



NEPA SYNOD

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod
LOVE • HEAL • ENGAGE

The Rev. CHRISTOPHER deFOREST
Bishop



June 17, 2025

Dear Synod,

In these warm days following Pentecost, I am still lingering over the first line of the reading from Acts: *"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place..."*

Would that we could be all together in one place! But summertime leads to a lot of travel; folks are on vacation; or preparing to move and to start in new schools or new homes or new communities. We are out of doors, out in our neighborhoods, out hiking and camping and visiting. Many of us spend less time in our churches, especially on Sunday – I have heard many say how thankful they are, that they can join worship online while they are away from home. We are out and about – loving, healing and engaging like Jesus.

Your synod council, synod staff and teams are also out and about – also doing new work, to support your ministries and your mission – even while taking our own time for rest and rejuvenation.

After a [productive synod assembly on May 30-31](#), the newly elected and continuing synod council members will be meeting at Bear Creek Camp on Saturday, June 28 for their first regular meeting together – in which they will also be moving forward on the work that is outlined in the "NEPA Synod Council Statement" from May 24, 2025. You can read that statement on the synod's website at godslove.org/council-statement-2025. This statement was issued to the Synod Assembly as an addendum to the "Report of the Synod Council" in the Bulletin of Reports for the Assembly. Voting Members of the Assembly were encouraged to share it, and it has been public on Synod Assembly webpage since May 27. We're also letting you know now so you can also be aware, and can join the synod council and staff in this work over the next couple of years.

Along with this, Synod Council Executive Committee has been working with me and our staff to make sure that your important work, as leaders and as congregations, continues to be fully supported. Here are some key categories of that support and who to contact:

Leader and Congregational Support: For leaders or congregations with questions or concerns; or who are in transition (seeking a new pastor, retirement matters): please note that five of our current mission district Associates of the Bishop are planning to continue in their roles. Associates, staff, and myself also work closely with your **nine elected mission district deans**, especially when there is a pastoral care need for pastors, deacons, or licensed lay ministers. If you need help with reviewing your congregational constitution, please contact [Laurie Christman](#), your Coordinator of Leader Support, who will connect you with the Governance Committee.

Hazleton-Lehigh Mission District: Pastor Carl Shankweiler has resigned as Associate (though I am glad to know he has been asked by the mission district leaders to continue with support for mission district programs). For any other matters within Hazleton-Lehigh, you can call me at 610-266-5101 or email me at bishopd@nepsynod.org; or contact the Mission District Dean, [Pastor Mike Frost](#), by email. The associates will also be assisting me in sharing this support, as are other volunteers.

East and West Berks Mission Districts: [Pastor Drew Neidig](#) also intends to resign as Associate effective August 1st. From now until then he continues in this role and is the person to contact. We will be working together with the Deans and the mission districts, on plans for support after that date and will let everyone know as soon as possible. Drew will continue his work as one of the pastors of the Pretzel City 6261 bundle, as well as other roles he fills with the mission district.

6261: For any congregations working or considering forming a 6261 Ministry Community, [Deacon Kat Tigerman](#), your Director for Evangelical Mission, continues to be the go-to contact. Almost two years ago, synod council voted to declare 6261 a “synod priority” – and that commitment continues, especially as three new groupings or “bundles” are preparing to launch in the next year. This direction is going strong.

Licensed Lay Ministry: [Pastor Jira Albers](#) continues to serve as our LLM Coordinator, working directly and actively with me and the “LLM Formation and Advisory Team.” LLM is an exciting formation pathway to support congregational vitality and leader development. It continues to grow at a fast pace, now with over 60 enrolled.

Candidacy: For candidates for pastor or deacon who are in the candidacy process, or considering ordained ministry: please contact [Pastor Jennifer Heavner](#), who is the chair of our Candidacy Committee.

For all other support – your synod staff, synod council, synod committee of deans, and ministry team chairs continue in their roles and duties, as listed on our synod website under “[Synod Leadership](#),” “[Mission Districts](#),” and “[Ministry Teams](#).” Every position has an email listed. All the contacts and duties have been updated as of June 17.

Count my support as well.

In God’s love,



Bishop Christopher deForest (he/him)

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

WHAT WE’RE DOING: Connecting congregations for life-giving mission and ministry, so they can love like Jesus, heal like Jesus, and engage like Jesus: growing young, gaining strength, and going beyond death to life.