philadelphia Pride Parade on June 7 and participating in an ecumenical prayers service before the parade. Worship with us and stop by and say “hi” at our table!

The Inclusive Communities Team has provided support and consulting for several congregations in our Synod this past year that have begun or journeyed through the Reconciling in Christ process. Please reach out to us if you are discerning how God is calling your church to be more intentionally welcoming of LGBTQ+ folks in your community. We have members of the team who can walk you through the nitty gritty aspects of the RIC process, we have an online Bible study addressing “clobber texts” and welcoming texts, and more! If you would like some support in building more inclusive communities and/or to participate in the work we do, please send us an email at inclusion@sepa.org.

Vitality Team

Vitality Team Report to 38th Synod Assembly - 2026

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

As Chair of the Vitality Team, and on behalf of Rev. Linda Manson, Co-Director for Evangelical Mission and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, I’m honored to share a glimpse of the Spirit-led work that has taken shape across our synod over the past year. Together, we have continued cultivating vibrant ministries and nurturing new communities of faith.

With deep gratitude for the faithful leadership and ongoing support of Bishop Bryan Penman, we have been able to build on a strong foundation and carry this vital work forward. It has been a year marked by energy, collaboration, and a growing sense of hope for what God is doing among us.

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

Vitality Team Volunteer Members

- **Rev. Kayla Sadowy** – Grace, Broomall
- **Rev. Sandra Brown** – Interim Ministry
- **Mr. Tom Salber** – Prince of Peace, Philadelphia
- **Mr. Wayne Goerlich** – Good Shepherd, Southampton
- **Rev. Paul Jann (Retired)** – Reformation, Media
- **Rev. Kathleen Harkness** – Trinity, Pleasant Valley
- **Rev. Matthew Ollikainen** – Advent, Richboro
- **Rev. Dr. Eric M. Allison** – Trinity, Germantown
- **Rev. Regina (Gee) Goodrich** – Mediator, Philadelphia
- **Mr. Don Stevenson** – Mediator, Philadelphia
- **Rev. Kevin Tracey** – St. Mark, Clifton Heights
- **Rev. Janet Peterman** – Interim Ministry

Mission Developers

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

New Ministry Starts & Vital Congregations

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

- **The Welcome Church**

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

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

ELCA Support: \$8,880

- **The Well**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel

Rooted in The Welcome Church, this ecumenical women's shelter provides safety, hospitality, and housing support while offering spiritual sanctuary and companionship for

vulnerable women.

ELCA Support: \$12,000

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$5,000

- **Kairos Communities**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Bob Fisher

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

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$5,000

- **Iglesia Luterana Nueva Creación**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Lyzette Rios-Sanchez

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

- **ELCA Support: \$21,500**

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$20,000

- **Mindfulness + Church**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Tom Natalini

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

ELCA Support: \$22,000

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$10,000.00

Strategic Ministries

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

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

Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$6,000

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

Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Noah Hepler

ELCA Support: \$8,000

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$15,000

- **Grace, Broomall**

Mission Developer: The Rev. Kayla Sadowy

ELCA Support: \$12,000
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$15,000

- **Mediator, Philadelphia**
Mission Developer: The Rev. Regina Goodrich
ELCA Support: \$12,000
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$20,000
- **Trinity Lutheran, Philadelphia (Germantown)**
Mission Developer: The Rev. Dr. Eric Allison
ELCA Support: \$20,000
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$10,000
- **Rev. Timothy Knauss Mission Support**
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$6,000

Evangelism Projects

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

New Explorations

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

- **African Descent Sustainability Trainings**
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$5,000
- **African Nationals Reclaim Gathering**
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$5,000
- **Bear Creek Camp Philly Connect**
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$5,000
- **Care for Creation**
SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$34,000

- **Arabic Outreach**

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod (SEPA) is actively partnering with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to explore the development of an Arabic-language ministry in the region. This initiative seeks to engage Arabic-speaking communities through culturally rooted worship, outreach, and pastoral care. A powerful example of what this ministry could look like is found at First Presbyterian Church of Allentown, where an established Arabic ministry provides spiritual support, social services, and fosters mutual understanding between Arabic and non-Arabic communities. This collaborative model offers a vision for how such a ministry could take shape within SEPA, rooted in partnership and hospitality.

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$5,000

- **Community of Love Clothing Stipend**

SEPA Funds for Mission Support: \$12,000

Orderly Closure of Congregations

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

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

+ Community of Love Lutheran Church - **May 4, 2025**
117 4th Street, Oxford, PA, United States

What We Do — And How We Can Help Your Congregation

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

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

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

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

Strengthening Congregations Through Partnership

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

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

Let's Start a Conversation

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

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

- **Rev. Linda Manson**
Co-Director for Evangelical Mission & Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
- lmanson@sepa.org

- **Rev. Bradley D. Gow**
Chair, Vitality Team
[*pastorstpetersville@gmail.com*](mailto:pastorstpetersville@gmail.com)

With Gratitude

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

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