

‘Build Us Up, Lord’

The 28th assembly of the New Jersey Synod will be held June 4-6 at Ocean Place Resort and Spa in Long Branch, N.J. Gathering under the theme “Build Us Up, Lord,” the assembly will be a time to call for God’s place in our lives and communities and an opportunity to seek out ways to hear God’s call and will.

This year’s synod assembly will use the theme of “Build Us Up, Lord.” Inspired from the hymn in Evangelical Lutheran Worship (670), this theme gives us the chance to be cultivated as the body of Christ and to give thanks for the ways God is working, moving, and growing us as a people and as a church.

Gathering

At the assembly we will gather as congregations and individuals to walk together in faith to cultivate Christ-centered, generous, resilient, missional communities for the sake of the world. There will be wonderful fellowship times and opportunities to worship as the New Jersey Synod together!

We will be joined by the Rev. Rubén Durán, ELCA program director for new congregations. He is responsible for promoting the development of area strategies, local initiatives and emerging models for the multiplication of new communities of faith in the U.S. and the Caribbean. Durán brings his amazing experience of helping support new wor-

shipping communities and of seeking new ways to be the church.

A recent *Christian Century* article pointed out that “under Durán’s leadership, the ELCA has started an impressive array of worshiping communities in homes and bars and on the streets and in train stations. These communities have found different entry points into conversations with their neighbors, gathering around ecological issues, or concerns about paycheck lending, or the need for day care.”

The assembly will also include some intentional time for conversations around racism, an issue that continues to flare up and rip apart our relationships, communities and congregations. There will be amazing and creative workshops around myriad topics to help build us up as God’s people for the sake of the world.

Ordination service

At this year’s assembly we will be blessed with a great occasion—an ordination service on Thursday evening. Those who are being ordained have gone through a process of discernment, were approved by their synod, and are called to serve in the ministry of word and sacrament. While this call takes place to a local community, this ordination is on behalf of the whole church, and we are blessed to have this worship alongside the assembly. More details will come shortly.

The synod assembly gives us the opportunity to gather as the Lutheran church in New Jersey, and to worship, learn and be empowered to be followers of Jesus. Built upon Jesus Christ, our rock and cornerstone, our hope is that this gathering will give us boldness, inspiration and joy as we are sent out into the world.

Come be part of what God is up to in the New Jersey Synod!

For more information, visit www.njsynod.org/assembly. □



Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry expands

After more than 25 years of faithful advocacy ministry, the Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry is welcoming new partners into this critical mission of our church.

On May 1 the Episcopal dioceses of Newark and New Jersey, along with the Episcopal Church, joined the ELCA and the New Jersey Synod in a strong five-way partnership for advocacy. This new organization is called the Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry of New Jersey (LEAMNJ).

A new policy board will come together for its first meeting on June 16. The board is made up of six Episcopalians and six Lutherans. All three bishops will serve as ex officio board members.

The LEAMNJ board will help set the legislative agenda, coordinate advocacy opportunities for local congregations, and oversee financial decisions.

Advocacy ministry is expanding with these new partners

in other ways as well. We will work together to have a strong local voice in municipalities as well as at the state level.

In New Jersey, decisions related to housing, education and many other issues are most often deliberated and decided right in your community. In equipping local Lutheran congregations to partner with their Episcopal neighbors, we will engage in conversations to shape public opinion for the sake of God's world.

Advocacy ministry seeks to empower people with lived experiences of poverty and marginalization and people of faith to share stories and advocate for sound public policy that attends to the needs of all God's children, not just a privileged few.

Through LEAMNJ, we will partner with our Episcopalian brothers and sisters and with all of you in the months and years ahead to engage Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God right here in New Jersey. □

Initiative to address economic challenges of pastoral leaders

In early February, the Religion Division of Lilly Endowment Inc. confirmed that the New Jersey and Southwestern Minnesota synods received a joint grant to assess economic challenges faced by pastors.

This Lilly initiative has two goals:

- Assist in developing new or strengthening existing programs to alleviate some of the financial pressures that inhibit effective pastoral leadership.
- Improve the financial literacy and management skills of pastoral leaders through educational programs to provide capable fiscal leadership for the parishes and ministries under their care.

The two synods were selected to proceed with a planning grant and will assess from February to August 2015 data and programs relating to the economics of exceptional leadership, mission and support. A Research & Planning Team has been formed to gather data and propose expanded programs and strategies.

A possible three-year implementation proposal will emerge from the results of the six-month planning process.

We operate in an era of dramatic and rapid economic change and challenge. The changing congregational context, the 2008 recession and the financial experience of millennial leaders highlights the value of reviewing contextual factors. The initiative will help build trust in more open partnerships between pastors and their congregations, and among mission partners and ministry contexts. The synods wish to equip pastors and congregational leaders to navigate the distinctive challenges and financial concerns of this 21st century. □



Gathering God

Our God is a gathering God. Our God, again and again, gathers God's people together and feeds them, prepares them and sends them back out again. In homes, congregations, and across the country and world, God does this day in, day out; week in, week out; year in, year out. This summer God once again will gather God's people—this time in the broken, beautiful, blessed city of Detroit for the ELCA Youth Gathering.

Detroit

Heidi Hagstrom, Gathering director, writes: "Detroit has much to teach us about being a part of what God is up to at this time in our history ... there are many Lutherans, and brothers and sisters from partner communions, who stand alongside the citizens of Detroit with the cross, proclaiming healing and wholeness in the midst of the death and despair. God is calling us to bear witness to their story, and to his creative and redeeming story of death and resurrection."

New Jersey Synod

As part of the Gathering, more than 400 teens and adult leaders from the New Jersey Synod will travel by bus, van and airplane to Detroit to be fed and further strengthened to go back out into the world as beloved children of God, followers of Jesus Christ on fire by the Spirit.

The Gathering is designed so what happens in Detroit does not stay in Detroit. Rather than asking our young people and adults "Did you have fun?" when they return, we are preparing to actively explore such questions as:

- What was God up to this summer for you and for us?
- What might the Spirit do with this in your lives, our church and God's world?

We eagerly anticipate God's active presence through the Gathering experience!

NJ-Detroit Peace Team

A special connection for the New Jersey Synod at this Gathering will be the work of the NJ-Detroit Peace Team. This team is made up of 23 young people and adult leaders from five of our urban congregations: Christus, Camden; Redeemer, Trenton; St. Stephan's Grace, Newark; St. John, Jersey City; and Redeemer, Jersey City.

The group is coming to Detroit to lead two activities at the Gathering: "Peace Puppets" and "Race & Dreaming God's Future."



The Peace Puppets offering involves making puppets out of newspaper and masking tape, a technique learned from the late Jane Henson, wife of and co-muppeteer with Jim Henson. Used by the Bosnia IST (International Service Trip) teams, these simple, fun puppets are then used to teach special peace-making skills for community problem-solving.

The team's second offering, Race & Dreaming God's Future, is a highly interactive, multimedia activity that will facilitate creative, faith-focused conversations about race, community and God's preferred future.

The NJ-Detroit Peace Team is eager to serve and teach at the Detroit Gathering and to bring back those experiences to their home congregations and beyond.

Connect to the Gathering

All are invited to connect to the Gathering, whether your congregation is sending participants or not. Through the Gathering website (www.elca.org/gathering), you can follow along via the "gNews" newsletter, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. During the Gathering many of the sessions will be live-streamed through the website.

The New Jersey Synod has a Facebook group set up to share news and ask questions. Search Facebook for "NJ Detroit 2015 ELCA Youth Gathering." □

From the bishop

Assembly: How is God at work in us?



Tracie Bartholomew

As you know by now, our assembly theme for 2015 is “Build Us Up, Lord”—a prayer and a plea to God from a church desperately seeking to be faithful in our call.

We will use this theme to explore how God in Jesus Christ is already at work building us into a people ready to serve our neighbors. We will sing this theme as we discover how the Spirit is invigorating and challenging us to take risks in order to proclaim the gospel. We will explore this theme in workshops, reports and stories of our common life.

During our assembly we will also pray for God to

build us up as sisters and brothers in Christ. We will take some intentional time to confront the sin of racism that seeks to tear down and tear apart our neighborhoods, our country, our world and our church.

Being honest with ourselves and each other, we will prayerfully engage in conversations that will, I hope, lead to deeper connections for the sake of being authentic witnesses to the world. This will be important and life-giving work that we need to undertake together.

I invite you to pray our simple theme prayer for your congregation, for our New Jersey Synod and for the ELCA.

Who knows what surprises are in store for us or how God will answer when we raise our voices together? I can't wait to find out!

“Build us up, Lord. Amen.”

Bishop Tracie Batholomew

Cross Roads Camp & Retreat Center

Cross Roads is a welcoming, ecumenical retreat center and camp of the New Jersey Synod and the Episcopal Diocese of Newark. During the summer we provide an amazing camp experience packed with fun activities, faith building and new friendships.

Our theme this summer is “A Love that Never Ends,” focused on Deuteronomy 6:5. There are opportunities for families and kids of all ages.

And check us out year-round for other retreats and activities!

Check us out at www.CrossRoadsRetreat.com for more information!

