

# La Crosse Area Synod

## 2016 Synod Assembly Minutes

Luther College – Decorah, Iowa



### FRIDAY, JUNE 10

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7 pm Choir Rehearsal – CFL (*all are welcome to attend*)

#### **PLENARY SESSION 1 – CENTER FOR FAITH AND LIFE (CFL)**

8 pm -- Opening of Assembly Litany read by Bishop Arends. Song led by assembly musician, Ernest Blecha and prayer given by Synod Vice President, Lori Toso.

Bishop Arends called on Dr. Paula J. Carlson, President of Luther College, for a greeting. Then with Rev. Mike Blair, campus pastor, Luther College, shared a brief history of Luther College, its connection to our synod and to early Norwegians against slavery.

Bishop Arends introduced guests present and then called for a **Mission Moment** from Pr. Kent Johnson of the Middle East Subcommittee.

8:30 pm - **WORSHIP** with Bishop Arends preaching; offering directed to the ministry of the La Crosse Area Synod.

### SATURDAY, JUNE 11

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#### **PLENARY SESSION 2 – CENTER FOR FAITH AND LIFE**

8:15 am – Plenary convened with an opening **Song** led by Ernest Blecha. A Devotional Reflection was shared by Rev. Jeff Thiemann, Pres/CEO of Portico Benefit Services, followed by a prayer by Pr. Wendy Ruetten, East Conference Dean.

#### **Recognition of retirements & anniversaries (pastors & congregations)**

Bishop Arends called delegates and representatives from the following congregations, each celebrating their 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, forward for recognition: Blair Lutheran Church, Journey Lutheran Church and Peace Lutheran Church – Tomah. Pictures of each congregation were displayed on the screen.

Ordination anniversaries were then acknowledged; those celebrating 25 years through 60 years were called forward to receive certificates

#### **10 Years**

The Rev. Karyn Bodenschatz  
The Rev. Sherry Hoening

#### **15 Years**

The Rev. Douglas Steinke  
The Rev. Mark Carr

#### **20 Years**

The Rev. Tanya Rist  
The Rev. Wesley Dunbar

#### **35 Years**

The Rev. James Arends  
The Rev. Robert Thacker

#### **40 Years**

The Rev. Gary Daines  
The Rev. Mark Solyst

#### **45 Years**

The Rev. Adolf Quast  
The Rev. Glenn Borreson

**25 Years**

The Rev. Peter Beckstrand

**55 Years**

The Rev. N. David Guetzke

**30 Years**

The Rev. Jonathan Schmidt

The Rev. Neal Solomonson

**60 Years**

The Rev. Luther Larson

The Rev. Robert Young

Bishop Arends and the assembly then read through the following litany and prayer:

**B:** Dear Christian friends: Baptized into the priesthood of Christ, we are called to various vocations. It is our privilege today to remember those who celebrate anniversaries of their callings and those who retire.

**B:** The Lord be with you.

**C:** And also with you.

**B:** Let us pray.

God of our callings, we give you thanks for all who have offered themselves for service in your name. We thank you for the work they have accomplished, the creation they have stewarded, the relationships they have sustained through the Spirit's guidance, and the joys and sorrows they have experienced in Christ. For our pastors, we thank you for the Word they have preached, the sacraments they have administered, and the forgiveness they have spoken in Christ's name. Be with those who celebrate anniversaries of their callings, and strengthen them in their continued work. Give to those who retire gratitude for their service to you and peace in your presence. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**C:** Amen.

Bishop called on Lori Toso for the Assembly General Announcements, including the following:

- Deadline for submitting Resolutions to Reference & Counsel Committee will be noon Saturday.
- "Sunday School" WORKSHOPS – directed to handout listing workshops on Sunday morning (see on synod assembly web page <http://www.lacrosseareasynod.org/#!2016-synod-assembly/czim> )
- Encouraged to view all displays are in CFL lobby and down hallways to each side of main doors. A time was designated in the agenda before and after lunch to view the displays.
- Welcome attendees to feel free to take pictures during assembly and then forward them to Melanie or Pr. Libby at the synod office ([office@lacrosseareasynod.org](mailto:office@lacrosseareasynod.org) or [assistant@lacrosseareasynod.org](mailto:assistant@lacrosseareasynod.org))
- Called attention to the salmon-colored handout seeking leaders for synod committees
- Pastors reminded that their photos are being taken for an updated synod pictorial directory by Pr. Peter Jonas and to go at their appointed time or whenever Peter is available.
- Encouraged to view our Synod Cow Herd . . placed in the Library lawn, and reminded attendees to take their congregation's cows home!

Bishop Arends introduced additional guests who arrived Saturday morning.

**Vice-President Lori Toso called for Mission Moment – Introduction of the Synod Council**

Synod Council members gathered up front singing their version of "We are the ELCA" to the tune of "Y.M.C.A." Synod Council Members: Bishop Jim Arends, VPres Lori Toso, Treas Derek Jackson, Secy Mike Schnitzius, Pr. Peter Jonas (North Conf. Dean), Leah Wisnewski, Stephen McDougal, Pr. Meg Hoversten (South Conf. Dean), Lynn Joholski, Mike Lusk, Pr. Wendy Ruetten (East Conf. Dean), Alyssa Weaver, Dennis Glaman, Pr. Karyn Bodenschatz (West Conf. Dean), Sharon Zimmerman, Jim Howe, Pr. John Dumke, Pr. Anna Sorenson, Pr. John Stennes-Spidahl, Pr. Libby Howe (Dir. of Evangelical Mission/Asst. to the Bishop), Kathleen Sumrall, Pr. Ben Morris and Sierra Mastin.

**Lori introduced those going off council this year and presented them with certificates:**

Anna Sorenson      Alyssa Weaver      Sierra Mastin

Lori called up Mike Schnitzius, Synod Secretary, who is going off of Synod Council and Executive Comm., and he was presented with a gift.

**Lori then introduced members of the Assembly Planning Committee and asked them to stand:**

Co-Chairs: Lori Toso & Rev. Libby Howe

Bishop Arends

Rev. Wendy Ruetten

Debbie Dukatz

Rev. Barbara Bruneau

Jim Howe

Betty Sacia

Melanie Timmerman

Andy Stutesman (adjunct)

Deb Wold (adjunct)

**SA: 16.6.1 Adoption of the Agenda and Rules**

**MMSC**

**Bishop Arends introduced the Assembly Parliamentarian** - Bishop Emerita April Ulring Larson, and she gave an orientation to voting members regarding parliamentary procedure.

Bishop Arends announced that any business not completed during the assembly will be directed to the Synod Council. Bishop Arends asked voting delegates to consider ideas of where to designate the offering from the sending worship Sunday afternoon; vote to be taken Saturday afternoon.

**Report of the Treasurer** – Bishop called on Derek Jackson, Synod Treasurer for his report and for the second reading of 2016 Revised Budget and 2017 Budget (*first reading at pre-assembly conference caucuses*) (see Treasurer's Report on synod assembly web page: <http://www.lacrosseareasynd.org/#!2016-synod-assembly/czim>)

**Report of the Nominating Committee** – Bishop called on Michael Schnitzius, Synod Secretary for Report of the Nominating Committee (see ballot attached at end of these minutes)

After a break the plenary was reconvened with a song led by Ernest Blecha, Assembly musician.

Report of the Registrar was given by Vice Pres. Lori Toso:

59 Pastors    160 Lay Representatives    219 Voting members    45 Guests

**Lori called on Bishop Jim Arends for his Report to the Assembly** - "God Does Not Leave Us Alone" and Statistical Report (see both at end of these minutes).

Bishop called on **Rev. Jeff Thiemann, President & CEO, Portico Benefit Services** for his Report on Portico Benefit Services

**Bishop Arends called for Mission Moment** – Synod World Hunger Subcommittee

**Bishop Arends called on Reference and Counsel for Resolutions:** (see all resolutions as amended and passed on synod assembly web page: <http://www.lacrosseareasynd.org/#!2016-synod-assembly/czim> )

**SA 16.6.2 Motion to approve voice for Synod Committee members who are not voting members.** **MMSC**

**SA 16.6.3 Motion to change the word "Wisconsin" to "United States" in line one of Resolution #4, Resolution Supporting Dairy Farmers' Cooperatives.** **MMSC**

**SA 16.6.4 Motion to strike the word "Cooperatives" from title of Resolution #4.** **MMSC**

**SA 16.6.5 Motion to adopt Resolution #4 “Resolution Supporting Dairy Farmers,” as amended. MMSC**

Lori Toso gave announcement prior to lunch break regarding deadline for submitting Resolutions to Reference & Counsel Committee by noon. Attendees encouraged to take time to view display tables. Prayer given by Pr. Wendy Ruetten, East Conference Dean

**PLENARY SESSION 3 – CENTER FOR FAITH AND LIFE**

Reconvened at 1:15 pm for **WORSHIP**: Preacher – Pastor Presidente Pedro Bullón from companion synod in Peru, Iglesia Luterana del Perú. Offering gave voting choices between a variety of synod ministries and ELCA World Hunger. Bishop Arends presented Pastor Bullón with gift from the Synod following the signing of the new Companion Synod Covenant.

**Elections:**

**SA 16.6.6 Motion for unanimous adoption of the ballot as presented.**

**MMSC**

**SA 16.6.7 Motion to approve the Proposed 2016 Revised Mission Support Budget, the 2017 Mission Support Budget, and 2017 Pastoral Salary Guidelines** (see on synod website: *For Congregations/For Call Process/Materials for Call Process.*)

**MMSC**

**Prayer for Synod Budget given by Bishop Arends:**

*God of all things—*

*This budget is our intention to give and distribute money.*

*We give this money because you first loved us and we are grateful.*

*We give this money because we know you are God and money is not.*

*We give this money because we trust you to give us our daily bread.*

*This spending plan declares our intentions to volunteer, to minister to each other, to reach out to our community and our world. It says what we want to do in honor and praise of your great love. As givers, may we give joyfully and liberally extend your mercy to those who stand in need of it.*

*We want to do something more than just meet this budget, O God. We do not want it to be the limit or the target of our giving. We anticipate the celebration of going beyond it, and the ability to do more for you than our little faith allowed us to dream.*

*We declare our intentions to give and distribute as fully dedicated to you. May we be surprised by all that is done through these efforts.*

*And may you be pleased. Amen*

**Bishop Arends Called on Reference & Counsel** for additional resolutions.

**SA 16.6.8 Motion to approve Resolution #1, “Resolution on U.S. Government Aid to the State of Israel.”**

**MMSC**

**SA 16.6.9 Motion to approve Resolution #2, “Resolution on the 2016 Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act.”**

**MMSC**

**SA 16.6.10 Motion to approve Resolution #3, “Congregational Support for the World Hunger Appeal.”**

**MMSC**

**SA 16.6.11 Motion to add the words “and community” after the word “religious” in the 5<sup>th</sup> Resolved of Resolution #5, Resolution Supporting Time of Prayer to End Human Trafficking.**

**MMSC**

SA 16.6.12 Motion to move phrase “in their congregations and national organizations” in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Resolved to line above following, “through Super Bowl Weekend as a time of prayer.” **MMSC**

SA 16.6.13 Motion to add “and to work with law enforcement to end human trafficking” in final Resolved following “and encourage them to establish the same time of prayer to end human trafficking.” **MMSC**

SA 16.6.14 Motion to approve Resolution #5, “Resolution Supporting Time of Prayer to End Human Trafficking,” as amended. **MMSC**

SA 16.6.15 Motion to amend Resolution #6, Resolution Regarding Youth Mission Trips, by deleting the words “or evangelical” from the 6<sup>th</sup> Whereas. **MMSC**

**Bishop Arends called for a Mission Moment** – Global Mission Committee, Cheryl Mader

Plenary reconvened with a song following a break.

**Bishop Arends** introduced **Rev. David Wunsch**, Director for Unit Operations and Programs of the Global Mission Unit of the ELCA **for the Report of the ELCA.**

**Bishop Arends** called on **Pr. Libby Howe** for the Report from Director of Evangelical Mission / Asst. to the Bishop

SA 16.6.16 Motion to divide the designated offering collected at the sending service on Sunday equally between ELCA World Hunger, the new Sudan Church and reducing synod’s debt to Churchwide from this year’s budget. **MMSC**

**Bishop Arends** called on **Reference & Counsel** for additional resolutions:

SA 16.6.17 Motion to amend Resolution #6 by substituting the word “eager” for the word “anxious” in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Whereas. **MMSC**

SA 16.6.18 Motion to approve Resolution #6, “Resolution Regarding Youth Mission Trips,” as amended. **MMSC**

SA 16.6.19 Motion to approve Resolution #7, “Resolution Encouraging Congregations to Hold an Annual LSS Sunday.” **MMSC**

**Bishop Arends Called for a Mission Moment** – Lutheran Campus Ministry, Pr. Ben Morris

Lori Toso gave announcements and directions for evening banquet and ELCA Churchwide Conversation. Prayer led by Pr. Karyn Bodenschatz, West Conference Dean. During the banquet a **Mission Moment** was given by the synod Church in Society Committee. ELCA Churchwide Conversation – “Called Forward Together in Christ” -- took place in Marty’s following the banquet and was led by Rev. David Wunsch. This was followed by a time of fellowship.

## **SUNDAY, JUNE 12**

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### **PLENARY SESSION 4 – CENTER FOR FAITH AND LIFE**

Plenary 4 convened at 8:15 am with song - Ernest Blecha, assembly musician, and Prayer by Pr. Meg Hoversten, South Conference Dean

Rev. Libby Howe, Dir. of Evangelical Mission gave a brief “**Sunday School Opening**”

Attendees directed to workshop listing in their binders, also shown on screen; room locations were shared and

also one change made in the listing: Pr. Ben Morris was unable to lead session on church websites. Instead Pr. Karyn Bodenschatz led a session on peace efforts in the Middle East. Two, back-to-back Sunday School sessions were then held in either CFL or Olin Hall.

Plenary reconvened at 11:20 am after a break. **Bishop Arends** gave a big “**thank you**” to our assembly volunteers in the red vests and to our AV technicians: Andy Stutesman and his assistants, Suzanne Lindner and Jens Bringsjord. Bishop also announced that the official count indicated 142 cows were brought to synod assembly to pasture at Luther College this weekend. Though the official amount gathered for ELCA World Hunger by this project was not yet defined, all pastors and congregations were thanked for their amazing support of this project.

**Bishop then called on Reference & Counsel** for additional resolutions:

**SA 16.6.20 Motion to amend Resolution #8 by substituting the word “craftspeople” for the word “carpenters” throughout the resolution.** **MMSC**

**SA 16.6.21 Motion to approve Resolution #8, “Resolution Regarding Hiring Practices of Craftspeople,” as amended.** **MMSC**

**SA 16.6.22 Motion to approve Resolution #9, “Resolution Regarding Endowment Funds.”** **MMSC**

**SA 16.6.23 Motion to approve Resolution #10, “Resolution to Work Toward a Companion Synod Relationship.”** (This will be a new companion synod relationship with the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren.) **MMSC**

**Bishop Arends called for a Mission Moment** – Endowment Fund Board, Pr. Jonathan Schmidt

Announcements given at 11:50 am; song led by Ernest Blecha and prayer given by Pr. Meg Hoversten, South Conference Dean. Lunch followed in Dahl Centennial Union.

#### **PLENARY SESSION 5 – CENTER FOR FAITH AND LIFE**

PLENARY 5 convened at 1 pm with a song led by Ernest Blecha and prayer by Pr. Meg Hoversten, South Conference Dean.

Announcement given of date and place for 2017 Synod Assembly, June 9-11, in La Crosse. Assembly evaluation forms were sent to attendees’ email addresses, or paper copies also made available at registration table.

**Sending WORSHIP** – Service of Holy Communion took place with preacher – Rev. Libby Howe, Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop. Offering was as designated by the assembly in earlier vote.

**Bishop Arends led Closing of Assembly Litany** and assembly was adjourned.

Mike Schnitzius  
Secretary

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**FOLLOWING ARE VARIOUS HANDOUTS FROM THROUGHOUT THE 2016 SYNOD ASSEMBLY.**

## **2016 BALLOT - LA CROSSE AREA SYNOD-ELCA**

### **SYNOD-WIDE NOMINATIONS:**

**Synod Council**, Secretary (term to 2020): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Stephen McDougal, Living Hope Lutheran, Ettrick

**Synod Council**, East Conference Lay Female (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Linda Raap, Woodland Lutheran, Rome

**Synod Council**, South Conference Lay Male (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Mike Lusk, Coon Valley Lutheran

**AT-LARGE NOMINATIONS TO FAITH AND LIFE COMMITTEES:** *(Under our bylaws each Faith and Life Committee has one clergy and one lay person from each conference and shall have two to four additional lay people at-large, no particular conference. The at-large nominations for Faith and Life Committees are separate from conference nominations.)*

**Church in Society Committee**, North Conference, At large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Tanya Rist, Retired, St. John Lutheran, Alma

**Church in Society Committee**, South Conference, At large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Emma Grinde, Immanuel Lutheran, Viroqua

**Church in Society Committee**, East Conference, At Large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Kathleen Sumrall, Trinity Lutheran, Sparta

**Church in Society Committee**, West Conference, Lay at Large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Bob Bendiksen, English Lutheran, La Crosse

**Evangelism and Outreach Committee**, North Conf., Lay at Large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Dave Denson, Journey Lutheran, Onalaska (incumbent)

**Evangelism and Outreach Committee**, South Conference, At large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Peter Kirkegaard, Mt. Sterling Lutheran, Mt. Sterling

**Mission Support Committee**, South Conference, Lay at Large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Nancy Luckasson, Immanuel Lutheran, Cashton

**Mission Support Committee**, West Conference, Lay at Large (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Lori Lowell, Good Shepherd Lutheran, La Crosse



## **CONFERENCE NOMINATIONS:**

### **NORTH CONFERENCE:**

**Consultation Committee**, lay (term 2022): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Marc Baures, Living Hope Lutheran, Ettrick

**Discipline Committee**, clergy (term 2018): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Pastor John Ashland, Hardies Creek / S. Beaver Creek Lutheran parish, Ettrick

**Discipline Committee**, lay (term 2022): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Richard Miller, Blair Lutheran

**Evangelism and Outreach Committee**, North Conference Clergy (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Kris Fahey, Interim Pastor, Mindoro/Lewis Valley Lutheran parish

**LYLE (Lutheran Youth Leading Evangelism)-Adult Advisory Team**, lay (term 2018): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Matt Iverson, Holmen Lutheran, Holmen (incumbent)

**LYLE (Lutheran Youth Leading Evangelism)-Adult Advisory Team**, clergy (term 2018): VOTE FOR ONE

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### **SOUTH CONFERENCE:**

**Consultation Committee**, 6-yr term (one term limit), Clergy (vacancy to 2017): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Kathy Ingbritsen, Immanuel Lutheran, Viroqua

**Discipline Committee**, 6-yr term (one term limit), Clergy: VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Margaret (Meg) Hoversten, Middle Coon Valley Lutheran

**LYLE (Lutheran Youth Leading Evangelism)-Adult Advisory Team**, lay, 2-yr term: VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Sheila Rodriquez, DeSoto Lutheran

**Mission Support Committee**, South Conference Clergy (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Dan Wollman, Westby Coon Prairie Lutheran, Westby

### **EAST CONFERENCE:**

**Church in Society Committee**, East Conference Lay (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Laura Bishop, Peace Lutheran, Tomah

**Consultation Committee**, Clergy (vacancy to 2018): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Pr. Jeff Ruetten, St. Stephen's / St. Peter's Lutheran parish, Camp Douglas



**Consultation Committee**, Lay (6 year term): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Karl Katuin (Bethany Lutheran, New Lisbon)

**Mission Support Committee**, East Conference Lay (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rick Antin, Woodland Lutheran, Rome

\_\_\_\_\_ Nancy Sikorsky, Trinity Lutheran, Sparta

**WEST CONFERENCE:**

**Church in Society Committee**, West Conference Clergy (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Lisa Shank, Bethany Lutheran Homes

**Church in Society Committee**, West Conference Lay (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Bridget Crave, First Lutheran, Onalaska

**Discipline Committee**, Clergy (term to 2022): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Duane Baardseth (Retired), Interim Pastor, Bethel Lutheran, La Crosse

**Evangelism and Outreach Committee**, West Conference Clergy (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Jean Schmidt, Our Savior's Lutheran, West Salem

**Evangelism and Outreach Committee**, West Conference Lay (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Laura Cunliffe, Trinity Lutheran, La Crosse

**LYLE (Lutheran Youth Leading Evangelism)-Adult Advisory Team**, Clergy (term to 2018): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Steve Meyer, Immanuel Lutheran, Caledonia, Minn.

**Mission Support Committee**, West Conference Lay (term to 2019): VOTE FOR ONE

\_\_\_\_\_ Terry Lee, First Lutheran, Onalaska

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**Report of the Bishop, La Crosse Area Synod Assembly  
Luther College, June 10-12, 2016**

**GOD DOES NOT LEAVE US ALONE**

Once a year we gather in Assembly to celebrate that God brings us together and that together as the Body of Christ we can do more than any one household or any one congregation can do alone. We celebrate the ministries we live out in the name of Christ. We celebrate the work we do as Jesus whispers in our ears, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." But we don't get comfortable, because God does not leave us alone. God is always challenging us to be more and more, the living Body of our Sovereign and Savior.

## OUR MESSAGE

“Jesus is Lord!” – Many call this the first Christian creed. One of the shortest sermons I ever heard was, “Jesus loves you – live with that.” And isn’t this enough? We are thankful for the simple truths of faith. We can rest in them.

**But God does not leave us alone.** Since Jesus is our friend, we want to know Jesus better. Since we want to tell people about our Divine Friend, our Savior and Sovereign, we want more to share. Since we are called to be Christians in the Lutheran tradition, we want to know who we are. October 31, 2017, marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation.

The synod’s Anniversary Committee has set a simple goal for the learning period from now until the observance: That every member of every congregation can name:

- 1) One thing special about being an ELCA Lutheran, and
- 2) One thing ELCA Lutherans contribute in this world.

Is it time to spend more time in Scripture? Is it time to learn more about your faith and your tradition? What would you like to know to share your faith more clearly?

## OUR BUILDINGS

We love our church buildings. Many of us sit in worship, look to the chancel, and see in our minds our little ones in cherub robes waving and singing with shouts. We see our youth, now moved away to colleges and big city work, standing in confirmation stoles sharing their statements of faith. We see wedding dresses, baptismal gowns, and funeral palls. We see the candle glow of Christmas and hear loud Easter choruses. We look to the past, lean back in our pews, and thank God for the comfort of this place.

**But God does not leave us alone.** God calls us to see our buildings and ministry centers. And we open our doors. The number of Come for Supper sites continues to grow throughout our synod. Food pantries are moving from closets to classrooms. Office space is donated to county services and Lutheran Social Services. Stately sanctuaries seasonally see pews covered in patchwork quilts to be donated, piles and piles of food headed to hungry people. Comical mosquitoes and cartoonish cows celebrating both malaria and hunger fought. Classrooms are used by Alcoholics Anonymous groups, by county health screeners, and for supervised parental visits with at risk children.

One of the greatest assets our congregations have is our buildings. Many, many rooms are unused for great portions of each week. How does your church building serve our God? How does Jesus want to expand the use of rooms consecrated for service?

## OUR TREASURES

We have weathered one of the greatest recessions in the history of our country. Many are still hurting, many are stable, and many are doing better. In a time of recession we make sure our security is guarded as much as possible. Many cut back their giving to the ministry that we share. Many were thrilled they were able to maintain a dollar amount. We thank God that we made it through and we rest.

However, the reality of the last three years is reflected in the amount we have been able to apply to our work through our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. As mission support from congregations has remained fairly stable over the last three years, synod operating costs have risen. This has resulted in a difficult decision. The Synod Council is recommending that this assembly adopt an amended budget for 2016 and a new budget for 2017 that will reduce our mission support contributions from 55% to 50% of our income. We have been a 55% synod for a long time. Please take home from this assembly the stories of what we do together as a church. Please work to increase the mission support giving of your congregation to continue these vital

ministries. The Synod Mission Support Committee is eager to help our congregations in stewardship education for our members.

At the same time this weekend we are particularly celebrating a herd of cows now grazing on the library lawn of this college. Each cow represents \$500 given by a congregation to fight world hunger. I will report the amount of giving to date at this assembly and we will have cause to celebrate. We are well on our way to our 2016 goal of \$150,000, a goal that was surpassed in 2015 with a total received of \$153,457.94. (In addition, we announced at the 2015 assembly that the synod had surpassed its three year goal in the malaria campaign of \$150,000; at the end of February 2016 the La Crosse Area Synod had contributed \$180,170.63 to fight malaria.)

**But God does not leave us alone.** We know as faith-filled people that all we have is a gift from God. We know that we are called to tend our treasures for the good of God's world. We remember that we have been taught as children of God to share.

How are you sharing beyond your family – in your neighborhood, congregation, and beyond? How is your congregation reaching out beyond its doors? Where is Jesus calling you to share?

## OUR PEOPLE

We train our pastors well in the ELCA. Our congregations call their pastors carefully. We get a pastor we enjoy – full of energy, fine preaching and teaching skills, good with the youth and a blessing to the homebound and hospitalized. We thank God that our pastor has limited office hours, because most of the time our pastor is out of the building meeting people where they are at – the coffee shop, the school, the warming shelter. We thank God that our pastor is active in organizations on our behalf making our communities better places. We thank God that our pastor attends regular text studies to create the best messages we need to hear and attends theological conferences to hone the skills each pastor needs. We are thankful and rest in the blessings.

**But God does not leave us alone.** God reminds us that our pastors are only part of the ministry to which we are called. God works in us the need to serve and pushes us to volunteer. We are called to teach children and adults, to mentor youth, to lead the service ministries of our congregations, and to be the Christ-filled people who are needed volunteers in schools and hospitals and service groups, in short term projects and long term ministry. God calls us to speak of Jesus, to make disciples, and to raise up leaders.

A specific need: it is estimated that in the next ten years the number of active clergy in the ELCA will be reduced by 1,000 pastors. This means more and more leadership will need to be done by lay people. I believe this will be a positive change for our church. But change does not come easily. Now is the time to become more active. And now is the time to encourage people to consider professional leadership in the ELCA.

How is your congregation making disciples? What discipleship skills do you need to grow in? Where are you called to serve?

## THANKS

Speaking of people, I am thankful for the servants who share a passion for God's work as we seek to be synod together. Thank you to leaders in congregations and those who serve in committees and projects of the Synod. Thank you to the synod staff – Pastor Libby Howe, Melanie Timmerman, Deb Wold and Alice DaFoe. Thank you to my spouse Lynn.

**God does not leave us alone, what a promise! God does not leave us alone, what a challenge!**

Thankful we are in Christ together,

*Bishop Jim*

Rev. Jim Arends, Bishop

## **Roster Update as of March 25, 2016**

### **New Clergy in our synod:**

The Rev. Allison Cobb, Holmen Lutheran Church, Holmen, Wis.

The Rev. Anne Hokenstad, Interim-De Soto & Freeman Lutheran Churches,  
De Soto, Wis.

The Rev. Mark Kvale, Trinity Lutheran Church, Sparta, Wis

The Rev. Bradley Lindberg, Interim-Journey Lutheran Church, Holmen, Wis.

The Rev. Charles Miller, Kickapoo United & Peace Lutheran Churches,  
Soldiers Grove, Wis.

The Rev. Robert Thacker, Bethany Lutheran Church, Mauston, Wis.

### **Members of Our Synod in the Candidacy Process:**

Amy Heinz

Joseph Pinzl

Levi Powers

Christopher Sesvold

Alyssa Weaver

### **Clergy Transferred:**

The Rev. Elizabeth Albertson, Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, Dir. for Evangelical Mission

The Rev. Kimberly Jordan, Trinity Lutheran Church, Fort Atkinson, Wis

The Rev. Vern Skarstad, retired, Manor, Tex.

The Rev. Steven A. Meyer, Joy Lutheran Church, Prescott, Wis.

The Rev. Jeff Miller, retired, Cross Plains, Wis.

The Rev. Lanny Westphal, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Dubuque, Iowa

### **Clergy Changes Within our Synod:**

The Rev. Douglas Andersen to On Leave From Call

The Rev. Elizabeth (Lisa) Shank to Chaplain, Bethany Lutheran Homes, La Crosse

The Rev. Bryant Haney to removed from the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Daniel Henderson to retired

The Rev. Jean Pagliaro removed from the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Kristin Wendland to St. Paul's, Wilton, Wis.

### **Deaths with in Our Synod:**

The Rev. Merrill Herder, retired, died Dec. 26, 2015, La Crosse, Wis.

The Rev. Lyle Ness, retired, died July 15, 2015, Mondovi, Wis.

The Rev. Dale Ruosch, retired, died Nov. 3, 2015, Holmen, Wis.