



## 2016 BISHOP'S REPORT TO THE NORTHWESTERN MINNESOTA SYNOD, ELCA

FOR ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE CONGREGATIONS

FROM BISHOP LAWRENCE R. WOHLRABE *pictured here with third grader from Our Savior's of Thief Lake (Middle River) who received his first Bible along with a challenge to think about becoming a pastor.*

Starting February 1, 2016 the Northwestern Minnesota Synod made two major changes in how it operates. We lived into *a new structure* (adopted at the 2015 synod assembly) moving from 10 conferences to 8 conferences, encompassing 24 clusters of congregations. And the synod also embarked on a pilot project with six other synods, in collaboration with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund, to form *Synod Financial Services (SFS)*. SFS provides comprehensive financial services to our synod, including revenue processing, accounts payable, general accounting and reporting.



Throughout 2016 our steering committee and synod staff lifted up *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA*. Eleven Campaign events were held across the synod to present the goals of the Campaign to potential donors and congregational leaders. We are over one-third of the way to our own synod's goal of \$4.75 million for the Campaign. Many of our synod's congregations participated in "Forty Days of Giving" for ELCA Hunger during Lent 2016, in conjunction with the Campaign. As of the end of September 2016 the Campaign for the ELCA had received \$96 million toward its \$198 million goal.

Spring events in the synod included a Joint Theological Day on "*Caring for Our Common Home*" (stewardship of the environment) in March, that featured Dr. Larry Rasmussen, retired professor from Union Theological Seminary in New York. Over 200 ELCA pastors and Catholic priests and deacons gathered at the Church of Saints Anne and Joachim in Fargo for this event co-sponsored by the Crookston Diocese, Eastern ND Synod ELCA, Fargo Diocese and NW MN Synod ELCA. In April the synod's Senior High Youth Gathering featured speaker, Pr. Jonathan Swenson and musician Taylor Wilson at Castaway Club, on the theme: "The Word Became Flesh."



Over 500 Lutherans gathered at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, for the **2016 NW MN Synod Assembly** on the theme "*Truth and Love at the Crossroads.*" Best-selling author, Pr. Nadia Bolz-Weber was the keynote speaker, and Pr. Ron Glusenkamp of the Campaign for the ELCA was our churchwide representative. The Assembly passed resolutions on affirming the MP4ME Designated offering for our Synod Partners; financial support for seminary students; support of the Bible Women of the Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church (AELC) in India; support for the Phebe Hospital Solar Project, PV (Photovoltaics) for Phebe; and the dissolution of Lutheran Campus Ministry of Minnesota, Inc.

In May, the synod welcomed *John Bell* as our new Communications and Events Coordinator. Among John's first accomplishments was the creation of a new synod website that went live on September 1. He also created video clips and a Congregation Toolkit for the Campaign for the ELCA.



Twenty-four parishes and ministries of the synod welcomed new rostered ministers in 2016. Seven of these pastors were ordained in 2016 to serve their first calls in the NW MN Synod: Pr. Matthew Zelig, Our Savior's Ten Mile Lake of Dalton and First Presbyterian of Ashby; Pr. Keith Lankford, Good Shepherd of Henning; Pr. Ben Jacobson, First of Alexandria; Pr. Carleton Smeed, Bethany of Nevis and First of Akeley; Pr. Janna Bader, Neighbors in Faith Parish of Kensington; Pr. Taylor Wilson, Good Shepherd of Moorhead. Suzi Porter was commissioned as an ELCA Associate in Ministry, serving Trinity of Detroit Lakes. In addition, thirteen lay persons with theological training are serving as Synodically Authorized Ministers in thirteen parishes and ministries of the synod. Currently there are twelve persons from our synod preparing for rostered ministries in the ELCA.



During the summer months ELCA Mission Builders partnered with local volunteers to put up new cabins at Luther Crest Bible Camp, Alexandria. Pathways Bible Camps installed Pr. Steve Peterson as executive director and Brooke Klemetsrud as program director.



Twenty-two members of NW MN Synod congregations were among the 945 voting members that met during the **14th Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** in New Orleans, LA, August 8-13. The Assembly took many actions such as electing William B. Horne II of Clearwater, FL, as ELCA Vice President; approving the Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist that lifts up 32 statements

of agreement between Roman Catholics and the ELCA; approving unification of the ELCA's current three lay rosters (associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers) into one roster of Ministers of Word and Service who will be called "deacons;" approving ELCA churchwide budget proposals for 2017 through 2019; passing resolutions on issues like preventing suicide, alleviating global hunger, deepening relationships with historic black churches, respecting Native American rights, and welcoming refugees; electing ELCA members to 60 positions of leadership in the churchwide organization; and amending governing documents of the ELCA.

Autumn synod events included **Mission Interpreter Training** events in August and September; a brunch (co-sponsored with the Eastern ND Synod) in October for **Retired Pastors and Spouses**; and the **Spouses of Clergy Retreat** (together with the SW MN Synod) at Luther Crest Bible Camp, Alexandria, in early November; at Grace, Detroit Lakes.

**Wonderful speakers, preachers and teachers** spoke at synod events throughout the year: Dr. Mark Tranvik, of Augsburg College; Dr. David Creech of Concordia College; and Dr. Michael Chan of Luther Seminary led School for Lay Ministry courses (co-sponsored with the Eastern ND Synod). Ambassador Daniel Speckard, CEO of Lutheran World Relief, spoke to folks from the Eastern ND and NW MN Synods. Pr. Adam Copeland of Luther Seminary spoke on "Generosity Across the Generations" at a synod stewardship gathering. Dr. Barbara Lundblad retired professor from Union Theological Seminary lectured at the fall Theology for Ministry Conference. Pr. Jodi Houge of Humble Walk Lutheran Church in St Paul addressed the Synod Women's Organization convention.

**Thanks—as always!--for your congregation's constant prayers, generous financial giving and faithful partnership in the Gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!**