

SEPA SYNOD ASSEMBLY 2012 - Ecclesia Plantanda

SEPA's 2012 Assembly focuses on Muhlenberg's motto: "The Church must be planted!"

Bishop Burkat Re-elected The Assembly re-elected the bishop on the first ballot with exactly the 75% margin required. "I've learned over the last six years that the Synod elects a pastor and forms a bishop. And you have formed me," Bishop Claire Burkat told the 2012 Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly May 4 after it re-elected her to a second six-year term as bishop. "We are embarking on a new world of ways that we can network and reach out to one another, and God will multiply our efforts more than we can imagine," she said.

'God's Dandelion Church' At the opening worship of the 2012 Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly, Bishop Claire Burkat compared the church to a dandelion. "Just one bright yellow flower, when it's done blooming yields hundreds of tiny seeds that parachute through the air and land to take root, starting the process all over again," said Burkat. She told the Assembly about seeds of word and service currently being spread throughout the Synod. "We are called to spread the Gospel," said Burkat. "Everyone is a potential dandelion seed who believes that the power of God through Jesus Christ springs eternal-anywhere, anytime, anyplace... Live a dandelion faith! Be God's dandelion church," she said.

Seeds of Mission "This is a new season of health and vitality...for the Kingdom of God, for the ELCA, and right here in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod," Bishop Claire Burkat said in her address. "I see lots of life," the bishop said, reflecting on her visits to congregations throughout her first term as bishop. "I see many strong, healthy, mature plants, congregations deeply rooted in their communities that provide their neighbors with beauty and shade and food -- and the Gospel. Dedicated church leaders who are busy watering and fertilizing the soil of the Kingdom, and pulling out weeds that threaten to choke off our witness to the Gospel," she said. "The good news we know and we proclaim is that we are not responsible for the growth - it's God who gives the growth!" the bishop said. "Our call is to faithfully plant, water and tend the garden, whether it is a season of growth or decline."

Faith-Immanuel Received It's a long way from Liberia to East Lansdowne, but over that distance God planted the seeds of the church and nurtured a small worshipping community in a refugee camp into a thriving Lutheran Church received at the Assembly. "I want to say thank you to the Synod, thank you to the bishop...and also thank you to the whole ELCA for helping us," said council president Samuel Kolleh. As a token of that thanks the congregation gave the Synod a birthday gift of \$5,000.

Surplus 2013 Budget Approved The Assembly overwhelmingly approved a 2013 budget that calls for ending the year with a surplus of approximately \$10,000. The budget anticipates income of \$2.26 million in partnership support from congregations and \$1.36 million in additional income, with expenses of \$3.61 million. The budget maintains partnership support to the ELCA at 53.5 percent of giving by congregations, and does not require revenue from sales of church properties or transfers from reserves to balance. Earlier, the Assembly heard that 91 congregations increased or maintained partnership support in 2011, with 24 congregations sending 10 percent or more of their regular giving by members. In all partnership support revenue decreased by 4 percent in 2011. Due to nearly \$260,000 in ongoing savings produced by reducing staff and making targeted expense reductions, the 2012 spending plan expects to complete the year with a small surplus.

'You are the ELCA' "The ELCA is the church that shares a living, daring confidence in God's grace" was the message the Rev. Dr. Sherman Hicks, Director for Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), brought to the 2012 Assembly. Members of the Synod serve the wider church through the work of local members on Church Council and on task forces and churchwide committees. He thanked the individuals and congregations whose mission support enabled the Synod to send over \$1.2 million to the ELCA and allow its partners, agencies and global partners to fund important work in the world. Partnership comes back to Southeastern Pennsylvania, where five churches are supported in mission development, over \$39,000 has been provided in hunger grants to help in ministry to the hungry and poor, and three SEPA congregations have received ELCA congregational renewal grants.

Our Missionaries in Tanzania Susan and Tom MacPherson, missionaries in Tanzania, reported to the Assembly on May 5, live from Tanzania via Skype. The McPhersons have been serving as volunteer missionaries to the North Eastern Diocese of Tanzania, companion to SEPA, since November, 2011. Tom thanked the synod for giving them the opportunity to serve in Tanzania and share the SEPA story in its companion synod. Their work is now taking root in Tanzania.