



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
NEW JERSEY SYNOD
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.
1930 Highway 33, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

August 16, 2021

Dear Friends,

In Romans we read:

“ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (8:38-39)

I have been clinging to this passage lately. After more than a year and a half of disruption, uncertainty, disappointment, and grief, I need this reminder daily.

People who work with disaster relief and community trauma tell us there is a cycle to our communal response in times such as ours¹. After an initial boost of “heroic response” and a honeymoon period of feeling like things will be ok, there is a deep dive into a time of disillusionment. This is the time we are in – with peaks and valleys of determination, blame, anger, hope, and weariness. We may be on the climb toward a new beginning, but we aren’t there yet, personally, or societally.

So I cling to what I know to be true and it reminds me that even as we struggle together, we are not alone. God’s love in Christ is stronger and bigger than any virus or bad behavior or societal ill or my own feelings.

As you receive this letter, I am on vacation through the end of the month. I hope you have had or will have time to step away. I’ll be with family at the beach for a week and then at home tackling some household projects, and ending with time with regional colleague bishops and spouses in Rhode Island (vaccinated, outside, and masked when inside). While I won’t be thinking about my work, I will be holding you in my daily prayers and ask you to continue doing the same for me.

Here are a few announcements about our life together:

On-going safety protocols for indoor gatherings

Please follow the CDC guidance about masks and distancing. Currently, the daily new cases are such that everyone, vaccinated and unvaccinated, should be masked indoors. Encouraging vaccination and offering vaccination clinics can be lifesaving. As long as children under 12 remain ineligible for vaccination we need to observe protocols that keep them as safe as possible. The question for us is always whether our actions are loving toward our neighbor.

Synod Calendar

Our staff spent a day together looking at the program year and putting dates on the [calendar](#) for synod events. Many of the events are online activities but our hope is for some in-person gatherings as well. The Synod Youth Retreat (November 19-21) and a Bishop’s Challenge trip to Philadelphia to visit the African American Museum and the site of Jehu Jones’ church (November 13) are currently planned as in-person events. We’re excited for many educational, inspirational, and just plain fun activities for our

synod. Please watch Jersey Jottings throughout the year for announcements and details about more exciting ministry opportunities.

Mission Support

As you know, your mission support is vital to our spending plan and the work we do together as synod. To date, we have received 52% of the intents for 2021 – yay! This puts us right on target for the year. Thank you for your generosity. The challenging part of that news is that intents were well below what is needed to fully fund the spending plan which we all agreed to. We will need to find ways to increase our income to support our planned ministries. Because of our current financial reality, we are not looking to add another Assistant to the Bishop in 2021.

Bishop's Challenge: The Jehu Jones Mission

Thank you to those who have sent in their commitment cards to financially support our goal of \$50,000 for educational opportunities for emerging African American leaders. To date we have received \$18,165.00 and have pledges for an additional \$9,000.00. One of the gifts we received from Zion, Oldwick is in memory of the family of Aree van Guinee, a freed slave in whose house Zion's first worship service was held 307 years ago!

Even if you don't submit an intent, you can pray for this challenge, participate in the educational offerings, make a quilt square, and financially contribute. Every week we are featuring a quote from those at synod assembly who answered the question, "Why is this important?" – look for yours to be shared one week. I've heard of some congregations making plans to use this challenge as an emphasis for Advent or Lent; please share your ideas with us so we can celebrate together.

Thank you for your ministry, friends. You give me hope and I celebrate the ways we are church together for the sake of the world – even when it's hard. South African Bishop Desmund Tutu wrote these words as prayer which echoes Romans 8 quoted above. They are in our hymnal and worth singing together today:

Goodness is stronger than evil; love is stronger than hate.
Light is stronger than darkness; life is stronger than death.
Victory is ours; victory is ours,
Through God who loves us.

Peace to you,



Bishop Tracie L. Bartholomew

¹ There are many resources on community trauma response. One helpful resource can be found here: <https://www.parkview.com/community/dashboard/collective-trauma-and-our-reactions>