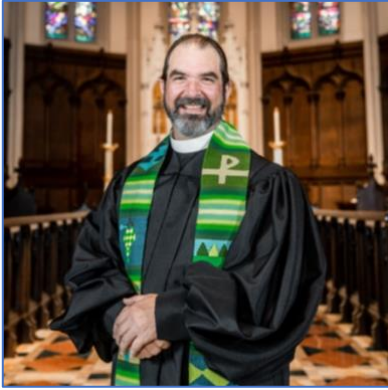




## Upstate New York Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

### 2023 Staff Reports



*The Rev. Lee Miller II, Bishop of the Upstate NY Synod*

#### **2023 Highlights from the Office of the Bishop!**

Cultivating a GRACE Mindset: Restorative Justice. Restorative justice, the second practice in our GRACE Mindset led our annual theme and programs. Our Synod Assembly, with keynote speaker, The Rev. Amy Reumann, ELCA Director of Advocacy, and Fall Synod Ministerium for rostered leaders, with special guest Deacon Ross Murray, author of *The Everyday Advocate*, led and taught us the ways of practicing restorative justice as individuals and in community. We have supported congregations and individuals through the work of the Gender and Racial Justice Task Forces and have begun conversations relation to care of creation as a justice matter. We have also listened to learn of the experiences of our Palestinian Lutheran siblings in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and how we might accompany their ministries to care for God's people in a land sacred to so many.

We have also celebrated great gifts of joy this year! The ordinations of The Rev. Heather Allport-Cohoon, called to the Northwest Pennsylvania Synod, The Rev. Chuck Copps, St. Mark Baldwinsville, The Rev. Lisa Frauens, St. Timothy, Geneseo, The Rev. Meghan James, St. Martin, Tonawanda & Abiding Savior N. Tonawanda, and The Rev. Gerald Zimmerman, Bethel, Portville & Shepherd of the Valley, Wellsville. Each ordination was meaningful in its own way with family, friends, community, and colleagues joining in the celebration.

We have welcomed seven pastors who are new to the Upstate New York Synod in 2023: Please join us in welcoming The Rev. Adam Arends, St. Timothy, Grand Island, The Rev. Josh Evans, St. John's, Albany, The Rev. Darcy Tillman, Lord of Life, Depew, The Rev. Rebecca Truland, King of Kings, Liverpool, The Rev. Jeff Wilson, Holy Trinity, Buffalo, The Rev. Garth Olsen, Good Shepherd, Fayetteville, and The Rev. Jennifer Manis, Grace and Holy Spirit, Cortland. Each pastor makes of us a new church, and we are blessed when our gifts come together for the sake of the church and the world God loves.



Joys include the work of all congregation lay leaders, staff, and volunteers. We give thanks for the service of Synod Authorized Ministers as they lead worship in congregations every Sunday and grow in their formation and responsibilities. Special thanks to our deans, program specialists and Office of the Bishop staff, we are grateful for your work and wisdom.

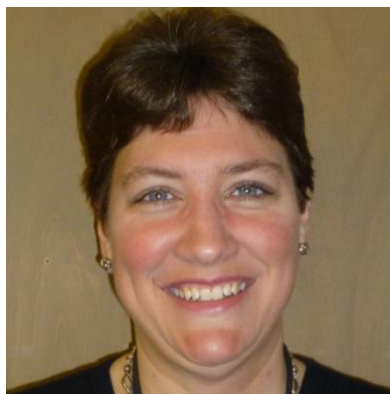
My greatest joy in this call is to be in community with congregations in worship, sharing in expressions of prayer, praise and thanks to God. Thank you for inviting me into your community and sacred spaces. Together, we dream a church where God's love in Christ might activate us for the sake of justice and joy. Thanks be to God!

*Lee M. Miller*

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**The Rev. Aileen Robbins, Associate with the Bishop for Healthy Systems and Congregational Life**

Since becoming the Associate to the Bishop for Healthy Systems and Congregational Life, I have attended the first of the ELCA Systems Academy in October with the second coming shortly in January. I have met attended the Staff Retreat and met with a number of pastor's in informal conversation at the Ministerium. My colleague, Karen Immerman, and I have traveled to conduct in person meetings. Some of my conversation have been with congregations and leaders in crisis or anticipating Holy Closure or a merger, and some have been wonderful dialogs regarding discerning the moving of the Spirit among God's people. I love being engaged with the leaders of our Upstate New York churches and look forward to working with you in the upcoming year.



**Julie Grindle,**

*Associate with the Bishop for Candidacy, Roster Care and Administration*

Greetings! This year has felt like a whirlwind! My official title is now Associate with the Bishop for Candidacy, Roster Care, and Administration. I deal with all things Candidacy: this includes discernment conversations with those not yet sure if they want to be rostered leaders; working with those who have applied for candidacy, helping the candidates navigate the process until they are Approved for Ordination; and dealing with all of the Churchwide paperwork.

My virtual office door is always open for roster care, whether it's a question from a rostered leader about On Leave from Call, retirement, or a question about a situation in a congregation. Hopefully, I can either answer the question or get them to the right person. I work with the Bishop's schedule, travel the Synod as necessary, and work with our Mobility Specialist, Rachel Sosebee, on congregational transitions in our Synod. You can catch me on Monday morning for our Synod 9@9, and sometimes leading worship at a Synod event. Please know that I am here to listen and respond (if that is what's needed.) This position comes with a lot of trust, and I am hopeful that I can always maintain that. On to 2024!

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**The Rev. Imani Olear, Director of Evangelical Mission**

**Justice Ministries**

- Racial Justice - Rev. Kwame Pitts and Tom Craig, have co-lead this ministry and put together events and educational opportunities for the UNY synod.
- Gender Justice - Rev. Tonya Eza has been a faithful leader of this ministry that has stretched across our conferences; they have recently stepped down, and Rev. Andrew Tobias Nelson, has begun as lead communicator for this ministry.
- Creation Justice is on pause
- Hunger Justice - due to the change in the process of grants from World Hunger-ELCA only one of our congregations from the UNYS was awarded a grant this year. The funding sources will change in 2024.



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### Stewardship/ Mission

- Training completed with the Lake Institute on new trends on fundraising and mission which lead me to work with two congregations to develop their stewardship campaign for 2023-2024 year.
- Worked with 3 congregations to develop their stewardship / Mission emphasis

### SAWC & Strategic Ministries - As DEM I operate as their supervisor and met with them regularly and these are initiatives that have received funding from either ELCA, UNY Synod or both:

- Appleseed - Syracuse NY - Rev. Dana Smith - food ministry and support for lower socio economic area
- CGN - Buffalo NY - Rev. Kwame Pitts - ensuring that food injustice is addressed
- Oasis - Buffalo NY - Rev. Kwame Pitts - for persons that are for the spiritually curious and looking for safe spaces to explore their faith.
- Journey of Faith (New) - Vestal NY - Todd Eames - birthed out of redevelopment process of Christ the King and currently worshipping in "house church" model.
- South Asian (New) - Buffalo NY - Rev. Sohail Ahktar - exploration of the possibility of working with the Pakistani community
- SWM - Rochester NY - Rev. Matthew Nicoloff - in the process of organizing for 2024 to become a "full" congregation
- Hope - Troy NY - Rev. Pamela Hoh - in the process of organizing for 2024 and has been designated as a LEAD congregation for innovative work and exploration.

### Strategic Ministries

- Lord of Life - Depew - 3 year grant - to work within their community to "dream like Jesus" for their strategy that bridges generations and the staff while also looking at DiSC assessment
- Prince of Peace - Depew - 2 year grant - Hager's Kin to provide funding for those that have been impacted by church misconduct.

### Synod Vitality

Synod - Received a 2-year grant total of \$45K - Our mission is to rebuild trust, ignite passion for justice, and create a thriving and united synod that actively engages in transformative justice work, both within our congregations and throughout our broader community.

### Congregational Vitality

Requested	Not Started by Congregation	In Process	Program Plan Initiated	Completed
16	8	4	3	1



### Campus Ministries

Working with two of the campus ministries to unwind and then develop their connections with the communities they serve, churches and leadership. For RIT campus ministry working along side the Episcopal Diocese because its a shared ministry.

### Preaching Moments

Supplied for several congregations throughout the year.

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**Rachel Sosebee, *Mobility Specialist***  
Mobility Annual Report- 2023

My 10 hours a week are spent in a variety of ways, but reading Roster Minister Profiles and coaching and resourcing call committees, Ministry Site Profile writing teams, congregational councils, conference deans and candidates in the discernment and call process is the majority of my time.

In 2023 we had 7 successful call votes. There are currently 9 congregations with active MSP's in the churchwide system and a couple more are moving towards preparing and submitting their MSPs.

This year I also contributed to two projects that are alongside mobility. I worked with a team of pastors and lay leaders to begin updating our Transition resources. Round one was updating the documents (covenants, checklists, guides, and sample documents) from our 2003 resource. These documents are being edited by the Bishop's team and then will be shared with leaders for use. We will work on the next round of resources starting in late Spring 2024.

The other opportunity I had the honor of participating in was to work with Bishop Miller and 4 congregations in South Erie County to discuss a possible collaboration. This work is on-going, but has given us a possible framework to use for other areas interested in exploring collaborative ministry.

I love my job! My greatest joy is getting to walk with congregational leaders and rostered leaders as they discern. I am privileged to meet many passionate people living out their call in a variety of ways and to hear their stories and see God moving. God is good!



**The Rev. Lowell Chilton, *Lay Ministry Coordinator***

Since beginning this role in May 2023, I've worked with the Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM) Steering Committee to continue the implementation of the revised SAM Program, worked with our SAM Students to coordinate formation for service as Certified SAMs, worked with the Constitution Committee and Synod Council to bring the Synod constitution up to date to the latest revisions to the Constitution for Synods, and begun planning ways the SAM Program will continue to evolve. I look forward to continuing to evolve the SAM Program in 2024.



**The Rev. Lisa Frauens, *Administrative Support Specialist***

I have enjoyed meeting many of you over the past year as I coordinated registration for both the Synod Assembly and Fall Ministerium. We transitioned from using Tithe.ly for registration to using Google Forms and Paypal in order to make the process more user-friendly and reduce costs. I work with Julie Grindle and other staff members on ad hoc administrative projects as well. In addition to my Synod activities, I am excited to share that I was ordained in July and installed as the pastor of St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Geneseo, NY. It is a privilege to work with and learn from all of you.