



2017 Bishop's Report to the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

For Annual Meetings of the Congregations

From Bishop Lawrence R. Wohlrabe *pictured here preaching at the 2017 NW MN Synod Middle School Youth Gathering in Alexandria.*

WE ENGAGED THE NEXT GENERATION at synod youth gatherings in March, April and November that reached hundreds of middle and high-schoolers. Their theme, *Reformation Remix*, invited youth and adult leaders into deep conversations about contemporary issues in light of God's unconditional promise and love in Christ. Hundreds of NW MN Synod young people are registered to attend the ELCA Youth Gathering, *This Changes Everything*, next summer in Houston, TX.



WE COMMEMORATED REFORMATION500 in a host of ways. *Lutherans Making a World of Difference* was the title for my bishop's monthly studies (<http://www.nwmnsynod.org/2017study>) Catholic and Lutheran ministers gathered at Trinity, Moorhead for a Joint Theological Day (April 20th) on the topic, *On the Way: Encountering Christ Together* with former ELCA presiding bishop Mark Hanson and Father John Crossin serving as keynoters. Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton (*see picture*) keynoted the Concordia College Symposium in September on the theme *Reformation: Transforming the World One Door At A Time*. An ecumenical Reformation worship service involving representatives of ELCA, Catholic, United

Methodist, Moravian, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian and Episcopalian churches marked the conclusion of the symposium. On November 5th I joined Bishop Donald Kettler of the Diocese of St. Cloud for a stirring joint Catholic-Lutheran worship service at Our Lady of Victory Catholic Church in Fergus Falls.

WE WELCOMED NEW MINISTERS. During 2017, 25 congregations of the synod *welcomed new pastors and deacons*. Three of these pastors were ordained in 2017 to serve their first calls in the NW MN Synod: Pr. Kent Krumwiede, Peace and Grue of Ashby; Pr. Anne Meredith, Zion of Blackduck and Our Savior's of Kelliher; Pr. Elise Pokel, associate, Trinity of Crookston and First Presbyterian of Crookston. Deacon Jon Leiseth was consecrated as a Minister of Word and Service, serving in campus ministry at Concordia College. In addition, 19 lay persons with theological training are serving as Synodically Authorized Ministers in 27 congregations of the synod. Currently there are also 15 persons from our synod preparing for rostered ministries in the ELCA.



Pr. Anne Meredith (center) was ordained to serve the North Beltrami Parish, Blackduck and Kelliher.

WE CARED FOR THOSE WHO CARE FOR US: Starting in October the synod's pastoral staff began a series of *Together in Ministry* (TiM) visits: hour-long, one-on-one conversations with all pastors, deacons, and SAMs currently serving under Letters of Call or contracts in our synod. The purposes for TiM visits are to listen to one another and become better acquainted; to celebrate opportunities and identify challenges in ministry; to share support and encouragement; and to pray together. Thus far the synod pastoral staff have done TiM visits in four of the synod's eight conferences; the remaining four conferences will be visited in February 2018.



WE GAVE GENEROUSLY, running slightly ahead of last year's giving toward ELCA/synod mission support (as of 11/30/2017). Congregations and individuals continued to support *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA*. As of September 30, our synod had raised \$2,137,980 toward its \$4.75 million goal. Just one year after it was established, the *NW MN Synod Fund for Leaders Endowment* has received over \$175,000 in gifts for seminary student scholarships—including over \$33,000 from 125-member Little Norway Lutheran Church of Fertile.

WE GATHERED IN ASSEMBLY, with nearly 500 folks at Concordia College, Moorhead, for the *2017 NW MN Synod Assembly, June 9-10*, on the theme *Risky Business: Always Reforming*. Dr. Mark Tranvik of Augsburg College was the keynote speaker, and Ms. Molly Beck Dean of the ELCA Youth Gathering was our ELCA churchwide representative. The Assembly passed resolutions amending the synod constitution and bylaws; urging changes to ELCA churchwide governing documents to make more flexible the criteria for non-stipendiary calls and Synodically Authorized Ministers; and seeking reconciliation with and closer ties to our Native American neighbors. Two new synod officers were elected: Pr. Karla Mickelson as Synod Secretary and Ms. Catherine Dickey as Synod Treasurer.



Pr. Brad Skogen, Battle Lake, led one of our *Boundaries in Ministry* workshops.

WE HELPED SERVANT-LEADERS GROW at School for Lay Ministry classes on topics like *Creating Worship Vitality in Any Setting* (with Jay Beech) and *Bereavement: Reaching Out With Care and Healing* (with Pr. Gayle Bintliff). Two *Equipping Congregations Days* were held in Thief River Falls and Perham last February—with a keynote message on *We've ~~Never~~ Done It That Way Before* and a host of breakout groups on timely topics. The synod also co-sponsored learning events such as *Re-Rooting In God's Mission* (last April), *Mission Interpreter Trainings* (in August and September), *Embracing Stewardship* (in October) and *Navigating Change in Changing Times* (in November). Pastors, deacons and synodically authorized ministers attended two *Boundaries in Ministry* workshops (in May) and our annual *Theology for Ministry Conference* at Fair Hills, with Dr. Winston Persaud from Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa (in September).

WE STARTED TO PONDER OUR SYNOD'S NEXT CHAPTER, following my announcement at June's synod assembly that I will not be available for a third term as bishop. So, as we prepare to elect a new bishop in 2019, our synod council formed a 2019 Bishop Transition Commission, chaired by Pr. Matt Peterson of Trinity, Moorhead. The "bish commish" as they call themselves has engaged the services of Michelle Snyder with Crow's Foot Consulting. Early in 2018 leaders in our congregations and synod will be invited to make their views known by way of a wide-ranging survey, called *The Landscape*. Findings from the Landscape will shape the drafting of a Ministry Site Profile (MSP)—similar to the MSPs that congregational call committees prepare—to lift up the hopes, dreams and gifts that we'll seek in our next synod bishop. Please participate in this crucial process of spiritual discernment as we trust the Holy Spirit to guide us!

Thanks—as always!--for your congregation's constant prayers, faithful partnership and generous financial giving as we continue to serve God's mission in the world!