



NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. CHRISTOPHER deFOREST
Bishop

April 23, 2025

God's Beloved,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

During the 2020 Synod Assembly, as it became increasingly possible that you all might actually elect me to be your bishop – I began to imagine who might be the best person to have alongside me, to help me do this new work, and to best serve God and you – the dear people and congregations of the NE PA Synod.

The first name that came into my mind was Pastor Rachael Dietz. She and I had already worked together for three years, training and mentoring new pastors and deacons in First Call Theological Education. She was well-known and deeply respected. And whereas I can be a bit... shall we say, dramatic? Pastor Rachael was more measured, more calm, and she knew just the right kinds of questions to ask, to get to the heart of matters.

So I was grateful when she accepted the offer to join me, serving in a new position on the bishop's staff: Executive Associate of the Bishop for Leadership. I took office on January 1, 2021, and she joined one month later. She began with a large portfolio of responsibilities, including: the candidacy process; the mobility process; management of the roster of pastors and deacons; stewardship; constitution and governance; and she was the Associate relating to both the East and West Berks Mission Districts.

Over these four-plus years, all of us together have sailed through all kinds of weather. And each of us have had our professional and personal moments of success and of struggle. Through it all, God has been ever faithful. And Rachael has often been the first to ask the biggest and best question: "Where is God in all this?"

This question has so often provided an opportunity to open ourselves to new possibilities, and to listen closely to our God who says: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?" [Isaiah 43:19] In this Spirit, Pastor Rachael Dietz is resigning from her position as Executive Associate of the Bishop for Leadership.

To facilitate a smoother transition, Pastor Dietz will be working with us through June 30, 2025, fulfilling all her regular duties, and helping us prepare for her departure and do good leave-taking with and for her. She will then take an administrative leave from July 1 through December 31, during which time she will be able to provide limited, appropriate support to those taking up her current role and responsibilities. Her focus, however, will be on discernment for her future and where God is calling her next. Then, she will formally resign as of December 31 as Executive Associate for Leadership.

Very soon, I will be sharing more information on new strategies and structure for the bishop's staff – including job descriptions and postings for new positions, to meet the needs and support the life and growth of our congregations and their leaders. You can expect to see more on or before May 9.

There is no short way to give you a full sense of all that Pastor Dietz has meant to this synod and this church – in her time as Executive Associate, and her 19 years of ordained ministry. Her strength, her faith, her courage, her good humor, her deep insights, her care and keen awareness of the needs and dignity and value of those around her and all God's people and places. Plus, for me – the phone calls and texts, sometimes at odd emergency hours, that she almost always sent or received with grace, kindness and patience; the insights and reflections she brought to complex problems; the many laughs and joyful celebrations; the tears and the prayers – I am truly grateful, as I'm sure you are as well.

Rachael has told me, it is fine for you to reach out to her, through her email, or snail mail sent to the synod office. We look forward to the good work we will still be sharing with her through June 30, including staff and synod team meetings, Synod Council and our May 30-31 Synod Assembly. At this point, all the events and services that she was scheduled to be present for, through June 30, are still happening; but you can check with her to confirm.

As St. Paul writes in Philippians 1:3-6: "I thank my God for every remembrance of you, always in every one of my prayers for you, praying with joy for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident in this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."

In God's Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Christopher deForest". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Christopher deForest
Bishop, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA