

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS
OF THE THIRTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD
OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**
“Imago Dei”
May 29 & 30, 2026

FIRST SESSION – Friday evening, May 29th

The 38th Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod began at 6:30 p.m. with Evening Prayer.

ORDER FOR THE OPENING OF THE ASSEMBLY

At 7:00 p.m. Bishop Bryan J. Penman and Vice President Cheryl Ann Lafferty led the Order for the Opening of the 38th 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 to the 38th Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He noted that this is a different format than we have followed as a Synod in an effort to make it easier for those who work nine to five jobs to participate in this assembly. The theme for our gathering is “Imago Dei.” Imago Dei is Latin for “Image of God.” This weekend we will embrace that each of us was uniquely made in the image of the divine, explore ways in which we can see the world around us, and be sent from this place to joyfully celebrate our place in creation.

He then recognized the officers of the Synod, thanking them for their work in service to Jesus and the Church.

- + Ms. Cheryl Lafferty, Vice President, Redemption, Philadelphia
- + The Rev. Karl M. Richard, Secretary, St. Matthew, Springfield
- + Ms. Janet Neff, Treasurer, St. Luke, Devon

Bishop Penman then thanked those who will be serving as leaders of 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; the Rev. Jennifer Casey, chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel; the Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath, chair of the Nominating Committee; the Rev. Meagan Esterby, chair of the Worship Planning Team.

Bishop Penman welcomed and thanked Ms. Judith Roberts, Director for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as our churchwide representative, and the Rev. Dr. Furson Zumot from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, his wife Rawan, their daughter Taleen, and son Wadie who will speak to us of our partnership in this global church.

Bishop expressed his gratitude for the Mission Center partners that are here representing various organizations and social service agencies that can provide ways for congregations to more deeply Love God and Love Neighbor.

He also thanked our host site, Trinity Lutheran, Lansdale, and “All About Catering,” who provided the meals and hospitality breaks during the Assembly.

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. Christopher Drummond from Metro Chicago Synod serving at Holy Spirit, Secane
- + Deacon Grace Marcus from North Carolina Synod to administrative assistant II at Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities
- + The Rev. McIver (Mac) Mullins from Southeastern Iowa Synod serving as associate pastor at St. Paul’s Doylestown
- + The Rev. Harriet Wieber from Metro New York Synod onto our retired roster
- + Deacon Allie Clark from Southeast Synod serving as Faith Engagement and Outreach Coordinator at Ken Crest and Grant Evaluator for our Faith Alive Initiative.
- + The Rev. Madison DeLuca from Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod serving at Little Zion, Telford
- + The Rev. Jessica Zurcher from Metro DC Synod, serving at Holy Trinity Narberth

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: 353

Total number of Voting Members registered and in attendance as of this report: 274

Number of Voting Members needed for a quorum: 177

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 37th annual assembly on September 18, 2025. They are available in the Bulletin of Reports, Section 6, Report of Synod Council, pages SC – 16 to SC – 44.

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 on the Constitution

Secretary Richard shared that the report delineating proposed changes to the Constitution, ylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod was inadvertently not posted in the Bulletin of Reports. They have now been posted and can be found on MinistryLink under the Bulletin of Reports, tabbed as "Constitutional Amendments" under the Report of the Secretary. These proposed amendments have been endorsed by the Synod Council at its December 11, 2026, meeting. In order to give the voting members time to review them, we will not act on these proposed amendments at this time. They will come before the Assembly under Unfinished Business for consideration and potential approval.

BISHOP'S ADDRESS TO THE ASSEMBLY

Vice President Cheryl Lafferty introduced Bishop Bryan Penman and the Rev. Linda Manson, co-Director of Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, to present the Bishop's Address to the Assembly.

Bishop Penman and Pastor Manson presented in dialogue format this address based on scripture and our baptismal theology, showing both God's desire for the inclusion of the diversity God has made, and our struggles to make this happen. In their presentation they showed that the Church

has an image problem both in how we are seen, and of who we do not see. The world's image of the Church is one of doubt and suspicion, because the Church has often demonstrated difficulty in seeing all people as made in the divine image and worthy of full inclusion in the Church, let alone in society.

Scripture used to show God's intent included Genesis 1:26 "Then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness," Psalm 139:14 "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made," and Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Building off the two Great Commandments to Love God and Love Neighbor, and our baptismal calling to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth, Bishop Penman and Pastor Manson challenged the Church to embrace the call of God to recognize the inherent dignity in each person, because each person has been made by, and is loved by God.

They offered examples of how we fall short of this call.

- + When we claim to be "colorblind," we downplay the reality and the lived experience of persons of color.
- + When we do not make room or provision for people with different physical abilities, we fail to provide a welcome that can affirm the fullness of the gifts of these people.
- + When we discount children because "they can't keep still," we are missing the needs of neuro-divergent children, causing their parents to feel awkward, and thereby encouraging them to leave.

As we work to see all people as made Imago Dei, as we work to include all people in our life together as people of God, Bishop Penman has set three words to guide us as a Synod: Healing, Justice, and Joy.

- + Healing: The body of Christ is broken. Many are absent not because they do not love God, but because they have been harmed by members of the Church. What are the wounds in your community that need God to show up as a healer?
- + Justice: We come needing justice. Justice is not charity; it is the work of making the world more congruent with God's desire for the world to be in right relationship. What specific way can your congregation engage to bring God's justice to bear?
- + Joy: The proclamation of the Gospel is joyful work! Joy is creative work. We are called to do creative work to bring healing, justice, and joy to our ministry sites.

The Church that is willing to really see the image of God in every person is the Church that the world is hungry for now. When we are a Church where people know "I see you, and more importantly, God sees you; you are wonderfully made, and welcome at the table," then we will be a Church that will not have a membership problem. God is calling us to be the Beloved Community, striving toward the wholeness that God intends. Let us do this work with fierceness and humility and joyful love.

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Bishop Penman called on the Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath, Chair of the Nominating Committee, to bring the report of the Committee before the Assembly.

Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath 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 1, Ticket 5, and Ticket 8. Deacons are no longer eligible for lay positions.
3. Again, a reminder that a person making a nomination from the floor must immediately present to the Assembly office a copy of the nominee’s biographical information, and a picture of the nominee. These nomination forms are available from the Assembly pages.

TICKET 1: SYNOD COUNCIL, CLERGY

(Two rostered ministers to be elected for terms ending 2029)

NAME	CONGREGATION
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The Rev. Timothy Ness	St. Paul, Ardmore
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The Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath	Redeemer, Jamison
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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 the Rev. Timothy Ness and the Rev. Dr. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath **ELECTED**.

TICKET 2: SYNOD COUNCIL, CHESTER CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY MAN

(One lay man to be elected for a term ending 2029)

NAME	CONGREGATION
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There are no nominees from the committee.

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #2 closed and noted that it reverts to the Synod Council to find a person to fill this seat.

TICKET 3: SYNOD COUNCIL, LOWER BUCKS CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY MAN

(One lay man to be elected for a term ending 2029)

NAME	CONGREGATION
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Dr. John Connors	God’s Love, Newtown
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The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #3 closed and further declared Dr. John Connors **ELECTED**.

**TICKET 4: SYNOD COUNCIL, LOWER MONTGOMERY CONFERENCE
REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN**

(One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2029)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Dr. Marcia Boraas	St. John, Melrose Park

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

The Rev. Axel Kaegler nominated Ms. Allison Uehling, Christ, Oreland

As there were no further nominations from the floor, Bishop Peman declared Ticket #4 closed.

TICKET 5: CONSULTATION COMMITTEE, CLERGY

(two rostered ministers to be elected for a term ending 2032)

NAME	CONGREGATION
The Rev. Jane Marston	Tabor, Philadelphia
The Rev. Ann Shade	St. Michael, Sellersville

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #5 closed and further declared the Rev. Jane Marston and the Rev. Ann Shade **ELECTED**.

TICKET 6: CONSULTATION COMMITTEE, LAY MAN

(One lay man to be elected for a term ending 2032)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Mr. Carl Reitz	Redeemer, Jamison

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #6 closed and further declared Mr. Carl Reitz **ELECTED**.

TICKET 7: CONSULTATION COMMITTEE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2032)

NAME	CONGREGATION
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There are no nominees from the committee.

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #7 closed and noted that it reverts to the Synod Council to find a person to fill this seat.

TICKET 8: COMMITTEE ON DISCIPLINE, CLERGY

(Two rostered ministers to be elected for terms ending 2032)

NAME	CONGREGATION
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The Rev. Jennifer Casey

Holy Trinity, Wallingford

The Rev. Tori Callahan Geiger

St. Andrew, Perkasio

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

The Rev. Susie Folks nominated the Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir, St. John, Phoenixville

Bishop Penman declared Ticket #8 closed.

TICKET 9: COMMITTEE ON DISCIPLINE, LAY MAN

(One lay man to be elected for a term ending 2032)

NAME

CONGREGATION

Mr. Vincent Spiritosanto

God's Love, Newtown

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #9 closed and further declared Mr. Vincent Spiritosanto **ELECTED**.

TICKET 10: COMMITTEE ON DISCIPLINE, LAY WOMAN (One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2032)

NAME

CONGREGATION

Ms. Sue Durborow

Good Shepherd, Coatesville

The Synod Assembly may make nominations from the floor.

As there were no nominations from the floor, Bishop Penman declared Ticket #10 closed and further declared Ms. Sue Durborow **ELECTED**.

Bishop Penman thanked Dr. Rodrick-Schnaath for her report.

Following a prayer by Bishop Penman, the Assembly stood in recess until Saturday morning.

SECOND SESSION – Saturday morning, May 30th

The Synod Assembly resumed at 9:00 a.m. with worship.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS and REPORT FROM THE ELCA CHURCHWIDE OFFICE

Bishop Penman introduced our Churchwide Representative, Ms. Judith Roberts. Ms. Roberts is Senior Director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Ms. Roberts began her remarks by thanking Bishop Penman and Pastor Manson for setting the table for this Assembly and for her address.

In response to the ELCA commitment to increase racial, ethnic diversity, the 2019 Church Council affirmed the Strategy Towards Authentic Diversity document and the formation of a task force to implement its recommendations. The Rev. Chris Boerger, former Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, asked Ms. Roberts to be a part of this intentional effort to increase diversity in our Church.

The ELCA's commitment to authentic racial and ethnic diversity and anti-racism continues through various ministries among diverse cultures and communities, ethnic associations and racial justice ministries. These efforts aim to confront racism and build a more multicultural church. According to the data gathered through the 2023 ELCA Annual Congregation Report, those who identify with ELCA who are People of Color was 6.8%. This is well below the goal of 10% set at the inception of the ELCA in 1988.

This church commits to working to intentionally lift up voices from historically underrepresented groups in its assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units. While specific identities are listed below, this church recognizes that humans have multiple aspects of their identities that are tied to systemic privilege and oppression that shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways.

For all purposes in this church's governing documents, historically underrepresented groups shall be understood to include the following:

- a. Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English;
- b. Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual orientations;
- c. Persons experiencing poverty or persons of lower income;
- d. Persons living with disabilities;
- e. Persons who are not natural-born United States citizens

In addition, the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in Phoenix, AZ voted to increase the percentage goal of youth and young adult voting membership of Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, and churchwide boards and committees from 10 to 20%.

Identifying such groups as those who need to be seen and included, and increasing our efforts for diversity, equity and inclusion is a bold stance to take in a time when the society around us is taking away efforts of diversity. But our Church is making a stand for diversity.

We are working on a DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging) handbook for congregations to assist our churches in their efforts to create the community God intends. The vision of the 2.7 million members in the 8,900 congregations of our ELCA is that we are called to boldly live out our mission to proclaim God's grace and love in Christ for ALL people. While we have divisions politically, we must never forget we are called to love each other and care for our neighbors.

Ms. Roberts noted the work of some of the ministries of the ELCA which make a significant contribution to the care of people around the world, and Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod's support of these ministries.

ELCA World Hunger:

Last year, ELCA World Hunger worked in 58 countries, including the United States, addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty. In 2025 the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod contributed \$263,139 to this work.

Lutheran Disaster Response

Lutheran Disaster Response is our church's way of walking with communities impacted by disasters. In 2025, we served neighbors in 51 countries including the United States. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod contributed \$374,472 to Lutheran Disaster Response.

Mission Support

The work of the Church only happens with the support of all our congregations, given through our Synods, to support the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The support given by the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to the work of the Churchwide organization in 2025 was \$737,898 of the \$1.7 billion dollars shared from across the Church.

Thank you for your generous support of your Church.

Serving at the Churchwide level

In addition to the financial resources this Synod shares, you also share human resources. Serving the broader church in positions of leadership are:

- + The Rev. Gwendolyn King, member of the ELCA Church Council and Chair of the Committee on Reference and Counsel
- + Ms. Joy Grace, Good Shepherd, Coatesville, Committee on Discipline
- + Mr. Damar Wilson, Reformation, Philadelphia, Synod Young Adult Network Representative.

Ms. Roberts concluded her presentation by playing a video address from Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, in which Bishop Curry shared a reminder that we are a connected Church, living in three expressions (Congregations, Synods, and Churchwide Organization) working as one Church standing in solidarity with those who need to have their voices heard and their lives lifted up by the Gospel of Christ.

RECOGNITION OF SYNOD COUNCIL AND TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Bishop Penman thanked those who also serve on the territory of our Synod as Synod Council Members.

Lay Members:

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| + Mr. Bennaiah Bennie | Faith-Immanuel, East Lansdowne |
| + Dr. Marcia Boraas | St. John, Melrose Park |
| + Dr. John Connors | God's Love, Newtown |
| + Mr. Dennis Faust | St. Luke, Zieglersville |
| + Ms. Pia Graham | St. John, Ridge Valley |
| + Mr. Craig McJett | Trinity, Philadelphia |
| + Dr. Sherrell Mickens | Christ, Upper Darby |
| + Ms. Irene Rajarigam | Grace, Drexel Hill |

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| + Mr. Phillip Richard | Grace, Pottstown |
| + Mr. Tony Scheivert | Good Shepherd, Coatesville |

Clergy Members:

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|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| + Deacon Katie Afflerbach | St. John, Spinnerstown |
| + Rev. Gwendolyn Johnson-Bond | St. Peter, Philadelphia |
| + Rev. Dr. Nelson Rivera-Garcia | Upper Dublin, Ambler |
| + Rev. Heidi Rodrick-Schnaath | St. Mark's, Conshohocken |
| + Rev. Jonathan Steiner | Trinity, Lansdale |

Additionally, we have two task forces actively working – one on providing Childcare for synod events, and one on revising the Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Ministers. Bishop Penman asked those serving on the Task Forces to rise and be recognized.

FIRST 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 placed before the Assembly the following:

Resolution on Creation Care and Climate Justice

WHEREAS, God created heaven and earth and called creation good, entrusting humanity with the care of the earth (Genesis 1:1–31; 2:15);¹ and

WHEREAS, Scripture affirms that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1), grounding our call to care for creation in our relationship to God as Creator;¹ and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, through its social teaching, affirms that care for creation is a matter of faith, justice, and responsibility to future generations;² and

WHEREAS, the ELCA’s social message Earth’s Climate Crisis names this moment as a kairos time—an urgent and opportune moment calling for faithful, decisive action;³ and

WHEREAS, the impacts of climate change are experienced most acutely by communities who are most vulnerable and have contributed least to the crisis, raising urgent concerns of justice and neighbor-love;⁴ and

WHEREAS, the World Council of Churches has launched the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2035), inviting churches into a shared “pilgrimage of repentance, transformation, and hope” and calling for action rooted in justice, peace, and the integrity of creation;⁵ and

WHEREAS, Lutherans Restoring Creation and similar organizations provide resources, networks, and support to equip congregations and synods in this work;⁶ and

WHEREAS, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod’s Care of Creation Ministry Team is already engaged in this work and is well-positioned to support and encourage participation across the synod;

SA26.05.01. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly reaffirms care for creation as an essential expression of our faith in Jesus Christ and our call to love our neighbors; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly encourages congregations, ministry partners, and individuals to engage in the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action as a shared commitment to faithful response in this time; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly directs the Synod Council, through the Care of Creation Ministry Team, to support and promote engagement in this work across the synod; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this work shall include sharing resources and creating opportunities for congregations and individuals to learn, pray, advocate, and take meaningful steps toward more sustainable and just practices; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly encourages participation in ways that are meaningful and contextually appropriate, trusting that even small acts of care and stewardship are part of God's ongoing work of renewal; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Care of Creation Ministry Team include updates about this work in the 2027 assembly Bulletin of Reports.

1. The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE).
2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice (1993).
3. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Earth's Climate Crisis (2023).
4. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report.
5. World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2035), <https://www.oikoumene.org>
6. Lutherans Restoring Creation, <https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org>

The Committee on Reference and Counsel recommends adoption of the Resolution.

Following a second, Pr. Casey provided the following rationale from the Committee:

This resolution affirms care for creation and climate justice as an expression of Christian faith and love for our neighbor. It encourages congregations, ministry partners, and individuals across the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to engage in faithful responses to the climate crisis, including participation in the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2035). The resolution also directs the Synod Council, through the Care of Creation Ministry Team, to support ongoing engagement, education, and resource-sharing.

As there was no discussion, Bishop Penman called for the vote.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

Pr. Casey then put before the Assembly a Memorial to the ELCA on the same topic:

**Memorial to the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA
On Deepening the ELCA's Commitment to Climate Justice**

WHEREAS, God created heaven and earth and called creation good, entrusting humanity with the care of the earth (Genesis 1:1–31; 2:15);¹ and
WHEREAS, Scripture affirms that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1), grounding our call to care for creation in our relationship to God as Creator;¹ and
WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, through its social teaching, affirms that care for creation is a matter of faith, justice, and responsibility to future generations;² and
WHEREAS, the ELCA’s social message Earth’s Climate Crisis names this moment as a kairos time—an urgent and opportune moment calling for faithful, decisive action;³ and
WHEREAS, the impacts of climate change are already being experienced most acutely by communities who are most vulnerable and have contributed least to the crisis, raising urgent questions of justice, equity, and neighbor-love;⁴ and
WHEREAS, the World Council of Churches has launched the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2035), inviting churches into a shared “pilgrimage of repentance, transformation, and hope” and calling for action rooted in justice, peace, and the integrity of creation;⁵ and
WHEREAS, many ELCA congregations, synods, and partner organizations, including Lutherans Restoring Creation, are engaged in this work and seeking stronger coordination, support, and shared direction across the whole church;

SA26.05.02. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly memorialize the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to deepen and strengthen the church’s commitment to climate justice as a matter of faith, public witness, and care for our neighbors; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this memorial invite the Churchwide Organization to engage the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action as an opportunity for shared learning, advocacy, and coordinated action across the church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this memorial encourage the Churchwide Organization, in consultation with synods and ministry partners, to expand leadership, coordination, and communication around climate justice efforts across the ELCA; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this memorial encourage the development and support of staff and resources dedicated to equip congregations and synods for faithful and effective engagement in care for creation and climate justice; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this memorial encourage the identification and sharing of resources, practices, and opportunities that support congregations, synods, and ministries in responding to the climate crisis in ways that are contextually appropriate and grounded in the church’s social teaching; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this memorial be forwarded to the Church Council and the next Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for consideration.

1. The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE).
2. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice* (1993).
3. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Earth’s Climate Crisis* (2023).
4. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report*.

5. World Council of Churches, Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2035), <https://www.oikoumene.org>

The Committee on Reference and Counsel recommends adoption of the Memorial.

Following a second, Pr. Casey provided the following rationale from the Committee: This memorial asks the wider ELCA to deepen and strengthen churchwide leadership, coordination, and support for climate justice work within the church. It encourages engagement with the Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2035) sponsored by the World Council of Churches as an opportunity for shared learning, spiritual reflection, advocacy, and faithful action in response to the climate crisis. The memorial also encourages expanded churchwide resources and support to equip congregations and synods for this work.

As there was no discussion, Bishop Penman called for the vote.

The Synod Assembly adopted the memorial.

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 two tickets:

TICKET 4: SYNOD COUNCIL, LOWER MONTGOMERY CONFERENCE REPRESENTATIVE, LAY WOMAN

(One lay woman to be elected for a term ending 2029)

NAME	CONGREGATION
Dr. Marcia Boraas	St. John, Melrose Park
Ms. Allison Uehling	Christ, Oreland

TICKET 8: COMMITTEE ON DISCIPLINE, CLERGY

(Two rostered ministers to be elected for terms ending 2032)

NAME	CONGREGATION
The Rev. Jennifer Casey	Holy Trinity, Wallingford
The Rev. Tori Callahan Geiger	St. Andrew, Perkasio
The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir	St. John, Phoenixville

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

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.

275	St. Matthew Lutheran Church (Kellers Church)	Perkasie, PA
275	Trinity Lutheran Church	Coopersburg, PA
250	St. Peter Lutheran Church	North Wales, PA
200	Jerusalem Lutheran Church (Almont)	Sellersville, PA
150	Centennial Lutheran Church	Kimberton, PA
125	Grace Lutheran Church	Wyndmoor, PA
125	St. John Lutheran Church	Melrose Park, PA
125	Trinity Lutheran Church	Havertown, PA
75	Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church	Philadelphia, PA
75	Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Living God	Roslyn, PA
75	Holy Spirit Lutheran Church	Secane, PA
25	Christ the King Deaf Church	West Chester, PA

REOGNITION OF THE COMMITTEE OF DEANS

Bishop Penman recognized and thanked those who have served as deans of our eight Conferences since last year's Assembly. They include:

- + The Rev. Julie DeWerth, Lower Montgomery Conference
- + The Rev. Mukesh Cheedie, newly elected, Lower Bucks Conference, and said goodbye to the Rev. Nathan Krause, who now serves as Director of Evangelical Mission in the Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA
- + The Rev. Noah Hepler, Central Philadelphia Conference
- + The Rev. Christopher Franz, Chester Conference
- + The Rev. Marie Sager, Delaware Conference
- + The Rev. Daniel Eisenberg, Northeast/Northwest Philadelphia Conference
- + The Rev. Bill Coleman, Upper Bucks Conference
- + The Rev. Serena Sellers, newly elected, Upper Montgomery Conference, and said goodbye to the Rev. Matthew Finney

CAMPUS MINISTRY MINUTE

Deacon Grace Marcus, who serves the Network of ELCA Colleges & Universities, shared the importance of campus ministry in her life, and the role it played in her discernment to rostered ministry. She noted that this work matters. College can be exciting, and it can be lonely. Students are asking huge questions about their identity and future and where God is in all of this. University Lutheran is the Synod's campus ministry in this place, ministering to the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, and Temple University. People come for community and to wrestle and explore identity and faith, and to hear they are beloved children of God. Support of this ministry is vital to these students as they struggle with issues of faith and life.

Bishop Penman reiterated the importance of this ministry, and his desire that we expand those engaging this work beyond just University Lutheran. There are many colleges and universities in our synod's territory, and it cannot all fall on the shoulders of Pastor Esterby and University Lutheran. He noted that we are applying for a third Lilly grant that will focus on developing the

faith life of young adults. The hope is that this money, if granted, may assist this effort to make connections and allow questions of faith to be explored by young adults across our Synod.

IMAGO DEI HIGHLIGHTS

Bishop Penman invited the Rev. Linda Manson, Assistant to the Bishop for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and co-director of Evangelical Mission to lead us in our next exploration of Imago DEI. Pr. Manson shared the efforts of several teams of the Synod in the work of expanding diversity, equity, and inclusion across Southeastern Pennsylvania.

- + **Faith Alive** initiative – the Rev. Annemarie Hartner Cook, program director
Faith Alive accompanies SEPA congregations as they articulate their worship values; deconstruct existing barriers to full worship participation across all ages, stages, and abilities; and reconstruct worship where children know they belong. This will happen through Worship Learning Labs, providing resources for creative congregational evaluation and planning, and microgrants. Faith Alive honors our children’s experience of God and creates space for them to be full participants in worship. Faith Alive is a Lilly Endowment Grant.
- + **Vitality Team** – the Rev. Bradley Gow, chairperson
When we gather in Christ’s name, there is creativity and resilience, faith and hope. If you start doubting the hope, that is why the Vitality Team exists – to enter the journey, walking alongside you to discover who you are now, not what you used to be, and how God is calling you to work with what you have now, not what you used to have. We won’t tell you what you need to be based on what other congregations are doing. It is to help you discern how *you* can serve the community in which *you* are placed.
- + **Inclusive Communities Committee** – the Rev. Daniel Eisenberg and the Rev. Kevin Tracey, co-chairs
The purpose of this committee is to support the LGBTQIA+ people in the synod, to assist rostered ministers, lay leaders, programs of the synod, and congregations seeking intentional inclusion, and to offer guidance regarding the expansion of inclusion efforts within the synod.
SEPA Synod is a Reconciling in Christ organization according to Reconciling Works since 1995. The first “In God’s Image” event was held in 2019. In 2022 the Synod Assembly adopted an updated Welcome Statement and formed the Inclusive Communities Committee as an ongoing, supported ministry of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.
- + **Anti-Racism Team** – the Rev. Gwendoly King, co-chair, and the Rev. Raymond Miller, Team member.
The Anti-racism team encourages us to see anti-racism as a calling, and a fulfillment of the mandate of scripture to recognize we are all “Imago Dei.” We work to dismantle racism in all its forms and encourage us to see the image of God in every person.

- + **Creation Care Team** – Pr. Tom Lang shared that there is a scriptural and theological grounding to creation care. We are connected to each other and the earth, and everything we do has an impact on everything else. Our purpose is to equip congregations and individuals for the work of stewardship in our individual and corporate lives. Our stewardship of God’s creation is critical to the balance of life of all.
- + **Love Revolution** – Pr. Rick Summy, Program Director.
We are all about loving God and loving neighbor. The Good News does not only belong to us and those who look like us. We are all Imago Dei, made in the image of God. And we are called to care for our neighbors as much as we care for ourselves. The Love Revolution gathers congregational leadership teams in a two-year process to understand our baptismal promises, and to live into them while challenging the ways in which racism and colonialism have hindered our proclamation of God’s love to, and for, all people. We then want to move past this toward leading a revolution of love of God and love of neighbor.

Bishop Penman noted we are also served by other teams of volunteers at a Synod level, including:

- + Candidacy Committee
- + Interim, Bridge and Supply Pastors
- + Generosity Team
- + Communications Team
- + Transitional Development Ministry Team, and
- + Gather + Philly
- + Youth and Young Adult Ministry events
- + Forward Together in Faith Grant Team
- + Urban Ministry Grant Team
- + Synod Hunger Ministry Team
- + Childcare Task Force, Compensation Task Force

SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Bishop Penman then called on Pr. Miller, chair of the Committee on Elections, to present the results of the first round of balloting.

Pr. Miller reported the following:

Results of the balloting for Ticket 4: Synod Council, Lower Montgomery Conference Representative, Lay Woman

284 votes cast, 2 abstentions

282 legal votes cast, 142 needed for election

Dr. Marcia Boraas 182

Ms. Allison Uehling 100

Bishop Penman declared Dr. Marcia Boraas **ELECTED**.

Pr. Miller stated that there were concerns with the balloting on Ticket 8 that will require the Assembly to vote for this ticket a second time. Ballots were distributed. The results will be presented at a later point in the Assembly.

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN JORDAN AND THE HOLY LAND

Bishop Penman welcomed the Rev. Dr. Furson Zumot to share the story of our siblings in Christ and fellow members of the Lutheran World Federation in the ELCJHL.

Dr. Zumot stated that he is an Arab, and he is a Christian. Not all Arabs are Muslims. Arabs have been Christian from the beginning. They did not convert. He spoke of the ongoing struggles of Palestinians of all faiths as the Netanyahu administration in Israel continues its crackdown on the Palestinian territories. Over the past 50 years the Bethlehem area has seen the Arab Christian population decrease from 85% to less than 10 % of the population. They are being pushed out, by both the Jews, and by the Muslims who consider them to be infidels who worship three gods. They are able to keep going, ministering and serving their neighbors, because the broader Church, including the ELCA, have been sending support. With these resources they have been able to give real, tangible assistance to the people in their region. This has been a true way that God has been able to touch the lives of people in need. We need to show Christ to others, not just talk about the love of Christ. Thank you for the way in which you help us to show this love.

The Assembly stood in recess for lunch and workshops

THIRD SESSION – Saturday afternoon, May 30th

Bishop Penman called the Assembly back to order following lunch and workshops. He then called on Pr. Jennifer Casey to present the Second Report of the Committee on Reference and Counsel.

SECOND REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON REFERENCE AND COUNSEL

Pr. Casey placed before the Assembly the following:

A Resolution Rejecting Christian Nationalism and Affirming the Gospel's Call to Public Witness and Civic Engagement Rooted in Christ Alone

WHEREAS, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul reminds us that “our citizenship is in heaven,”¹ grounding our identity in Christ rather than any one nation, ethnicity, or political ideology; and WHEREAS, Lutheran theology affirms that God works through secular institutions and structures in order to benefit the wellbeing and protection of humanity but also rejects any authority that compromises the gospel and demands allegiance away from God;² and WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s social statement “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective” teaches that the church “has the obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people,”³ and

WHEREAS, the ELCA social statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All,” teaches that the church “affirms healthy forms of patriotism” and “it opposes unhealthy, distorted forms of patriotism that divide a country and endanger it, including religious nationalism,”⁴ and WHEREAS, in the United States, at the current time, “Christian nationalism is the dominant distorted form” and “fuses an imagined conception of a Christian nation with a false vision of God’s ultimate will. It confuses the kingdom of God with a particular government,”⁵ and WHEREAS, Christian nationalism in the United States promotes the false claim that Christians should hold privileged civic status and often correlates with anti-democratic attitudes, racialized exclusion, and threats to religious liberty;⁶ and WHEREAS, Christian nationalism distorts scripture by framing political power as divine mandate and cultural dominance as Christian duty;⁷ and WHEREAS, silence in the face of theological distortion risks allowing harmful ideologies to masquerade as Christian teaching; and WHEREAS, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA is called to equip congregations and leaders for faithful public witness, responsible civic engagement, and love for neighbor in a pluralistic society,⁸ by “encouraging congregations to respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society”;⁹

SA26.05.03. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA clearly and publicly reject Christian nationalism as incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Lutheran confessional teaching, and the social teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod commits to working against the power of Christian nationalism in our congregations and communities by affirming that Christ alone is Lord of the Church and that no nation, ethnicity, or political ideology may claim divine authority; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod actively strives to affirm a vision of Christian public life grounded in humility, service, the cross of Christ, love of neighbor, and consistent with the social teachings of the ELCA - in particular: “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective” and “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All”; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod commits to sharing resources for leaders and congregations, as appropriate and timely, such as: studies on Christian identity and public life, worship resources, and civic engagement opportunities especially as coordinated through the ELCA Advocacy Office and the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod calls upon the Office of the Bishop to issue statements against Christian nationalism as it pertains to the life and ministry of congregations and communities in the synod and to share messages from the Office of the Presiding Bishop with the synod regarding the same; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod encourage rostered ministers and lay leaders to speak clearly against instances when Christian language, symbols, or scripture are misused to justify exclusion, violence, or political supremacy and to engage others influenced by Christian nationalist narratives with pastoral sensitivity, curiosity, and invitation for dialogue; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod encourage all rostered ministers to prayerfully and diligently address their congregations about the responsibilities of civic life by supporting “efforts to increase voter registration and access to polling places and early voting while opposing state efforts to raise barriers to the ballot box”¹⁰ and to help dismantle structural barriers that limit voting rights and civic participation;¹¹ and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod encourage all SEPA congregations and ministries to build bridges, foster reconciliation, practice communal discernment, provide opportunities for difficult conversations, and address polarization constructively in their communities; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod commits to partnering with ecumenical and interfaith organizations working to defend religious liberty for all people, consistent with ELCA social teachings and the Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment,¹² as opportunities arise; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod offers appreciation for the efforts in the ELCA and church-related organizations that contribute to healthy civic life through service, advocacy, and education.

¹ Philippians 3:20.

² Augsburg Confession XVI.

³ “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” ELCA Social Statement, elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Church_SocietySS.pdf, page 4.

⁴ “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All,” ELCA Social Statement, elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Faith_and_Civic_Life_Seeking_the_Wellbeing_of_All_Social_Statement.pdf, Section 5, Article 38. 3

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ SEPA Synod Mission Statement, ministrylink.org/about.

⁹ SEPA Synod Constitution, Chapter 6, S6.03.02.d.

¹⁰ “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Wellbeing of All,” ELCA Social Statement, elcamediaresources.blob.core.windows.net/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Faith_and_Civic_Life_Seeking_the_Wellbeing_of_All_Social_Statement.pdf, Section 6, Article 46.

¹¹ “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Disciple in a Democracy,” ELCA Social Message, cdn.elca.org/cdn/wp-content/uploads/Government_and_Civic_Engagement_Social_Message.pdf, Section III, Number 1.

¹² See especially Commitments 3, 6, 7, 9, and 10 in the “Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment: A Policy Statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” resources.elca.org/wp-content/uploads/Inter-Religious_Policy_Statement.pdf.

The Committee on Reference and Counsel recommends adoption.

Following a second, Pr. Casey provided the following rationale from the Committee:

This resolution rejects Christian Nationalism as incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Lutheran confessional teaching, and the social teachings of the ELCA. It affirms faithful public witness and civic engagement rooted in Christ and Christ's teachings and encourages congregations and leaders to respond thoughtfully and pastorally to the misuse of Christian language, symbols, and scripture in support of exclusion, political supremacy, or violence. The resolution also encourages ongoing education, dialogue, bridge-building, and engagement in public life grounded in the church's social teaching, regardless of one's religion, nationality, or political ideology.

Bishop Penman opened the floor for discussion of the resolution.

The Rev. Dr. Alina Gayesuki, Reformation, Media, one of the drafters of the resolution, spoke in favor of its adoption. She said she is grateful to be a part of this effort. The concerns of Christian Nationalism are not happening far away; they are happening here, and now. People are using the language of faith to cause harm to others in this society, people who are our neighbors.

The Rev. Taylor Walker, Zion, Spring City, also spoke in favor of the resolution. She stated Evangelical Christianity used to be about a personal relationship with Jesus. It has move away from hat to Christian Nationalism, which is a wholesale rejection of Imago Dei, seeing all people as created in the image of God. It is important that we stand for our Lutheran heritage, recognizing God's grace is for all people.

As there was no further discussion, Bishop Penman called for the vote.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

The Rev. Serena Sellers was granted a moment of personal privilege. As a step in the direction of this resolution, she encouraged all congregations on July 4th to place on their church signs, "We have no King but Jesus."

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

Bishop Penman introduced Vice President Cheryl Lafferty and invited her to make her first address the Assembly as our Vice President.

Vice President Lafferty began her remarks by thanking Bishop Penman, Secretary Richard, and Synod Director of Operation Yvonne Curtis for their support and advice in this first year of her tenure as vice president. She is humbled and grateful for the trust that has been placed in her in this role. Ms. Lafferty is excited about what has happened in this past year, and what is yet to come.

Among the things in which she has been able to participate are Synod Council meetings, Executive Committee meetings, and being a presenter at the Congregation Council leaders event. She has also been able to attend the Faith Alive Learning Lab, the Lutheran Settlement House's fundraiser "A Fishtown Feast," and the National Association of Vice Presidents.

She has served as one of the Fund for Mission Trustees and on the Forward Together in Faith Team, both of which have been able to distribute money to congregations for ministry initiatives. She has been a part of launching new task forces: the Childcare Task Force, the Compensation Guidelines Task Force, and the soon to be empaneled Synodically Authorized Minister Task Force.

Vice President Lafferty has begun to visit different congregations in our Synod, and she looks forward to visiting even more as the months go on. In these visits she is getting to know the people and the ministries we have across our territory, and she is coming to see just how big our Synod is; not just in territory (140 congregations in 8 Conferences covering 5 counties), but in diversity and impact. We are rural and urban. We are in old spaces and new spaces, small spaces and even no spaces. We are folk who are young and old, teens and tweens. We are lifelong Lutherans, longtime visitors, and new followers of Jesus. We are black and brown, white and tan. We are gay, straight, transgender, non-binary queer, and more.

We are not monolithic. And we are all “Imago Dei,” made in the image of God. And God is not monolithic either. To be a Synod that truly is Imago Dei, we must strive to make community and diversity *seen* differently, and approach it with joy.

How do we, or do we not, reflect the image of God in the world? Do we reflect the diversity of God in our worship, our work, our welcome? Are the diverse people around us not just invited, but welcomed, not just welcomed, but given a space at the table, not just given a space at the table, but given a voice? This is not about reaching quotas, or being polite, or patting ourselves on the back. It is about honestly and intentionally reflecting the image of God in our Synod and our work.

Our differences are not a problem but a gift. Can we commit to step out in faith and listen and learn and serve? And when we fall short, can we come to Jesus for forgiveness and lean on the Spirit to guide us?

We are unique and beautiful and an expression of Imago Dei. We are SEPA Synod, and we have the opportunity to work together to share this beautifully diverse image of God with the world. May we have the courage to put this into action.

RECOGNITION OF ANNIVERSARIES

Recognition of Anniversaries of Rostered Ministers

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

40th Anniversary Celebrants

- + Deacon Ethyl Geist
- + Deacon Bruce W. Tonkin

- + The Rev. H. William Bixby
- + The Rev. Carol Ficken
- + The Rev. Pamela R. Gabel
- + The Rev. N. Jackson Haas
- + The Rev. Patricia Johnson
- + The Rev. Wayne Shelor
- + The Rev. G. Warren Weleck, Jr.
- + The Rev. Jo S. Wilhelmson

25th Anniversary Celebrants

- + The Rev. Dr. Patricia Ann Davenport
- + The Rev. Amy L. Hotter
- + Sister May Julia McKenzie

50th Anniversary Celebrants

Bishop Penman noted that it is the custom of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to invite 50th anniversary celebrants to bring greetings to the Assembly. We have four rostered ministers celebrating their 50th anniversary with one of them attending this year, the Rev. Dr. Philip D. W. Krey. We will celebrate the Rev. James E. Munz, the Rev. Paul M. Sorcek, and the Rev. James H. Wilford in their absence.

Bishop Penman introduced Dr. Krey, noting the Dr. Krey had been a mentor to him in his journey through seminary and his focus on urban ministry. Dr. Krey addressed the Assembly.

Dr. Krey stated that his life has been an experience of grace upon grace. He was born into a large immigrant refugee family. His mother came to this country from Poland after World War II. He was the fourteenth of sixteen children. His father was a pastor, and the expectation was that his sons would follow in his footsteps. Four of them did. While he became a pastor and professor of church history, his first love was oceanography – he wanted to be Jacques Cousteau.

He attended University of Massachusetts at Boston, and a professor encouraged all in his class to Find someone totally different from you and get to know them. This is the first piece of wisdom he wants the Assembly to follow. Dr. Krey was sitting next to an African American Viet Nam veteran who was present in Montgomery, AL, when four African-American children were blown up by the Klan. He returned from war, having served his country, and was furious about the betrayal, having served his country and then his country allowed this to stand. He took Dr. Krey on a journey from which Krey experienced America from an entirely different point of view.

Dr. Krey was still struggling with what he wanted to study. He only knew that he did NOT want to follow in his father's footsteps. While at UMass the campus pastor said to him, "You can do

this.” That was it, but it cleared up many of the doubts he had. We can also say to those around us, “You can do this,” because ministry is a scary thing to do.

When he left University, he had no debt. This was because Massachusetts invested heavily in education. And it was because his older sisters sacrificed greatly so the younger siblings could attend school. Some had three jobs.

He attended the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg and went to Washington D.C. where he was surrounded by significant scholars of the ecumenical community. It was here that he met and fell in love with René Diemer, and she has supported him in all his endeavors, and has been his fiercest critic.

At that time the Federal Government and the Lutheran Church in America invested heavily in urban development and ministry, and this influenced his life and ministry dramatically. He learned to experience defeat as well as victory.

He eventually came to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, serving first as a professor, and eventually as president. Since the end of his tenure at the Seminary, he has been serving as pastor at St. Andrew in Perkasio, the first suburban congregation he ever served.

His final word of wisdom is to listen to your people and say yes. St. Andrew’s has been in a six-year anti-racism dialogue with Bethlehem Baptist Church in Springhouse because a member suggested it, and he said yes. It has been difficult, but good. The council president suggested we enter a relationship with Temple Judea in Doylestown, and he said yes. A young member of the congregation suggested they look to clean energy and consider going solar, and he and the council said yes. Now St. Andrew has solar energy. Listen to your people.

Dr. Krey loves serving the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. It has been a life of living grace upon grace.

IMAGO DEI HIGHLIGHTS

Bishop Penman described that every congregation is receiving an “Imago Dei” packet at this Assembly. The purpose of this packet is for congregations to use this to plan and act on one intentional justice ministry. There are eight (8) sessions in the packet to help with your discernment of what this action might be. It can be used with Congregation Councils, Justice or Social Ministry Committees, or as a Bible Study. It is grounded in scripture and has a set of questions to complete together to “move the needle” in your thinking of Justice.

REPORT OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

Bishop Penman invited Mr. Craig McJett, chair of the Audit Committee and a member of Trinity, Germantown, and Ms. Tracey A. Beasley, a member of the Audit Committee and a member of Reformation, Philadelphia, to present the Audit Report.

To place the Audit Report before the Assembly, Mr. McJett presented the following resolution on behalf of the Synod Council:

SA26.05.04. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly accepts the Audit Report for the Fiscal Year ending January 31, 2026.

Following a second, he described the work of the Audit Committee as described in the Constitution of the Synod.

Ms. Beasley then described the financial status of the Synod as of January 31, 2026.

She noted that this is a snapshot of our standing as of the end of the fiscal year. Unlike most congregations, the Synod's fiscal year runs from February 1 to January 31.

Audit Report Details
Statement of Financial Position
Highlights as of 01/31/2025 and 01/31/2026

	1/31/25	1/31/26
Total Cash and Investments	\$18,413,573	\$21,446,164
Total Assets	\$22,337,569	\$25,797,884
Total Liabilities	\$ 191,226	\$ 361,651
Total Net Assets	\$22,146,343	\$25,436,233
Unrestricted	\$15,539,313	\$18,811,629
With Donor Restrictions	\$ 6,607,030	\$ 6,624,594

The statement of financial position is snapshot of our assets, liabilities and net assets as of 01/31/26 and 01/31/25. This is the end of our fiscal year.

Cash & investments increased by about \$3,000,000 largely due to investment gains and the sale of two properties.

Liabilities include the amount owed to the ELCA for 50% of the prior month mission support we received from congregations, prior month bills and the lease liability with the Seminary.

Audit Report Details
Statement of Activities

	Revenue	
	01/31/2026	
	Actual	Forecast
Mission Support	\$ 1,475,796	\$ 1,550,000
Other Contributions	\$ 656,915	\$ 447,141
Registration Fees	\$ 74,787	\$ 110,256
Investment Income	\$ 2,486,578	\$ 1,167,550
Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 68,558	\$ 60,000
Income from trusts	\$ 73,456	\$ 70,000
Proceeds from property	<u>\$ 1,828,745</u>	<u>\$ 1,910,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$ 6,864,835	\$ 5,314,947

Mission Support from congregations was \$1,476,000, about \$74,000 less than the prior year. Our hope is that Mission support will increase due to Love Revolution and Stewardship programing.

Other contributions of \$657,000 include All Saints contributions, trust income, ELCA grants, bequests, and hunger ministry grants.

Registration fees are for Synod Assembly and Bishop's Convocation.

Investment income is interest, dividends and realized and unrealized gains.

Beneficial interest in trust is the increase in the principal amount of the trust fund due to market gains.

Income from trusts is the amount we received from the Fisher trust for Bucks County congregations and the Bauer Trust for Liberty Lutheran.

Proceeds from property sales include the sale of the property of the former congregations of St. Paul's East Norriton and St. Paul's Lansdowne.

Total Revenue for 01/31/2026 was \$6,864,835.

Audit Report Details Statement of Activities

	Expenses	
	01/31/2026	
	Actual	Forecast
Operating Expense	\$ 1,876,280	\$ 1,901,371
Lilly Grants	\$ 301,045	\$ 423,351
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 737,898	\$ 775,000
Property Management	\$ 311,100	\$ 150,000
Distributions to other agencies	\$ 100,938	\$ 98,725
Remit to designated agency	\$ 15,579	\$ 12,540
Grants to Organizations	\$ 232,105	\$ 151,563
Total Expenses	\$ 3,574,945	\$ 3,512,550

Operating expenses include salaries, benefits, deans, insurance, rent, audit travel, supplies, technology and phone/internet.

Lilly Grants include the expenses for the love Revolution of \$165,000 and Faith Alive of \$136,000.

ELCA Proportionate share is 50% of what we receive from congregations for Mission Support

Property management includes expenses for 4 closed congregations and 5 cemeteries.

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

Remittance to designated agencies are contributions we receive that are designated for a congregation or agency.

Grants to organizations represent grants from the ELCA for congregations, Forward Together in Faith Grants, Hunger Grants and Seminary Debt Grants.

Total expenses for 01/31/26 were \$3,574,945.

Ms. Beasley expressed her appreciation for our Financial Team, Treasurer Janet Neff, and especially Senior Accountant Martin Schwab. She then presented 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, 2026, 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, 2026, 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.”

Bishop Penman asked if there were any questions for the Audit Committee. With none raised, he asked for a vote on the resolution on the floor to accept the Audit Report.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

Bishop Penman thanked Mr. McJett and Ms. Beasley for their presentation, and then invited Vice President Lafferty forward to make a presentation on the Synod’s Fund for Mission.

REPORT ON THE FUND FOR MISSION

It is my pleasure to share this year’s report on the Fund for Mission. The Fund for Mission was created to serve as a way to provide financial support for specific mission initiatives and strategies in SEPA Synod, as together we work to equip the saints and congregations for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ.

The Fund is managed by a Board of Trustees comprised of the Bishop, Synod Treasurer, Synod VP, Synod Secretary, the Finance Committee Chair, the Synod Directors of Evangelical Mission and one additional person appointed by the Bishop and approved by Synod Council.

Every year, the amount of funds available to be spent is equal to 5% of the Fund as of January 1st. Of that 5%, a large portion is allocated to the “Mission” segment of the SEPA budget, through which the Synod is able to support programs that fulfill the mission of the Gospel, but might not otherwise be able to support themselves, due to the populations and/or locations with whom they work.

The remainder of the yearly 5% is utilized to support recommendations and requests in line with the Fund’s established guidelines. Recommendations and requests for such support are brought forward primarily by the Synod’s Directors of Evangelical Mission, then discussed and prayerfully considered by the Board of Trustees before any funding is provided. All funding is followed up by ongoing relationships and reporting requirements.

And what, you might ask, are the guidelines for new, innovative ministries and projects that are supported via the Fund for Mission? These include:

- + Efforts that equip rostered and lay leaders for the work of ministry
- + New mission starts where collaborative funding has already been established among partners
- + Supporting vital ministries among new ethnic populations, in neighborhoods where people are experiencing poverty, and to support the advancement of the Gospel in urban settings
- + Supporting truly collaborative partnerships with congregations, ELCA institutions, social ministry organizations, Churchwide and ecumenical partners.

What are the numbers?

	Fund for Mission				
	1/31/22	1/31/23	1/31/24	1/31/25	1/31/26
Beginning Balance	5,786,299	6,660,700	5,850,201	6,664,369	9,900,355
ELCA Grants	63,000	206,900	181,848	146,165	203,025
Donations, Trust Income	27,724	25,406	25,278	32,080	32,194
Property Sales	387,091	----	----	1,786,740	1,627,737
Investment gain/(loss)	590,441	(649,195)	1,037,667	1,765,652	1,523,758
Grants awarded	(21,000)	(31,000)	(78,000)	(156,082)	(198,700)
Budgeted Disbursements	<u>(172,857)</u>	<u>(362,610)</u>	<u>(352,626)</u>	<u>(338,568)</u>	<u>(371,990)</u>
Ending Balance	6,660,700	5,850,201	6,664,369	9,900,355	12,716,379

This chart shows the growth and use of the Fund for Mission over the past 5 years. You can see that each year, income comes into the fund from sources such as Grants from the national church, donations and trust income, sale of properties, and hopefully investment gains based on the principal of the fund (though not always).

You can see that grants and disbursements from the fund are significant – though not always reaching the total of the 5% that is allowed. We have been fortunate over time that even with annual disbursements, the Fund has grown, which provides a strong foundation to ensure continued support for future ministries that are to come.

Where has the money been used?

Fund for Mission Grants	
African Descent Sustainability Trainings	Grace, Broomall
African Nationals Reclaim Gathering	Kairos Communities
Arabic Outreach	Mediator
Atonement	Mindfulness Plus
Bear Creek Camp Philly Connect	New Creation
Care for Creation	Northeast/Northwest Phila Conference
Christ 30th and Diamond	Share the Love Family Boutique
Christ Ascension	St. Michael's Kensington
Christ Upper Darby	Trinity, Germantown
Community of Love	The Welcome Church

The missions and ministries that have been supported by the Fund are varied – this chart shows just a snapshot of some fund recipients. As you can see, there are established churches, new mission starts, pilot programs, conference support, and non-traditional worshipping communities.

This list reminds us of the diversity of the expression of ministry and mission in this synod – the ways we see the Image of God going out into the world to meet people where they are, how they are, for the sake of the Gospel.

Fund for Mission St. Petri-Hope					
Restricted to Northeast Philadelphia Conference					
	1/31/22	1/31/23	1/31/24	1/31/25	1/31/26
Beginning Balance	472,213	547,922	471,424	512,846	574,937
Investment Gain/(Loss)	75,709	(57,498)	47,721	79,358	90,887
Grants Awarded	<u>--</u>	<u>(19,000)</u>	<u>(6,300)</u>	<u>(17,268)</u>	<u>(7,800)</u>
Ending Balance	547,922	471,424	512,846	574,937	658,024

Grants

Feast of Justice	St. John's, Mayfair
Prince of Peace	St. Timothy, Fox Chase
Redemption	Tabor

In addition, within the Fund is housed a restricted Fund for Mission St. Petri-Hope – this is specifically to support churches and ministries in the Northeast Philadelphia Conference, where St. Petri-Hope shared its ministry for many years. These grants are smaller, but still impactful – and often overlooked. So, if you are a church in NE Philly, consider learning if you have any ministries that are eligible to be seeded or support by this fund!

Bishop Penman thanked Vice President Lafferty for her presentation, and invited Ms. Pia Graham to come forward.

PRESENTATION OF THE BUDGET

Ms. Pia Graham, member of St. John, Ridge Valley, and chair of the Synod Finance Committee, presented the proposed budget for the fiscal year ending January 31st, 2028. To place the budget before the Assembly, Ms. Graham presented the following resolution on behalf of the Synod Council:

SA26.05.05. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly adopts the budget for the coming year, Fiscal Year ending 1/31/2028.

Following a second, she described the key portions of the budget.

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, 2027, ending January 31, 2028.

	2027 Budget Income		
	2025 Actual	2026 Budget	2027 Budget
Mission Support	\$ 1,475,796	\$ 1,600,000	\$ 1,550,000
Other Contributions	\$ 656,915	\$ 443,686	\$ 416,816
Registration Fees	\$ 74,787	\$ 99,256	\$ 83,875
Investment Income	\$ 2,486,578	\$ 1,226,630	\$ 1,772,602
Beneficial interest in Trust	\$ 268,558	\$ 60,000	\$ 100,000
Income from trusts	\$ 73,456	\$ 70,000	\$ 69,000
Proceeds from property	<u>\$ 1,828,745</u>	<u>\$ 700,000</u>	<u>\$ 800,000</u>
Total Revenue	\$ 6,864,835	\$ 4,199,572	\$ 4,792,293

Mission support is what comes from you, the congregations. Based on what we received in 2025, we are projecting a lower number than the budgeted number for 2026.

Other contributions include support we receive from Churchwide, and we are anticipating less as the ELCA is also struggling.

Registration fees include costs received for the Synod Assembly, Bishop's Convocation, and other programs.

Investment Income: This past year we had tremendous returns, but the current climate is so volatile we feel we need to be more conservative in this prediction.

Income from Trusts is also affected by the market.

Property sales in 2025 yielded a significant amount, but we do not know in the coming year what properties may be up for sale, or what they might yield. We have a place holder number for this line.

In total income for the next year, we are projecting less than received in 2025, slightly more than the budgeted number for 2026.

	2027 Budget Expenses		
	2025 Actual	2026 Budget	2027 Budget
Operating Expense	\$ 1,876,284	\$ 1,796,746	\$ 2,032,209
Lilly Grants	\$ 301,045	\$ 406,030	\$ 511,266
ELCA Proportionate (50%)	\$ 737,898	\$ 800,000	\$ 775,000
Property Management	\$ 311,100	\$ 75,000	\$ 85,000
Distributions to other agencies	\$ 100,938	\$ 98,725	\$ 99,500
Remit to designated agency	\$ 15,579	\$ 12,540	\$ 14,000
Grants to Organizations	<u>\$ 232,105</u>	<u>\$ 153,460</u>	<u>\$ 182,219</u>
Total Expenses	\$ 3,574,948	\$ 3,342,502	\$ 3,699,193

Operating expenses include a 3% increase for staff.

Lilly grant expenses are used to accomplish the work of the Love Revolution and the Faith Alive initiative.

ELCA reflects 50% of what we receive from congregations in Mission support.
Property management reflects the costs we have for properties we have received from former congregations, but which have not been sold or re-purposed.
Distributions to other agencies include Muhlenberg, ULS, and other agencies.
Remittance to designated agencies is money that is a “pass through” of what we receive from congregations to be sent to these organizations.
For 2027 we project a surplus of \$ 1,093,100.

Bishop Penman asked if there were any questions concerning the proposed budget. With none raised, he asked for a vote on the resolution on the floor to adopt the budget.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

Bishop Penman took this opportunity to thank Ms. Janet Neff, who is unable to be with us this year due travel, Ms. Pia Graham and the members of the Finance Committee, and Mr. Martin Schwab, our Senior Accountant, for their hard work, many meetings, phone conversations and email correspondence in preparation of the proposed budget.

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 2025 Assembly:

- + Sarajeon Grainson, called to Zion Lutheran in Leola, PA (Lower Susquehanna Synod).
- + Samantha Menapace, awaiting a call
- + Candidates from other synods assigned to SEPA for first call
- + Ali Clark (Southeastern Synod), called as the Faith Engagement and Outreach Coordinator at KenCrest and grant evaluator for Faith Alive
- + Madison DeLuca (Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod), called to Little Zion, Telford
- + Jessica Zurcher (Metro DC Synod), called to Holy Trinity, Narberth
- + Brynn Anderson (NEPA Synod), awaiting a call

THIRD REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS

Bishop Penman invited Pr. Miller forward to present the result of the balloting for Ticket 8.

Pr. Miller reported the following:

Results of the Second Ballot for Ticket 8 Committee on Discipline, Clergy

(Two rostered ministers to be elected for terms ending 2032)

284 ballots cast, 1 abstention

283 legal ballots, 142 needed for election

The Rev. Jennifer Casey	254
The Rev. Tori Callahan Geiger	167
The Rev. Ghislaine Cotnoir	149

Bishop Penman declared the Rev. Jennifer Casey and the Rev. Tori Callahan Geiger **ELECTED**.

Pr. Miller stated that this concluded the elections for this Assembly. Bishop Penman thanked him and the counters for their work.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

REPORT ON THE CONSTITUTION

Bishop Penman called on Secretary Richard to bring the Report on the Constitution and the consideration of amendments to the same.

Secretary Richard began by informing the Assembly that the first two sections of the Report on the Constitution involve required changes to the Constitution for Synods that were adopted by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. These changes are required to be added and need no action from the Synod Assembly. They are here for information and have been incorporated into our Constitution.

Section 3 deals with changes of the designation of three provisions from “required” to “non-required.” Synods may keep, or remove, these provisions as they choose. One of the three provisions also includes a recommended change in a word – to move from “the” mutual ministry committee to “a” mutual ministry committee. The recommendation of the Synod Council is to keep the provisions as non-required, and to change “the” to “a.”

Chapter 1. NAME AND INCORPORATION

‡S1.21. The seal of this synod is a cross and three entwined circles beside the cross. The name of this synod forms the circular outer edge of the seal.

Chapter 9. NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

‡S9.02. In all elections by the Synod Assembly, other than for the bishop, a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election.

Chapter 11. COMMITTEES (names of other organizational units)

‡S11.04. ~~The~~ A Mutual Ministry Committee shall be appointed by the Executive Committee of the Synod Council to provide support and counsel to the bishop.

Secretary Richard placed this resolution before the Assembly:

SA26.06. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod retains Sections S1.21., S9.02., and S11.04. as non-required provisions, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adopt the change in S11.04. from “The” Mutual Ministry Committee to “A” Mutual Ministry Committee

A majority vote is needed to adopt this resolution.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

Section 4 deals with recommended changes to non-required provisions of the Constitution. The proposal from the Synod Council is to adopt each of these provisions. We will consider each of them separately.

The proposed changes to S7.26. provides for the ability to permit synod authorized ministers and lay members of synod authorized outreach ministries to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly.

Chapter 7. Synod Assembly

S7.26. This synod may establish processes through the Synod Council that permit persons currently serving as synod-authorized ministers and/or lay representatives of authorized worshipping communities and/or outreach ministries of the synod, which have been authorized under ELCA bylaw 10.01.04., to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with †S7.21.

Secretary Richard placed this resolution before the Assembly:

SA26.07. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adopts the amendments to section S7.26.

A majority vote is needed to adopt this resolution.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

The proposed changes to S9.04. resets the language of “ties” in the ecclesiastical balloting for a bishop.

Chapter 9. Nominations and Elections

S9.04. The bishop shall be elected by the Synod Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot... The third ballot shall be limited to the seven persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the second ballot, and two-thirds of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election.

The fourth ballot shall be limited to the three persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the third ballot, and 60 percent of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. These ballots shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the previous ballot.

Secretary Richard placed this resolution before the Assembly:

SA26.08. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adopts the amendments to section S9.04.

A majority vote is needed to adopt this resolution.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

The proposed changes to S10.05. clarifies the prohibition of Synod Council members receiving compensation for their service.

Chapter 10. Synod Council

S10.05. ~~No eElected~~ members of the Synod Council shall ~~not~~ receive compensation ~~solely~~ for ~~such their~~ service ~~as council members~~.

Secretary Richard placed this resolution before the Assembly:

SA26.09. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adopts the amendments to section S10.05.

A majority vote is needed to adopt this resolution.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

The next proposed amendment is to add a new section S10.06., and then renumber the subsequent sections accordingly. This addition sets limits on the areas in which relatives of synod staff members may serve.

Chapter 10. Synod Council

S10.06. No person related to a synod staff member shall be eligible for nomination to or membership on the Synod Council or the following synod committees: Candidacy Committee, Finance Committee, Nominating Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, Consultation Committee, and the Committee on Discipline. For this purpose, a related individual is one who, with respect to the synod employee, is a spouse, parent, son, daughter, sibling, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, including corresponding members of blended families and in-laws (parent, son, daughter, or sibling of a spouse, spouse of a sibling, or the parent or sibling of the spouse of a sibling).

Secretary Richard placed this resolution before the Assembly:

SA26.10. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adopts the addition of Section S10.06., and the subsequent renumbering of the following sections.

A majority vote is needed to adopt this resolution.

Pr. Gwendolyn King, Calvary, West Chester, rose to amend by deletion the following segments, struck through and highlighted below:

S10.06. No person related to a synod staff member shall be eligible for nomination to or membership on the Synod Council or the following synod committees: Candidacy Committee, Finance Committee, Nominating Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, Consultation Committee, and the Committee on Discipline. For this purpose, a related individual is one who, with respect to the synod employee, is a spouse, parent, ~~son, daughter, child,~~ sibling, ~~uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild,~~ including corresponding members of blended families and in-laws (~~parent, son, daughter, or sibling of a spouse, spouse of a sibling, or the parent or sibling of the spouse of a sibling~~).

After a second, Pr. King spoke to her amendment.

The proposal as presented goes on infinitum. It goes into third (3rd) tier relationships which are difficult to trace and are beyond what needs to be considered. First (1st) tier relationships of parent, child, spouse make sense. Beyond that requires investigation that is an unnecessary requirement of a person for such a position.

Pr. Serena Sellers, St. Mark's, Pennsburg, spoke in favor of the amendment. In our synod we have a diversity of people. Some of that diversity is in fewer families than others. By limiting their ability to participate, we may be reducing our ability to live into our diversity.

Dr. Rodrick-Schnaath, Redeemer, Jamison, spoke against the amendment. Constitutions are written not for the everyday but for the extraordinary. It is easy for me to imagine our synod having a bishop with adult grandchildren who, if they were serving on some of these committees would represent a conflict of interest. While the chance of this happening is small, this is set for the times when things don't go as we think they should.

Pr. Leslie Richard, St. John, Melrose Park, spoke in favor of the amendment. By eliminating some of the binary language and replacing it with "child" we open our invitation. If there are other places to do this in this section, that would be beneficial.

Ms. Michelle Curran, Good Shepherd, King of Prussia, spoke against the amendment. I am a CPA by practice, and part of my training is in ethics. The original is in line with the independence rules. We want to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. We want to believe that people are acting faithfully, but we want to protect our institution. The original allows us to stay consistent with the rules that safeguard against such familial relationships that are known across industries to be a conflict of interest.

Pr. Rachel Maenke, St. John, Bluebell, called the question before the house.

The Assembly voted in favor of calling the question.

Bishop Penman then called for a vote on the motion as amended.

The Synod Assembly rejected the amendment.

The original proposal was returned to the table.

Pr. Jessica Zurcher, Holy Trinity, Narberth, moved to keep the change previously proposed to keep "child" instead of "son" and "daughter" to keep the language as non-binary as possible.

S10.06. No person related to a synod staff member shall be eligible for nomination to or membership on the Synod Council or the following synod committees: Candidacy Committee, Finance Committee, Nominating Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, Consultation Committee, and the Committee on Discipline. For this purpose, a related individual is one who,

with respect to the synod employee, is a spouse, parent, ~~son, daughter, child,~~ sibling, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, including corresponding members of blended families and in-laws (parent, ~~son, daughter, child,~~ or sibling of a spouse, spouse of a sibling, or the parent or sibling of the spouse of a sibling).

The Assembly began a wordsmithing conversation about how to alter language of aunt, uncle, and other portions.

Pr. Zurcher asked that we stop here and consider this as her motion.
After a second, the floor was open for discussion on this amendment.

Pr. Susie Folks rose to speak against the amendment. She asked if we could add language to change aunt and uncle to siblings of a parent of the individual and their children.

Secretary Richard pointed out that if the Assembly wanted to do that, there would need to be a proposed amendment to this amendment.

Pr. Folks chose not to make such an amendment at this time.

Dr. Karyn Wiseman, St. Mark, Conshohocken, spoke in favor of the amendment. She feels this is as good as we can get at this moment, as we do not have adequate language to go further than this at this time.

Pr. Taylor Walker rose to suggest we add further non-binary language to the amendment, but as she was under a point of information card, she was not able to make such an amendment at this time.

Parliamentarian Joseph Klinger spoke, asking the Assembly to consider this change at this time, and if any have other suggested changes to the language, to determine what those changes might be, but to do so after we have considered this motion that is currently on the floor.

Pr. Rachel Maenke, St. John, Bluebell, called the question before the house.

The Assembly voted in favor of calling the question.

Bishop Penman then called for a vote on the motion as amended.

The Synod Assembly adopted the amendment.

The proposed amendment as currently before the house:

S10.06. No person related to a synod staff member shall be eligible for nomination to or membership on the Synod Council or the following synod committees: Candidacy Committee, Finance Committee, Nominating Committee, Mutual Ministry Committee, Consultation Committee, and the Committee on Discipline. For this purpose, a related individual is one who,

with respect to the synod employee, is a spouse, parent, child, sibling, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, including corresponding members of blended families and in-laws (parent, child, or sibling of a spouse, spouse of a sibling, or the parent or sibling of the spouse of a sibling).

Pr. Rachel Maenke, St. John, Bluebell, called the question before the house.

The Assembly voted in favor of calling the question.

Bishop Penman then called for a vote on the inclusion of S10.06. as amended.

The Assembly adopted the resolution.

Proposed changes to S13.40. and S13.41. seeks to include synod authorized outreach ministries as well as synod authorized worshiping communities as being subject to the teachings, policies, and procedures of the ELCA.

Chapter 13. Congregations

S13.40. Synod-authorized Worshiping Communities and Outreach Ministries

S13.41. Authorized worshiping Worshiping communities and outreach ministries, authorized by the synod and acknowledged under criteria, policies, and procedures approved by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, shall accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose of this church, shall be served by leadership under the criteria of this church, and shall be subject to the discipline of this church.

Secretary Richard placed this resolution before the Assembly:

SA26.11. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod adopts the amendments to Section S13.40. and S13.41.

A majority vote is needed to adopt this resolution.

The Synod Assembly adopted the resolution.

Bishop Penman called Pr. Jennifer Casey forward for the final report of Reference and Counsel.

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;

SA26.12. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT at the end of this thirty-eighth meeting of the Assembly, we offer our appreciation and thankful applause;

To our Bishop Bryan Penman for reminding us to see the image of God in ourselves and each other;

To Vice-President, Ms. Cheryl Lafferty, and our Synod Council for their support and guidance;

To our ELCA representative Ms. Judith Roberts for attending and representing the larger church holding our synod in prayer during this assembly;

To the Rev. Dr. Furson Zumot from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, his wife Rawan and their children Taleen (daughter, 8) and Wadie (son, 5) for their presence connecting us to our global partners;

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. Carolyn Jackson, Deacon Tom Snyder, and our choir for the inspiring music;

To Pastor Heidi-Rodrick-Schnaath 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 Dr. Sherrill Mickens and her team of volunteers as they worked out the logistics for our synod to offer childcare at assembly for the first time;

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 2026 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 and Rev. Jonathan Steiner; Director of Operations Miwa Sperring; Director of Music and Worship Andrea Baxter; Organist Emily Brands; Tech Support Linda Graeff, Harry Smyser, and Bobby Sperring; Vicki Seal for her work with hospitality and catering; Director of Building and Grounds Moises Santiago and his maintenance staff; 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 Boy Scout Troop #61 of Lansdale who came in at 8:30pm on Thursday night to set up tables and chairs and make sure the space was ready for us;

To SEPA synod's Women of the ELCA for their help with the in-gathering;

To our workshop presenters, Mission Center staff, and representatives of all organizations and agencies of the Southeastern Pennsylvania (SEPA) Synod who are also present here at this Assembly;

To all SEPA Synod committee chairs and their teams for the countless hours, thoughtful planning, and problem-solving they have given throughout the year;

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.

The Assembly adopted the resolution by acclamation.

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	134
Total number of retired ministers of word and sacrament voting	23
Total number of ministers of word and service under call	7
Total number of retired ministers of word and service voting	1
Total number of lay voting members certified*, including Council members and Youth/Young Adult	206
TOTAL VOTING MEMBERSHIP	371

*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	76
Percent this total is of total voting membership	19.68%
Number of lay woman voting members	120
Number of lay man voting members	72
Number of Non-Binary voting members	0
Number of Lay Synod Council Members	9
Number of Youth/Young Adult	5

ACTUALLY IN ATTENDANCE

Number of ministers of word and sacrament under call registered*	108
Number of retired ministers of word and sacrament registered*	17
Number of ministers of word and service under call registered*	6
Number of retired ministers of word and service registered	1
Number of lay voting members registered*, including Lay Council members and Youth/Young Adult	196
TOTAL REGISTERED* VOTING MEMBERSHIP	328

*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	70
Percent this total is of total registered voting membership	21.34%
Total number of visitors and guests registered	71

CLOSING OF THE SYNOD ASSEMBLY

Bishop Penman recognized the outgoing members of the Synod Council, installed the newly elected members, and led the voting members of the Assembly in an affirmation of their witness to faith in the world. He and Vice President Lafferty then led the Order for Closing of the Synod Assembly.

The thirty-eighth Annual Assembly of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA, adjourned at 5:14 p.m.

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