



# Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Office of the Bishop

## A Message from Bishop Burkat

*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. – Philippians 1:6*

This rich promise of Scripture affirms the good work we have been doing as the church in Southeastern Pennsylvania. It also encourages us to accept the challenge of adapting to the ways in which God is working among us today.

As we survey the shifting landscape we see God's Spirit doing new things inside and outside the church -- even in the midst of declining church attendance, a growing "spiritual but not religious" population, and slipping trust in institutions.

We can't help but notice new patterns of faith and avenues for service developing in our congregations and in our culture as each new generation is born. Faithfulness to the Gospel demands that we find fresh ways to express God's message of grace and acceptance to the people God has placed in our midst.

In recent months we have listened carefully to the Spirit and to many clergy and lay leaders. We've heard you say that you want to be equipped for ministry in this transitional time. You long to be better connected to each other and to walk together collaboratively as a Synod.

This is why we are launching the ***Forward Together in Faith*** Campaign to generate resources to help make this vision a reality.

God has called us, together – as individual believers, as communities of faith and as the Synod organization – to be bold Lutheran witnesses to God's abundant love here in Southeastern Pennsylvania. As we approach the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, we, like Martin Luther, are called to adapt to tell God's story in new and creative ways right for our day and age.

I am excited about moving *Forward Together in Faith* with you as we reinvigorate our church and reach out to change lives and communities!

With and in Christ,

The Rev. Claire S. Burkat, Bishop



# Forward TOGETHER in Faith

## A Campaign for the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

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will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.*

– Philippians 1:6

This rich promise of Scripture affirms the good work we have been doing as the church in Southeastern Pennsylvania. It also encourages us to accept the challenge of adapting to the ways in which God is working here today. The changing patterns of faith formation and service emerging in our culture require our Synod to adapt in order to faithfully equip leaders and congregations for this new environment.

We are now poised to reshape the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod as a network that equips the saints, innovates ways of being church, and communicates what God is doing through us. The **Forward Together in Faith** campaign will raise \$2.5 million over the next three years to help us live into this vision.



**Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

# THE VISION ENCOMPASSES FOUR KEY THEMES:



## Forward Together as NETWORKS

JESUS CONNECTED AND EMPOWERED PEOPLE, AND SENT THEM OUT FOR MINISTRY TOGETHER.

We envision a Synod where:

- All congregations have access to tools to assess their assets for ministry and identify areas for attention
- Trained coaches accompany congregations through change
- Leaders have more opportunities to share their gifts with the Synod
- The Synod uses information about our peoples' strengths, expertise and needs to network leaders and congregations in new and exciting ways
- Grassroots networks will grow around new visions for mission
- We will gather more frequently to celebrate, learn and worship together



## Forward Together as EQUIPPERS

JESUS INVESTED IN HIS KEY LEADERS AND INSPIRED THEM IN DEEP RELATIONSHIP TO GOD.

We envision a Synod where:

- A new Mission "School" will allow leaders to learn from local and nationally-known teachers and work together to take action for God's mission
- We have funding to offer scholarships for seminarians and for learning events for lay leaders



## Forward Together as INNOVATORS

JESUS INCLUDED PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS AND EXPANDED HIS FOLLOWERS' VIEW OF FAITH COMMUNITY.

We envision a Synod where:

- We increase our support of ministries to people in poverty that may not be self-sustaining
- We have funding to start imaginative faith communities to serve many people not currently reached by our congregations
- We partner with congregations to start innovative faith expressions that meet local needs
- We support and encourage congregational innovation and experimentation
- We respond faithfully and creatively to the as-yet-unrevealed mission opportunities that God places before us



## Forward Together as COMMUNICATORS

JESUS COMMUNICATED TELLING STORIES, USING DIFFERENT STYLES AND METHODS, BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND GOD, AND PEOPLE WITH EACH OTHER.

We envision a Synod where:

- We have enhanced communications resources to tell more stories of God's transformation in our congregations, engaging strong visuals, video and social media
- We share more stories of "best missional practices" with congregations
- We help congregations tell their stories more effectively
- We have state-of-the art tools for electronic communications, online meetings and education, and producing and streaming video



**The Campaign  
for the ELCA**

When you support the *Forward Together in Faith* campaign, you will also support the ELCA Campaign, as we will tithe ten percent of our net receipts each year to the ELCA Campaign.

# Forward Together in **FAITH**

I'M INSPIRED BY A SYNOD THAT'S WILLING TO LOOK BEYOND THE WAY THAT THINGS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DONE TO TRY TO DISCOVER THE WAY THAT GOD IS MOVING US FORWARD TOGETHER IN FAITH. — Pastor Matt Staniz

Imagine your congregation is not alone, but part of a network of more than 150 faith communities and tens of thousands of followers of Christ, journeying together to share stories, celebrate success, solve problems, heal communities, change lives through Christ. It's a beautiful picture, a holy vision. **But it's not ours. It's God's.**

This vision has emerged as we listened to hundreds of leaders from across our Synod and learned your dreams for transforming our church. "You've shown us that you're ready to change and we are ready together to try new things, to take some risks and to move forward into the future, to adapt to new ways of being church for this 21st century," says Bishop Claire S. Burkat.

"The people have spoken and said, 'Equip us, show us how to do the ministries, send us out in the trenches and let us do it,'" says Tracey Beasley, Synod vice president.

As we listened three things came clear: People in our Synod want to move **forward**, experimenting with new ways of living out the old, old story in our neighborhoods. We like traveling **together**, learning from and supporting each other in mission and ministry. And we must journey in **faith**, bathed in prayer and powered by our grace-filled identity as Lutherans.



*An overwhelming number of people we listened to expressed the desire to look **forward**. "Change is here and change is coming, and that's not going away," says Pastor Keith Anderson, author of The Digital Cathedral: Networked Ministry in a Wireless World. "So we either engage with our world as its changing, or we're going to be left behind."*

*Our research also showed that Lutherans in Southeastern Pennsylvania like being and working **together**. "We as church can do something greater together than we can do apart," says Cheryl Lafferty, director of Rhawnhurst Turning Point.*

*It shows a lot of **faith** "that the Synod has the courage to try something that's never been done before here," says Dan Scharnhorst, executive director of our ministry partner Bear Creek Camp. "It shows a lot of excitement about the Synod and what we're capable of."*

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To bring this vision to life we have created the **Forward Together in Faith** campaign, which will help us imagine new ways of NETWORKING our people, EQUIPPING leaders, INNOVATING faith community and COMMUNICATING the Gospel story.

These streams flow into a single understanding for our common ministry as the Synod, says Bishop Burkat: "I want our Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod to be a leader in modeling innovation and finding new and creative ways to share the gospel for this day and age."

*For surely I know the plans I have for you,  
says the LORD, plans for your welfare and  
not for harm, to give you a future with hope.*

– Jeremiah 29:11

**Forward Together in Faith** and **Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA** are complementary. Our local campaign seeks to change the culture of our Synod, find new ways for congregations to do ministry together, and raise \$2.5 million to help us live into this new vision. The \$198 million ELCA campaign tends to national and global ministries, continuing the ongoing work of ministries including ELCA World Hunger and global missionaries and partnerships, as well as national priorities that include planting and renewing congregations and supporting future leaders.

We will tithe to **Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA**. Your gifts to **Forward Together in Faith** will make possible the revitalization of our Synod and our congregations *and* help support many ELCA ministries.

*"One of the compelling reasons why it's so important to embark on this campaign at this time is that the ELCA can't be healthy unless Synods are healthy and vital in their mission and ministry. Synods can't be healthy unless congregations, faith communities and social ministry organizations are vital and healthy. And congregations can't be healthy without individual believers learning how to be ambassadors for Christ in this day and age, for this new time," says Bishop Burkat.*

*"We're not going to wither and die because things are changing," says Dan Scharnhorst, "We're going to be bold, we're going to take steps and with God's help, we're going to change our part of the world to make people's lives a little bit better."*

**Forward Together in Faith** is not just about money; it's about bringing this vision into our Synod culture.





## Forward Together as **EQUIPPERS**

WHEN JESUS GATHERED HIS DISCIPLES, HE EQUIPPED THEM FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY. WHETHER THEY GOT IT ALL THE TIME IS ANOTHER STORY, BUT HE EQUIPPED THEM TO DO THE WORK AFTER HE WAS GONE. WE WANT TO DO THAT TOO.

– Bishop Claire Burkat

In today's ministry context, equipping means more than providing resources and information. Equipping involves helping church leaders to think like entrepreneurs, ready to take risks and learn from success and failure. Rather than looking to generic programs, pastors and congregation leaders will need to deeply understand their community and decide how to innovate in that context.

Our vision calls for hands-on equipping and ways for our leaders and congregations to continually learn from each other. It will involve bringing in national leaders to dialogue with our congregations. It will involve recognizing local teachers to share their experience with their peers. And we will develop ways to efficiently share the best practices that we learn along the way.

One thing is clear: **Equipping leaders will be our primary job.**

*"A lot of what I have seen is capacity-building," says Adrienne Melendez, who went from young adult servant trip participant to leader, Synod Council member and co-leader of youth programs at Good Shepherd, Coatesville.*

*This involvement "has opened doors and its deepened my faith, in getting to see the work that happens with youth and how they grow," Adrienne says. She watched youth on trips to South Dakota and Costa Rica grapple with new experiences and deep questions like "Why does God allow poverty?" and "What is my role as a Christian?"*

*"I think the Synod has really developed a rich culture of seeing youth as leaders," she says. "So I have to say kudos to the Synod for seeing opportunities for youth to serve, and for also knowing that they can come up with ideas and can lead projects, and really giving them the experience to do that, while still growing in their faith."*

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Congregations will have access to an assessment tool that will help them understand their passions, energy and willingness for change. "It gives a really good picture a snapshot of your congregation, helping to understand what your strengths are, where your growth edges can be," says Pastor Alina Gayeuski.

"This kind of evidence-based organizational intelligence would be invaluable to pastors in every situation," adds Pastor Wayne Matthias-Long.

*You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.*

– 2 Timothy 2:1-2

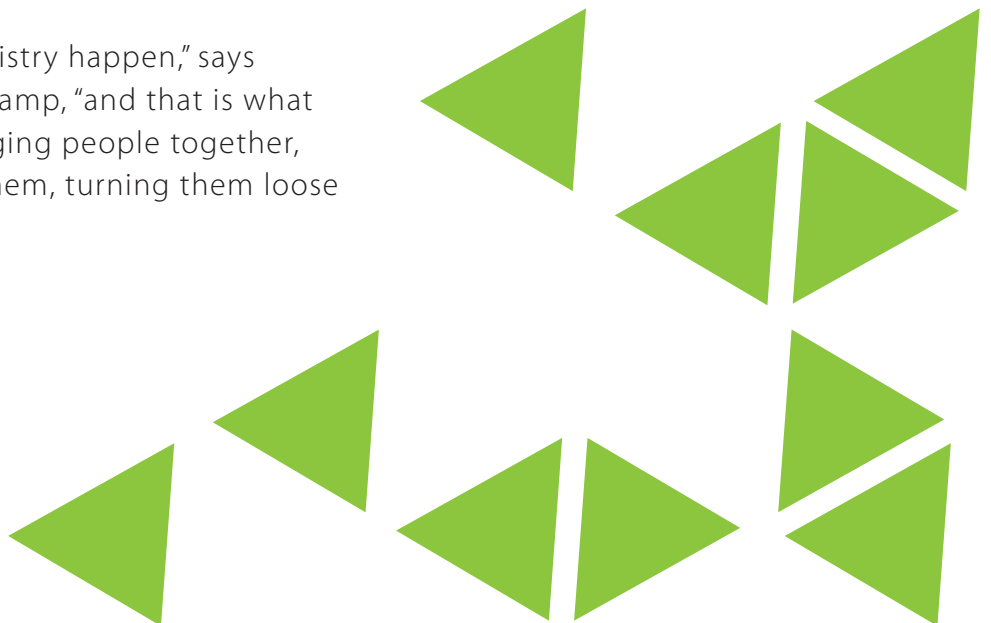
Equipping also means that it is "easier for people to say 'Yes!' to becoming a rostered leader in the ELCA," Bishop Burkat says. **Forward Together in Faith** will raise funds to increase the financial assistance the Synod can provide to seminarians to reduce the amount of debt they carry into their ministries, which gives them freedom to serve in a wider range of calls.

"This is a campaign to make ministry happen," says Dan Scharnhorst of Bear Creek Camp, "and that is what we are about as the Synod: bringing people together, empowering them, equipping them, turning them loose -- and changing lives."

*"I have been very blessed to be funded by a number of different sources" including the Synod, seminary and the larger church, says Kat Steinly, LTSP '15. Additional help from her home church, Trinity Lutheran in Perkasio, made it possible to graduate with minimal debt.*

*"It is certainly something that comes up in conversation among seminary students. People are often worried about how they are going to pay (student loans) off, especially given the fact that pastors don't make a whole lot of money," she says.*

*Having fewer loans "gives me a sense of freedom in not feeling pressured to make a certain choice in terms of my career, to decide what is best for me in terms of ministry, and what is best for the church." Kat says.*





# Forward Together as **INNOVATORS**

WE LIVE IN A CULTURE OF INNOVATION WHERE THE IDEA OF STARTUPS IS DRIVING INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY. WE NEED TO THINK OF OURSELVES AS STARTUPS—LIKE 250-YEAR-OLD STARTUPS. THAT'S WHAT WE ARE NOW.

– pastor and author Keith Anderson

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod has long been seen as an early adopter and mission innovator within the ELCA. Over the last two decades we have creatively planted ministries among underserved populations – in the Latino, African and Korean immigrant communities, for example.

Recent years have seen more out-of-the-box mission starts:

- *Rhawnhurst Turning Point, not a church at all, but a community youth center where young people express their God-given talents with Christian mentors.*
- *The Welcome Church, an “unhoused” church serving people without houses in Center City, which worships on the Ben Franklin Parkway and offers Bible study, respite and care in several downtown churches.*
- *Our latest mission, Living Gospel Ministries offers faith community, life skills and job help to persons returning to the community and their families after incarceration.*

“One of the things that the Synod does really well is constantly find new ways of telling and living the old story,” says Pastor Violet Little of The Welcome Church. “The new ways are innovations. But the story never changes because God never changes.”

*Several congregations in the Philadelphia area have tapped the emerging trend of “theology pubs” as a way of both engaging regular churchgoers and making space for skeptics—friends and neighbors talking about faith and life in a pub.*

*One benefit has been a growing understanding in the congregation that its mission and ministry extend beyond the church building. “It becomes an imaginative leaping off point for envisioning what God’s calling us to in the future,” says Pastor Keith Anderson of Upper Dublin Lutheran Church, convener of God on Tap in Ambler.*

*“I think one of the ways the Synod is going to look different is that we’re going to have different ways or more expansive ways of thinking about where ministry happens and who it happens with,” says Anderson. “I would expect to see many more localized ministries happening ... that our ministries kind of spread out from our congregations and fill the gaps.”*

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"These new ministries have been very courageous in their outreach to people on the margins," says Bishop Burkat. "We've got ministries welcoming immigrant communities coming into our Synod, and we have opportunities to connect with people of younger generations, or those people who have no faith community at all."

*I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*

– Joshua 1:9

Going forward as innovators also means fostering creativity for new ministries within existing congregations, like the "theology pubs" that have been springing up in congregations large and small, in city and suburbs. This dream poses two challenges—finding funds to help seed good ministry ideas, and developing a culture of innovation and risk-taking across the Synod.

"A lot of innovation is listening and figuring out what people want and what's going to add value to their life and their work, and being able to address that," says Adrienne Melendez, a young adult from Good Shepherd, Coatesville.

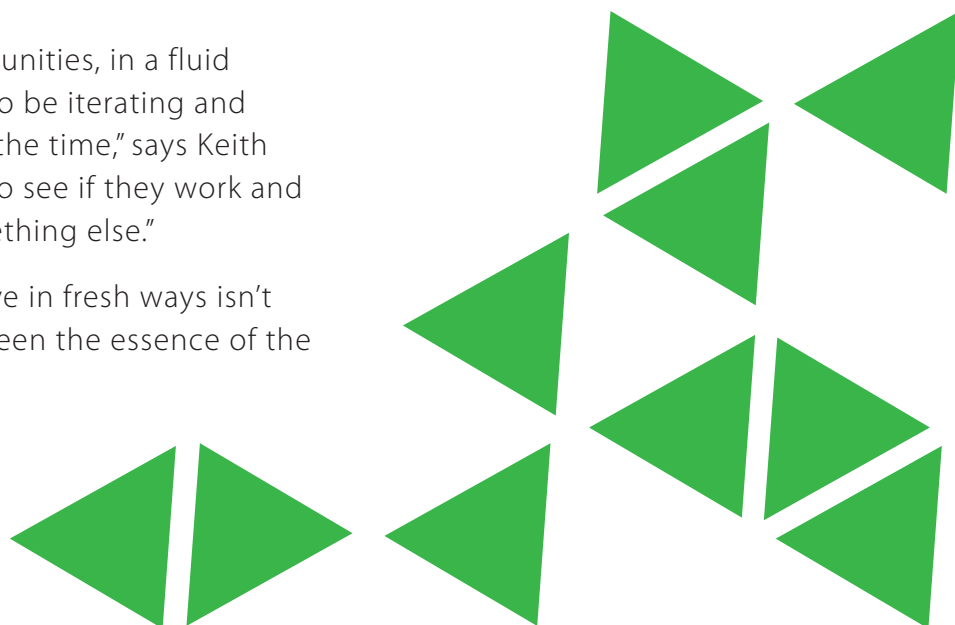
Instead of looking for "safe" opportunities, in a fluid landscape such as ours "we need to be iterating and experimenting and innovating all the time," says Keith Anderson. "We have to try things to see if they work and be okay if they don't, and try something else."

Telling God's story of hope and love in fresh ways isn't just the future of the church. It's been the essence of the church from the very beginning.

*"In prison, you don't make any decisions for yourself," says Pastor Linda Manson, the mission developer of Living Gospel Ministries, which replaces this negative cycle by showing formerly incarcerated people God's grace and mercy while helping them return to the community, improve basic life skills and prepare for employment.*

Our Synod's newest faith community recently began worshipping. "I believe adding worship as part of this ministry will only increase the ways in which we are able to serve our community," Manson says. "It's wonderful when you can help someone see how God is working in their life and where they are accepted as they are, despite their circumstances."

*"I'm so blessed to be doing this ministry, and I'm grateful that the Synod thinks out of the box when it comes to new forms of faith community," says Manson.*





## Forward Together as **COMMUNICATORS**

WE HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL IN WAYS WE JUST NEVER HAD BEFORE. LET'S NOT BE AFRAID OF THAT; LET'S EMBRACE IT.

– Bishop Burkat

Jesus did much of his teaching by telling stories to ordinary people, in language that reflected their daily life and work. Martin Luther famously adapted the emerging technology of his day to reach people far beyond his neighborhood. How we communicate, what media and channels we adopt, affects all aspects of ministry – how we equip people, how we build networks, how we listen to our communities in order to innovate ministry.

Our Synod has been a leader in sharing our stories across a wide variety of platforms; email, web, social media, video and more. We're equipping the people in your congregation who do communications ministry through consultations, a Facebook group and face-to-face learning sessions. And there are always more stories to tell, new channels to experiment with; which requires time, technologies, and funding.

"We don't have a rulebook that says if you communicate A, B and C, you'll get a response," says Pastor Matt Staniz. "Today it really takes being willing to communicate in ways A through Z, and then finding out where your communication has been effective. And then expecting that to change on a regular basis."

*As a member "having a fair amount of computer savvy and strong inclination for details and precision, I was involved in various aspects of ministry that involved communication" at two different congregations, says John Woehr III of Little Zion Lutheran Church at Indianfield. "When the Synod developed the Communicators Network it was a blessing to become a part of that larger ministry. It gave me opportunities to both share what I had to offer and to benefit from what fellow communicators had to share."*

*The Communicators Network allows congregation web editors, social media managers, writers and other communicators to share ideas and post questions to our SEPAComm Facebook group. The Network has also sponsored learning events on topics including social media, email marketing and copyright issues, and informal networking opportunities.*

*"The communications landscape is changing all the time, and it is hard to keep on top of everything," says Bob Fisher, assistant to the bishop for communication. "But in the network there's a good chance there is someone who has answered your question before."*

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The **Forward Together in Faith** Campaign will increase our Synod's capacity to tell our stories in more visual and compelling ways and to provide state-of-the-art tools for web and social media communications, video production and streaming, web conferencing and virtual meetings, and technologies that emerge over the next few years.

One key outcome will be developing channels through which congregations and leaders can easily share with each other what they are learning works – or does not work – as we go **Forward Together in Faith**.

*...for we cannot keep from speaking  
about what we have seen and heard.*

- Acts 4:20

The vision also includes providing more equipping events, consultations and peer advisors to help your congregation tell its story better through its newsletters, social media, websites, and other media.

"We really want to help our congregations to use the communication channels and technology that the people are using, that the younger generations are using," says Bishop Burkat.

Becoming fluent with the evolving communications landscape is crucial to our ability to reach out to digitally-connected generations.

"Every day, same-old ministry is not going to make it," says vice president Tracey Beasley. For the generations of Snapchat, Vine and Instagram, "just coming to this church on Sunday isn't cutting it for them. We have to change for the times as such as this."

*When crisis strikes, SEPA Communications can be your partner. In 2008 when a murder occurred in one of our congregations, communications helped the leadership to plan a response strategy to manage the TV trucks and newspaper reporters camped out in the church parking lot. Leaders appreciated that staff continued to provide advice and support throughout the police investigation and subsequent trial.*

*"If the media call, it is important to be ready to respond clearly and honestly, with pastoral compassion," says Bob Fisher. "Even a crisis situation can be an opportunity to share the Gospel with the community."*

*Thankfully most crises are on a smaller scale. But if your congregation faces an issue that might reach the public media, SEPA Communications is available to help manage your response. Resources are also available to help congregations prepare a plan before crisis occurs.*





## Forward Together as **NETWORKS**

MY VISION FOR NETWORKING WOULD BE THAT WE ALL REALIZE OUR NEED FOR ONE ANOTHER, AND THAT WE EACH HAVE SOMETHING TO GIVE AND SOMETHING TO RECEIVE.

– Violet Little, pastor, The Welcome Church

Our Synod is by definition a network – leaders, congregations, social ministry organizations, camp, college, seminary, and individual believers – walking together with the common objective of releasing our people to share God’s love and mercy across Southeastern Pennsylvania.

“I think the Synod does a great job of trying to connect people together, and if this campaign is successful it will really deepen those connections,” says Cheryl Lafferty of Rhawnhurst Turning Point. “It will help like-minded faith communities find one another and share resources and share stories and share training and to be able to do more efficiently what they are called to do.”

The results of congregational assessments will help the Synod to find affinities among congregations. “This will allow us to work with objective data, rather than assumptions or intuitions,” says Ellen Daneke, who leads the team that will analyze the data. Congregations will be able to find partners who share their passions for ministry and mentors who can help them navigate challenges.

*“The Synod was open to the idea of a grassroots, ecumenical, community mission when we first shared it with them, and they have walked with us since with encouragement, prayer, and funding,” says Cheryl Lafferty, director of Rhawnhurst Turning Point, an afterschool gathering space for local youth.*

*“The Synod has also been invaluable in helping us network with other Christians and congregations, as we share God’s Spirit at work and create new and life-giving partnerships with others,” says Lafferty. “Making these connections has given us a new way to network that has brought vitality and excitement to our community.”*

*“God is making connections, growing self-confidence in kids, and helping them to find trusted mentors in the volunteers. They now have a network of peers that is committed to making good choices,” says Lafferty.*

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"I think the Synod will be stronger because we will be able to network in a new and different way," says Pastor Stacey-Kyle Rea.

A key part of this vision will be to encourage and equip grassroots networks. There are now more than 40 teams and networks drawing people together to make ministry happen – from interim ministry to linking with congregations in our Tanzanian companion Synod, from identifying mission opportunities to building skills and cohesion among congregation youth workers.

"The whole idea is that we can do more together than we can do by ourselves," says Tracey Beasley, Synod vice president.

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

– 1 Corinthians 12:12

The vision also includes building bridges with other denominations and community partners. The Synod connected a half-dozen city congregations in an effort known as Urban Seeds, which has partnered with universities, financial institutions and non-profits to help raise financial literacy in their communities. Congregations forge these partnerships, too. For example, Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Yardley has joined forces with God's Love, Newtown, a local food pantry and a nearby Episcopal parish to form a local Food Insecurity Alliance.

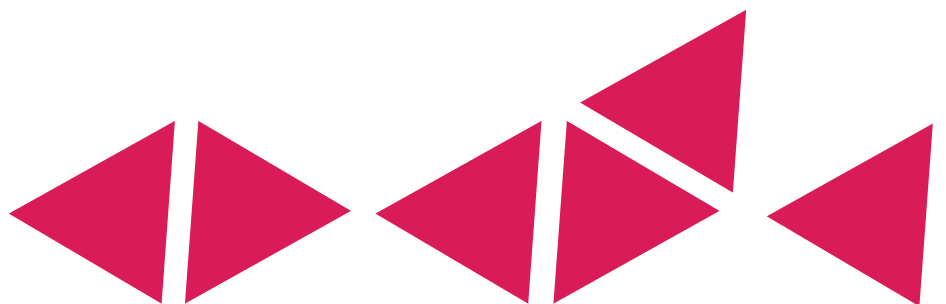
**The possibilities are limited only by our imaginations.**

*When Pastor Violet Little approached the Synod with the idea of a ministry for unhoused people in Philadelphia, she knew she'd need lots of other partners. She received salary support from an Episcopal parish and recruited a multi-denominational clergy team for The Welcome Church.*

*"When you have relationships with people one of the most important things is to listen to others," says Little. Several Center City churches offered space, and she soon realized that the possibilities for partnerships were limitless. Before long a network of congregations provided coffee hour for worship along the Parkway, warm clothing, and Bible study. Healthcare providers joined the mix.*

*Welcome Threads, a silk screening and weaving business, printing t-shirts began as a way to help build self-esteem, confidence and working skills. "More than anything Welcome Threads is about forming community, giving back, and having purpose."*

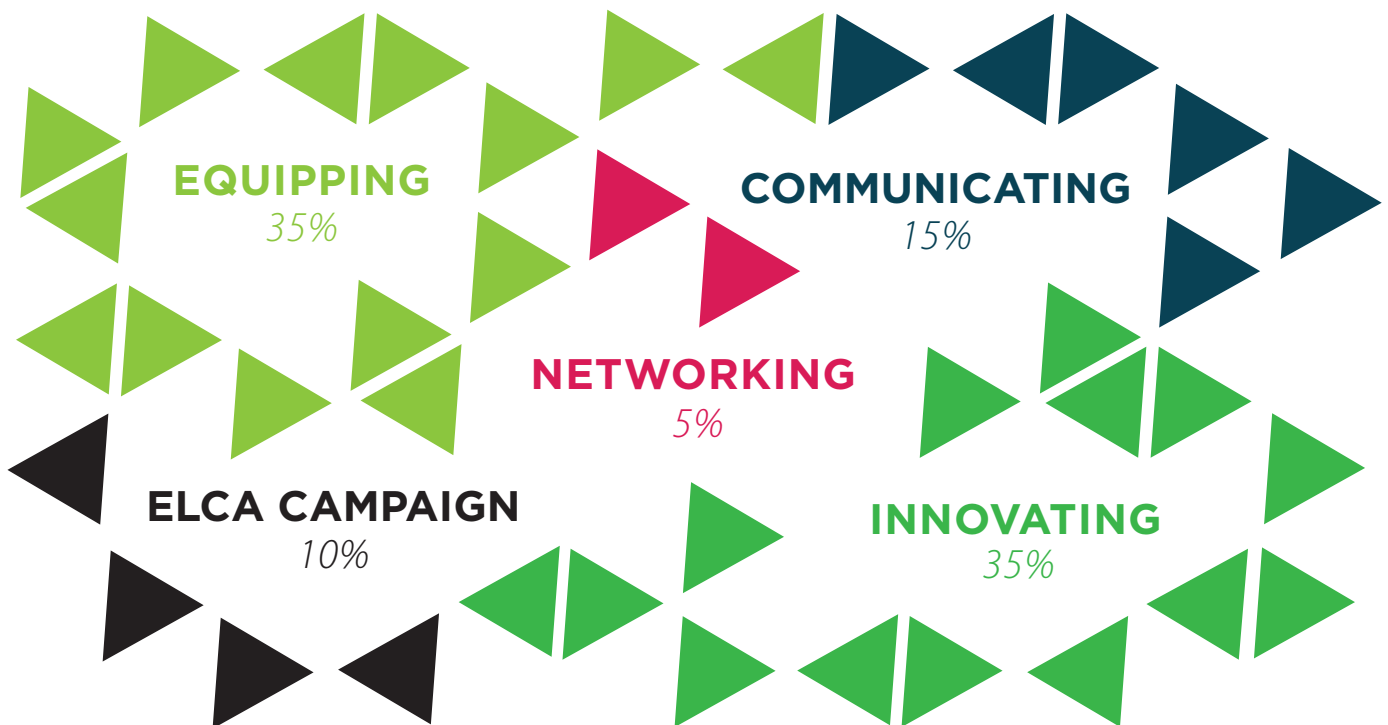
*"The Welcome Church has given me the realization of how badly we need one another and God to do anything," says Little.*





# Forward Together in **FAITH** Supports Ministry

*Forward Together in Faith* has a goal of raising \$2.5 million over three years to help the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod live into our four priorities, with a tithe to the Campaign for the ELCA:



**EQUIPPING** – providing learning opportunities, such as a “Mission School,” for congregational leaders; supporting more churches to take the Congregation Assessment Tool, and increasing scholarships for seminarians.

**INNOVATING** – planting new communities of faith among underserved populations and offering grants for innovative ministries by congregations.

**NETWORKING** – creating and sustaining new networks and partnerships among congregations and leaders.

**COMMUNICATING** – enhancing our ability to use emerging communications channels and technologies, and equipping congregations to improve their web presence and tell their stories using visuals, video, and social media.