



SOUTHEASTERN SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Report of the Bishop
The Reverend Kevin L. Strickland
September, 2021 Synod Council

The writer of second Corinthians states: *“So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. Because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”* (2 Corinthians 4:16,18)

Those six words, “So we do not lose heart”, have been in my thoughts a lot these past few months. As the pandemic of COVID-19 and its variants continue to create havoc for all of us. As the devastation of life has occurred in the massive earthquake in Haiti. As the political crisis in Afghanistan has caused many to worry as the 20th anniversary of September 11th approaches. As Hurricane Ida ripped through the southeastern part of the United States and left in her wake immense destruction. And so, so, much more.

It is a wonder, how any of us don’t lose heart. But as people of faith, we look not to what can be seen but what cannot be seen. We point to a God who holds us dearly even when our hearts break and faith seems hard to grasp. Amidst the worries, warring madness, and daily turmoil of life; we have a God who will never let us go. So, we do not lose heart. For our hearts rest in God and rise each day the same.

As St. Julian of Norwich is attributed to have said, “All will be well. All will be well. All manner of things will be well.” Indeed, amidst all of what has been, of what is, and what is to come; church, I remain thankful and do not lose heart.

I am thankful for each of you. For your dedication to Christ church and to all the many ways your love your neighbor. I am thankful for all the ways that even when it would be easier to lose heart, you point people to the God we know in Jesus. This God who continues to call each of us to equip, empower, and engage all people to love and serve. Thank you!

Below are snapshots into larger portraits of where I see us as synod living out this call. I encourage you to take a look into these and also see what pictures of your own ministries you can add to this. As always, thank you for the opportunity, even on its hardest of days to serve as your bishop.

Exhibit A.1
September 2021

Staff:

As always, I give thanks to God for the dedicated and faithful staff I have the opportunity to work with. Since our last synod council meeting, we have officially welcomed Pastor Jonathan Hemphill, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregational Life. Pr. Hemphill and his family have moved from Los Angeles and we look forward to his ministry among us. As well, we continue to hold he and his family in our prayers during this transition. Because we cancelled the September Staff Retreat, we will be attempting to do it in late December in Nashville.

Rostered Ministers and Pastoral Care:

The staff have been calling all rostered ministers over the past two months to do a check-in call with them. I am also offering Rostered Minister check-in times via zoom with me in October. Because we had to cancel Convocation, we will be sending rostered minister care packages in late October/early November. We continue to provide weekly sermons for rostered ministers and congregations to use as a way of offering them respite. I will have at least seven ordinations to do between now and the end of the year. We praise God for these new pastors and deacons in the church. Pastors Axel, Henning, Gordy will be gathering all rostered women together in October for a “Happy Hour” by zoom. The Region Nine Women’s Gathering was cancelled.

Formation:

For the past year our synod has been providing lectionary studies being taught by theologians all over the church. We have had people from all over the ELCA join us for these studies. In September we will welcome The Rev. Dr. Gordon Lathrop. October, The Rev. Dr. Shauna Hannan will lead us and then the Rev. Troy Troftgruben will lead us in November. In addition to these offerings, we have had about nine congregational leaders zooms this past year and will be holding another on September 26th.

Diversity and Justice:

This taskforce has been hard at work. September 19th will host the movie “13th” for the synod with small group discussion to follow. Pr. Jonathan Hemphill will also be leading a synod wide book discussion on “So you want to talk about Race” sometime in November. Stay tuned. September we will highlight Hispanic Heritage month. October we will highlight disabilities awareness. This taskforce is working on long-term plans moving forward.

Congregational Transitions:

We continue to have a number of congregational transitions and I don’t see that slowing at any time soon. We are also about to experience a large amount of clergy retire. Many of whom have been in these calls for quite some time. These transitions will require more interims and even more intentional interims. We are working to train more interims and to recruit from our full communion partners.

COVID-19:

It feels as if this is all we talk about most days. Due to COVID-19 and the rising variants, we moved our candidacy and synod council meetings to zoom for the fall. We cancelled the ecumenical interim retreat, staff retreat, and convocation. The Region Nine Women’s gathering was also cancelled. See more guidance and updates about COVID-19 protocols:

<https://www.elca-ses.org/covid>

Exhibit A.1
September 2021

Disaster Ministry:

We as a synod are by far no stranger to disasters. But it would be nice to get a break. Right? As you have seen the recent Hurricane Ida caused major catastrophic damage to parts of Louisiana and damage in our own synod. Pr. Morgan Gordy has been working with our Disaster Ministry Team, national, state, and local groups (such as Inspiritus) to help provide care and support to not only those in need of recovery from Hurricane Ida, but the flooding that impacted Middle TN prior. We are in major need of volunteers to help with clean-up. As well, those who are able to donate for disaster relief. We also continue to keep in our prayers and act to advocate for the least of these who were dreadfully affected by the earthquake in Haiti.

Stewardship and Finance:

We continue to work with our First Call and other rostered ministers through the work of the LifeLine fund for reducing seminary debt. Through the generosity of many across our synod we were able to receive an abundance for our Abundance Appeal. That appeal continues through the end of the year and the Mission think Tank will also be making recommendations. At this synod council meeting we will vote on the Endowment Committee members. Budget and Finance Committee will also be recommending suggestions for our work in preparing for mission funding plan. I am overjoyed by the number of congregations we have participating in “Cultivating a Culture of Generosity” with Rev. Mike Ward. We are seeing much fruit grown in these places. Thanks be to God!

Other:

We along with the ELCA continue to monitor the ELCA Youth Gathering that is scheduled for July of 2022. Pastor Michael Jannett will continue to let us know when and if any changes or possible cancellations are made. As well we have the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August of 2022. So far that is still moving forward.

Pastor Michael Jannett and I will be taking a small group to Germany in July of 2022 (pending COVID) to visit with one of our companion synods. Pastor Jill Henning and I will be leading a trip to the Holy Land January 1-10, 2023 for anyone interested. That link is here:

<https://www.eliastours.com/tours/bishop-kevin-strickland-southeastern-synod-holy-land-trip>

I have begun my DMIN program at Candler School of Theology at Emory University. This program is in the area of Christian Leadership and Community Witness. So far, it is very life-giving and fruitful to the work I have been called to do as your bishop.

Executive Session:

There are a number of items I will go over in executive session that will not be written here. Some of those will include roster, congregational conflicts, legal matters, and property.