



Southeastern Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

January 2020 Report of the Bishop to the Synod Council

*“Master, now you are dismissing your servant^[e] in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles
and for glory to your people Israel.” (Luke 2:29-32)*

In this season after Epiphany, how can Simeon’s song continue to carry us through the cadences of life’s darkness and bring hopeful light? Simeon’s “song”, has become one of our own. Many know these words well in the Latin, *Nunc Dimittis*, which means, “now send away,” the hymn that is sometimes sung after Communion or interestingly it is also what we sing as part of the service of Compline—the “going to bed” liturgy.

As we close our day, we sing, “Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.”

What have our eyes seen before going to bed? It’s usually the common ordinary stuff of life: dirty dishes, endless e-mails, which kid forgot to do their science experiment and waits until bedtime to tell you, paper work, bills, dirty clothes that seem to never end, aging parents that require more attention, etc., etc., etc.

What have our eyes seen before going to bed?

Is it the news that once again someone has been shot, or another terror attack, or another political slam made from one side of the aisle to the other?

What have our eyes seen before going to bed?

Is it the test results that reveal cancer, or the loved one who has to go into assistance because her memory is no more, or have our eyes looked into the eyes of another for the last time, as in peace and joy they now depart?

Is God’s salvation to be seen in such common, ordinary, even mundane things of life? As well, is God’s salvation to be seen in all of life’s good and bad, joy and sadness, celebration and mourning?

What have eyes seen when we gather as the assembly of God in worship? There are people who are vast and different. People who bring with them into this space a host of issues and yet in our

brokenness as a body we are made whole by Christ own. Is God's salvation to be seen in our gathering?

What have eyes seen in sacrament of Holy Communion? It is around simple things that we gather: bread and wine with one another. Is God's salvation to be seen in this?

What have eyes seen in the sacrament of Holy Baptism? It is around simple things like water that we gather with one another? Is God's salvation to be seen in this?

God is indeed present in an infant, in bread and wine, in water, in each other, in our gathering, in the ordinary and extra-ordinary events of everyday life. Where God is present, there salvation is for those with the faith to see more than just the obvious or what is transparent.

Could it be that Simeon sings the starting notes of the canticle of all of our lives? Could it be that Simeon reminds us that we behold God's salvation each and every time we behold the face of another that God created and each and every time we gather to watch over as another saint of God's departs in peace?

Over these few first months as bishop, my eyes have seen God's salvation in countless ways around our synod, through this church at work in the world, and I have been pleased to hear many sings with Simeon in countless ways. Let this report show you a glimpse of what my eyes have seen as your bishop.

Let us continue to sing with Simeon. Let us continue seeing the salvation of God that is before our very eyes each and every day with each and every person, until at our last we sing and we rejoice with Simeon and all the saints: "Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel."

May it be so! Amen.

Installation: I continue to give thanks to each of you and the countless many who helped, attended, prayed, or watched the installation of me as the fourth bishop of the Southeastern Synod and our staff. Words do not describe adequately, the palpable experience with the Holy Spirit that continues to nourish and sustain me in this call. Thank you for your support through that weekend. Thank you especially to the congregation of the Lutheran Church of Redeemer for hosting the Friday night BBQ with the Bishop and the ADLA Prayer Breakfast the morning of the installation (Thank you, Ms. Roxann Thompson). I also want to thank ADLA for hosting that powerful prayer breakfast. I would be remiss to not thank our talented and hardworking worship team, who worked tirelessly. And for the chair of the worship team, Rev. Cuttino Alexander. Thank you!!!

Churchwide Involvement: Following our last Synod Council meeting, I attended my first Conference of Bishops meeting in Chicago as a bishop. I also attended and participated in the Region Nine Women in Ministry sub group dealing with boundary training throughout Region Nine. One of the other joys this fall was being able to attend and participate in the installation of

fellow bishop colleagues: Bishop Yehiel Curry, Bishop Leila Ortiz, and Bishop Paul Eggenstiener. I was honored to attend the National Convention of Black Churches meeting that occurred in Atlanta with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. I look forward to more ways we can continue nurturing our relationships with historic black churches. I was also asked to write a forward for a new book/resource that Augsburg Fortress is publishing in 2020. Later in January, I will attend a consultation through the invitation of the office of the Presiding Bishop, the Holy Land.

Ecumenical Relationships: Over these past few months, I have had the pleasure of meeting and getting to know my Episcopal Bishops in Atlanta, Rt. Rev. Rob Wright and in Memphis, Rt. Rev. Phoebe Roef. In addition to those meetings, I have been able to have conversations with a few of our Presbyterian counterparts around the four states to discuss continued ecumenical partnerships. As we all continue to discern the growing challenges of what it means to be the church of today, I think our ecumenical relationships will help us grow more fully into what it means to be “church together,” as Presiding Bishop Eaton has called us to.

Community Involvement and Other Ministry Opportunities: It was an honor in October to participate and bring greetings to the Atlanta Pride Mass at All Saints Episcopal Church and then to preside at communion prior to and then march in the Atlanta Pride Parade. While in Memphis recently, I also was able to receive a tour of “Church Health”. This organization is aiding over 70,000 underinsured and uninsured persons a year.

Global Partnerships and Relationships: In November, Pastor Stephen Friedrich and myself attended the fifth annual Latin American Lutheran Consultation in Guatemala. There were over 120 persons from the United States, Canada, Central and South America. While in our host country that is also one of our Global partners, I was able to visit the Milagro Girls School and the Lutheran Center. As well, I was invited to be the opening preacher for the consultation. Pastor Michael Jannett and I are also working with our other Global Partnership in Bavaria through the ELCA Global Mission Office on ways we can work on planning future events and trips. These Global Partnerships are crucial to seeing the body of Christ in its best and largest sense. I am thankful for each of these opportunities. We are looking at ways to highlight these global partnerships at various times throughout the year.

Congregational Transition/Pastor and Deacon Transition/ and Conflict: We have a number of congregations (more information can be found in Pastor Boda’s report) who are in some form of transition. These require a lot of staff attention and time, but these are also holy moments of ministry to walk congregations through these times. Since beginning my term as bishop, I have had a multitude of conflicts that have needed a large amount of attention. Many of these are within congregations or around members. Then some are with our rostered ministers. Where these are time draining, I pray through each of them and give thanks when we can address this conflict directly and see resolution. Do these things, I think helps us work toward building vital congregations that are healthy. I also want to thank our synod attorney, Mr. Charles Bridgers. He has been a huge asset and help. Lastly, a number of pastors have already alerted me of their upcoming intentions to retire this year or within the next three years. That will also produce a lot of transition. As we walk into those, I want us to make sure we continue to keep our

congregations healthy and providing them with good interims and vision for their future. As well, helping our rostered ministers end their ministries well.

Pastoral Care: We have had two deaths of pastors since we last met. Pastor Will Rogers and Pasotr Bob Hartendfeld. I presided at the funeral of Pastor Rogers and I sent a letter that Bishop Emeritus Gordy read at the funeral of Pastor Bob Hartendfeld. We have had a number of pastors and deacons, who they personally or their families have had a lot of sickness and illness. We continue to hold all who mourn and all in need of healing in God's embrace and prayer. I give thanks to our deans, who do a great job at caring for and tending to those folks in their areas.

Congregational Visits: People often ask, "What do you enjoy most about being bishop?" My answer is always visiting our congregations and seeing the amazing ministries that we are doing as a synod. I have been privileged to be in a different congregation in our synod almost every Sunday. I have also made multiple visits to our deaneries and held question and answer sessions in those areas. I will be doing more of that throughout 2020. With these visits, I was able to celebrate congregational anniversaries. One major one was the 250 of Jerusalem Lutheran Church in Rincon, GA on Reformation Sunday.

Retired Rostered Ministers: We hosted at the Synod Office during Advent a lunch and worship service for retired rostered ministers and their spouses. This was well received and something that I hope to do a few places throughout our synod each year.

Ordinations and Installations: It was a job to be able to preside over my first Ordination of Illa Elise Anderson in Columbia, SC in December. I will be doing the ordination of Susan Fuerzig, Anyalse Triolo, and Dawn Bennett in January. It was also a lot of fun and a huge joy to preside at the welcome to the ELCA roster for Pastor Esther Nogomo.

Staff: I am so thankful for the dedicated people who make up with Southeastern Synod staff. These faithful people have and do work hard in their calls. We have had a lot of work to do, more transitions than expected, but developing a great working environment and I could not do this work without them. The Assistants to the Bishop have a retreat in January to continue building relationships and planning for our future. After months of discernment, looking at the current iteration of synod staff, the needs of the synod moving forward, and our budget realities; the position of Administrative Liaison for Leadership, Deacon Jeanette Burgess has been eliminated. She will receive a severance package from January-March of 2020. This was in consultation with the personnel committee, budget and finance, and the executive committee. We give thanks for Deacon Burgess and her twenty-one years of ministry in the synod office. We are a better synod because of her. We pray for her and our staff during this transition. The roles she had are now being redistributed amongst the rest of the staff. The other staff change is Mr. Hilton Austin will be transitioning out of his role as Director of Advocacy and as of February 1, Pastor Matt Steinhauer will be the Assistant to the Bishop and Director for Advocacy. This is being paid for out of grants and designated funds just like Hilton was. This is a 15 hour a week job and he will remain pastor 2/3 time at Faith Lutheran Church in Lebanon, TN.

Strategic Visioning: I have met with the synod council, the deans, pastors and deacons at convocation, and some deanery groups. I am in the process of building next steps for us and a plan of how to do some more demographic group conversations. We will then have time at the synod assembly for small and large group conversations. We hope to start this fall of 2020.

Moving Forward: Thank you for your support these past six months. I am thankful for each of you and honored by the responsibility you have entrusted within me as your bishop. I look forward to all the many ways God is calling us to serve our neighbors and spread the life-changing message of grace with the whole world.