

## Report of the Bishop

### Staff

By now, you have heard that Ms. Rachel Alley, Assistant to the Bishop for Youth and Young Adult Ministries has resigned to become Program Director for Youth at ELCA Churchwide. This move speaks well about Rachel's years as an effective and exemplary leader of youth ministry in this synod. We wish her well in this new and challenging position. We plan an official "goodbye" to her at the Leadership Convocation at Lutheranch next month.

With only a bit over a year left in my term as this synod's bishop, it seemed unlikely that we would find the right person to replace Rachel, given that the position may be short-lived since the new bishop will choose her or his own team. As you will read in her report, Pr. Jill Henning has come to the rescue. She has agreed to serve as Interim Liaison for Youth and Young Adult ministry, working with our adult volunteers in seeing that the good work we are doing in youth ministry continues. As you might expect from her, Pr. Henning has already begun her work with enthusiasm.

Earlier this week, our half-time DEM, Pr. Ron Bonner, announced that he will be leaving the synod staff to accept a position as associate pastor at Redeemer, Atlanta. He will also resign his call as pastor of Atonement, Atlanta. Pr. Bonner has served this synod well in his time on the staff, and we are grateful for his wisdom, insight, and commitment to this church. I believe that both Redeemer and the synod will be blessed by his new call.

Again, since it will be unlikely to find a replacement for Pr. Bonner as DEM, given the short time before a new bishop takes office, I am working with Pr. Sandra Chrostowski of the ELCA Domestic Mission unit to find an interim DEM.

You will have noticed from the reports of staff members how much work is being done by these faithful and dedicated folk. With a continuing large number of congregations in the call process, an office move, the dissolution of the MIF-FSO, a growing number of congregations facing the dilemmas associated with declining numbers, and significant changes in the candidacy process, we continue to ask a lot from our staff, and they continue to deliver in spite of the challenges and long hours involved.

In other staff news, we are very glad to have Deacon Michelle Angalet back from sabbatical. You'll learn something about her sabbatical in her report. I am grateful to others on the staff for picking up some of Michelle's work during her time away and to Pr. Delmer Chilton, who came back on staff very part time to work with some of the congregations that are in Michelle's portfolio. In her report, there is also a link to her April report to the Personnel Committee in which she outlines the challenges our staff continues to face. I encourage you to read it, especially if you are new to the Synod Council.

Deacon Jeanette Burgess will be leaving for sabbatical soon. We are grateful to have the excellent help of Ms. Melissa Fuller who has been working to digitize our candidacy files and will work with candidacy during Deacon Burgess' absence. Ms. Carolyn Davis has agreed to take on some of Jeanette's mobility work during the sabbatical.

Finally, you will note in her report that Dr. Sandra Gustavson plans to retire on August 31, 2019. It is not possible to exaggerate all that Sandra has done for this synod and especially this Synod Council since the beginning of the ELCA. It is imperative that the council begins now to develop a transition plan that will ensure all that Sandra currently does continues to be done. I recommend the appointment of a task group to work with Sandra in this succession planning.

### Leadership Convocation

The theme for this year's Convo is **First Things First: Proclaiming the Good News as the Call of the Church**. The Reverend Dr. Michael Burk, Bishop of the Southeastern Iowa Synod and former Executive for Worship in the ELCA will be our presenter. "Rooted in the gathering of God's people around the means of grace, we will explore what it means to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in a persistently changing landscape. Informed by scripture, grounded in the sacraments, and reflected in the decisions that we make, the gospel is a much-needed balm for the world's 'sin-sick soul,' and is the singular priority of the church of Jesus Christ." Registration is now open and you are all encouraged to participate. Convo will take place October 16-18 at Lutheridge.

### Advocacy

The synod's advocacy team received a grant to bring an advocacy intern on board to assist advocacy coordinator Mr. Hilton Austin, and to help expand the advocacy team's work. After interviewing several candidates, Jordan Slappey of Atlanta was chosen for the position. Jordan has been on the job only a couple of weeks, but has brought a great deal of energy to the position.

### Ordinations and Receptions

You will recall that at our Synod Assembly we received onto the roster of this synod Pr. Crispin Ilombe Wolondja, a former Jesuit priest from Congo. Later, in a service at St. John's, Atlanta, Pr. Wolondja was installed as developer of Good Samaritan Mission, which meets at Rock of Ages, Stone Mountain.

Also received onto the roster of the ELCA was Pr. Mica Koli, who was installed as developer of Resurrection Mission, which meets at Living Grace, Tucker.

This coming Sunday, I will ordain to the Office of Word and Sacrament, Paula Smith, currently a deacon in this church. Paula will serve St. James, Greeneville, TN, where she has been a TEEM candidate for the past several years.

Others new to the synod include Pr. Sara Cutter and Pr. Todd Cutter, who have accepted calls to Ascension, Savannah, and Pr. Andrew Rickel, who will serve the Georgia Tech, Georgia State, Agnes Scott Campus ministry in Atlanta, pending a call from the Synod Council at this meeting.

In July, on behalf of Bishop Jeffrey Clements, I ordained Preston Fields, who was prepared by our candidacy committee and will serve in the Northern Illinois Synod. Pr. Fields is among

twenty candidates from St. John's, Knoxville, who have been approved for ordination in the past fifteen or so years.

### Global Companions

Earlier this month, a gala was held in Atlanta for the purpose of raising money to support Casa Milagro, a project of our global companion church, the Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala (ILAG). Casa Milagro is a residence where girls and young women from the villages of rural Guatemala can live while they pursue studies in school and learn practical skills for life. The gala raised \$35,000 dollars for the school, which will provide room, board, supplies, and staffing for nine young women for a year.

I am grateful to Pr. Stephen Friedrich and Pr. Leland Armbricht who chair our ILAG team and to all who worked to make the gala the success it was.

Earlier this week I participated in a German ELCA Consultation in Chicago. The consultation brought together bishops and others from synods that have global partner churches in Germany with bishops and other leaders of those churches. While the consultation was valuable on many fronts, there was a bittersweet edge to it since Bp. Michael Grabow, of our companion church the Diocese of Augsburg of the Lutheran Church in Bavaria, is soon to retire. He has been a good colleague and friend. His successor, Pr. Axel Piper, has already been elected and will begin service at the beginning of 2019.

### Churchwide Challenges

Much of the agenda for the upcoming Conference of Bishops meeting will deal with the significant challenges the ELCA Churchwide Organization is facing. As mission support declines, a conversation about capacity has been needed. There are also issues around what part of this church's work is best done by Churchwide and what is best done by Synods. This promises to be an intense time together. I will report on the meeting and its outcome at our next Synod Council meeting.

### St. Paul's, Nashville Property

Second Harvest Food Bank, as a distribution center, is currently using part of the property of the former St. Paul, Nashville. Recently, Christ, Nashville, began using the nave once a month for a jazz Eucharist as they extend their ministry to Nashville's jazz community. Other uses of the property have been contemplated among the Lutherans in the area. With the Council's approval, I would like to appoint a three-person board, chaired by Pr. Lewis Groce, St. Timothy, Hendersonville, to produce a space-use policy for the property and to oversee its use.

### Synod Logo

As you will hear at this meeting, it looks now as if we will be able to occupy our new office space around the end of October, not surprisingly, a bit later than originally promised. Office Manager Holly Liersch tells me that the builders have asked for a synod logo for the sign that will identify our part of St. John's building. You have likely noticed that for the past several years, we have used as the synod's logo the "official" ELCA logo with the synod's name on top. Some have suggested that we use the older and more colorful "four

state” logo instead. Should we use the latter, we would need someone to do a bit of work to include the synod name. Here are both logos for your consideration:



#### Other Matters

Pr. Randy Jones has resigned his call at Messiah, Montgomery to accept the call of First United, Kennesaw. That means that I will need to appoint a dean for the Montgomery/Birmingham deanery. I am currently conferring with staff and clergy from the area and will make announcement when the appointment has been made. I am grateful for Pr. Jones' years of service in the role.

Since our last meeting, I have attended the triennial ELCA Youth Gathering (in Houston, Texas, in the summer!) and served as a staffer at Affirm, our synod's annual youth gathering. I also served as a speaker and workshop leader at the La Crosse Areas Synod Assembly. In addition, I participated in the new bishops' orientation, serving as mentor for Bishop Pedro Suarez of the Florida-Bahamas Synod.

We have sent disaster relief funds to the La Crosse Area Synod following widespread flooding in that synod. We will also send funds to the North Carolina Synod this week. The money for these gifts comes from our synod's disaster response funds. We are grateful that it is available for use in other synods.

As always, thank you for your partnership in the gospel,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+H Julian Gordy". The signature is written in a cursive style.

+H Julian Gordy  
Bishop