**2019 NJ Synod Assembly Recap**

475 members of the NJ Synod gathered in Assembly at the Hyatt Regency in New Brunswick on June 6-8, 2019. Our theme “Be Bold” was lived out in the workshops, worship, reports, celebrations, and elections. Below is a brief recap of our time together.

**Workshops**

We began our time together on Thursday afternoon in a variety of workshops on topics important to our life together. People gathered to learn from each other in the areas of advocacy, race, congregational vitality, financial literacy, ELCA World Hunger Appeal, and Excellence in Ministry, Unleashed (EMU).

**Worship**

Opening worship included the ordination of Pastor Heidi Link, called to serve Reformation, Absecon. Bishop Bartholomew preached and presided – her sermon can be found [here](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6a8946_564250b378c64efcb1dbdfb8a4eccd13.pdf). This celebratory worship service set the tone for our time together with music provided by Brian Conover (keyboard and vocals) and Jim Harris (trumpet and flugelhorn). Martin Luther’s morning and evening prayer book-ended our day on Friday while Saturday morning began with Pastor Raymond Kolison (Redeemer, Trenton) and Erica Earnest (LEAMNJ hunger fellow) leading the assembly in song and prayer. Songs and prayers and Bible dwelling were interwoven throughout our time together.

**Reports**

We heard from ministry partners, synod council, and teams/committees of our synod. The full Bulletin of Reports can be found [here](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6a8946_1d696f6579594cdb913c51d63ed1c123.pdf). Of note, the synod council proposed a 2020 spending plan which keeps spending at the same levels as 2019. The result of this plan is that staffing will change to keep within our anticipated income. A full-time youth ministry specialist will no longer be funded beginning February 1, 2020.

As part of the Reference and Counsel Report, the assembly passed two resolutions and one memorial while referring a third resolution to the synod council. The first resolution to pass affirmed our synod’s commitments to first fruits, percentage giving in congregations and as a synod to churchwide.

A resolution related to including non-binary gender identification in our representational principles was divided into a memorial to churchwide – asking the churchwide assembly to add language to the constitution that specifically includes non-binary gender identification in the changes it is proposing to the constitution and two resolutions related to the synod constitution and synod policies. The memorial passed as did one resolution about synod policies asking for gender information for events and registrations A resolution asking for changes to the synod constitution was referred to synod council.

The Bishop’s [report](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6a8946_1d9b22bbf6df4d65a9f1ae14596d3050.pdf) was given toward the end of the assembly and helped us look ahead to ways we can embrace change and follow the Spirit into the world.

**Celebrations**

Woven throughout the assembly were several celebrations of ministry! First, we celebrated the completion of EMU – Phase 1 and the good work this project accomplished in strengthening financial literacy among our pastors, alleviating student debt for our rostered leaders, and incentivizing retirement and health savings for our pastors. Pastor Scott Schantzenbach handed off the leadership for EMU Phase 2 to Pastor Fred Becker.

Our second big celebration was for The Bishop’s Challenge for World Hunger (aka “The Cow Challenge”). Thanks to your generosity, our giving to ELCA World Hunger Appeal doubled since our 2018 synod assembly! 130 of our 160 congregations donated over $360,000 to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal – and most of them brought a decorated wooden cow cut-out to decorate the ballroom. It was a wonderful celebration but more importantly, a wonderful way to reach out to our neighbors in need. Many thanks to Pastor Sara Lilja and ‘the cow crew” for their hard work in making this effort such a success.

The third big celebration was for the retirement of Pastor Scott Schantzenbach at our banquet. We thanked him for his 41 years of active ministry, the last 16 as an assistant to the bishop. With humor and deep gratitude we were able to highlight Pastor Schantzenbach’s stewardship work among us. You gifted him by contributing $15,000 towards the EMU Ministry Excellence Fund as well as a significant cash gift for him personally.

**Elections**

The assembly re-elected Bishop Bartholomew to a second six-year term, and Vice-President Arundel Clarke and Secretary Cassandra Mack to second four-year terms. In addition, the following people were elected to synod council:

The Rev. Giselle Coutinho (Bridge of Peace, Camden)

William Emerson (St. Mark, Oaklyn)

Andrea Gerrard (St. Stephen, Woodbury)

Steven Hernandez (Faith, Lavallette)

Daniel Fields (Messiah, Parlin)

Linda Magill (Holy Trinity, Manasquan)

The Rev. Carol Lindsay (Calvary, Cranford)

Josie Sanchez – youth position (Bridge of Peace, Camden

Please continue to support these elected leaders of our synod with your prayers.

Pictures and videos of our assembly can be found on Facebook and YouTube– please use them in sharing the story of our being church together.