



2016 Report of the Assistant to the Bishop, Deacon Brenda Tibbetts

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Jesus said, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest*" – Luke 10.2

MOBILITY

Indeed, the harvest is waiting...and the laborers are few. How might God be calling us to address these mobility issues facing our Northeastern Minnesota Synod as well as the broader church, the ELCA?

Ask: As in pray...all of us *together* asking God to call forth additional laborers. Be open to the Holy Spirit's leading. Are you being called to discern a call to seminary? Or, perhaps lay leadership training is needed to assist you in your current vocation providing tools to articulate the faith and to serve your local congregation on council, teaching, mentoring, visitation, etc.

Look & Listen: Look and listen to those around you. Who do you know in your own context that has leadership gifts and a passion for Jesus Christ that needs to hear that perhaps God is calling them to serve? Plant the seeds of wondering and discerning a call in your young people. Look. Listen. Encourage them to explore a call to ministry.

Invest: Retiring boomer age clergy came through a system that fully *invested* in their seminarians. Many of them graduated with little to no debt because congregations and the whole church *invested* in their education for the sake of the world God loves so deeply. As mission support has gone down, so too, have available funds to train rostered leaders. If we are truly concerned about the need for more seminary trained leaders for the church, we need to *invest* in their education.

The Northeastern Minnesota Synod's **Renewing the Promise** campaign as well as our synod assembly offerings seek to address some of those issues.

Please encourage your congregation to *invest* in the future of your church by *investing* in these funds to train rostered leaders. God's harvest - both inside and outside of the Church is not dead nor is it dying. However, the church as we have known it is in transition. I witness hope as God continues to call forth amazing leaders, leaders for whom you and I can play an important part in their education and training opportunities!

Shortage or Re-adjustment?

Last year I shared with the Assembly that "*we have too many buildings for the amount of people in the pews and the number of clergy available.*" Since then, several congregations have made some tough, bold, mission oriented, good stewardship decisions to merge for the sake of the gospel being proclaimed in their neighborhood.

On one hand, there is a real clergy shortage that is on-going which will continue to increase in the coming years. On the other hand, when congregations make adjustments following the leading of the Holy Spirit, to either share ministries or merge ministries, the options for calling a pastor are greatly increased.

Welcome

Oftentimes, we as a Church pay lip service in praying "*for God to send forth more leaders into the harvest*"...and then "we" - don't like or approve of the ones God has sent! Think about that. Be bold enough to "*think out of the box.*"

While there is a real shortage of potential clergy, there is also a larger list of fully vetted and fully approved candidates who are waiting and available for call. These candidates for rostered ministry are on the Extraordinary Lutherans Ministry/Proclaim list. Gifted and trained with a passion to serve Christ, the neighbor, and the world - many congregations and their Call Committees, are not open or prepared to interview candidates from the LGBT community. Is there a clergy shortage? Yes, but then again, perhaps not.

It has been said that "Nostalgia is poisonous to the health of the church." We believe, we worship and we trust in a God who *makes all things new*. What might God be doing in our midst to provide needed laborers in the Kingdom of God? We can be bold in asking what new areas of ministry might the Lord of the harvest, be calling us into! What changes need to be made?

INTERIM PASTORS & BRIDGE PASTORS

Intentional Interim ministry is an important aspect of the mobility process providing leadership to congregations in transition. These well trained pastors are called to provide strategic assistance to congregations preparing to address issues facing the congregation, update constitutions, allowing "breathing space" for congregations as they bid farewell to a former pastor and prepare to welcome a new pastor. All the while they are providing pastoral coverage/care.

Bridge Pastors might be better termed as Transitional Pastors. Retired clergy have often been willing to contract out to congregations on either side of an Interim Pastor's availability. They may fill in for pastoral services for 1-3 months prior to an Interim being available or sometimes they are called upon to fill in following an Intentional Interim who leaves prior to a congregation calling a new pastor.

It is important for the integrity of the process that Congregation Councils and Call Committees work cooperatively with synod staff in the mobility process. We are here to walk alongside you in this time of transition!



Thank you to our NEMN Synod Interim Pastors:

- The Rev. Judy Anderson-Bauer
- The Rev. Loren Anderson-Bauer
- The Rev. Glen Bickford
- The Rev. Brian Birk
- The Rev. Cheryl Fleckenstein
- The Rev. Kari Foss
- The Rev. Terry Frovik
- The Rev. Fred Hanson
- The Rev. John Lundberg
- The Rev. Paul Lutter
- The Rev. George Martin
- The Rev. Mike Peterson
- The Rev. Joyce Piper
- The Rev. Dave Stevens
- The Rev. Janeva Stromberg
- The Rev. Jim Raisanen
- The Rev. Peter Rosenkvist
- The Rev. Steve Weston

Thank you too, to the followingg Bridge Pastors:

- The Rev. Art Dale
- The Rev. Richard Hane
- The Rev. Mark Osthus
- The Rev. Denise Scheer
- The Rev. David Tryggestad

Many thanks to Pastors Jim Swanson and Dennis Paulson, now retired, for their many years of Interim ministry.

FIRST CALL PASTORS

In 2016, four First Call Pastors (Sierra Wester-man, Eric Thiele, Sue Johnson and Beth Pottratz) were called to the Northeastern Minnesota Synod and ordained by Bishop Tom Aitken. In spite of the clergy shortage, the Northeastern Minnesota Synod has been blessed to receive First Call Pastors being assigned to our synod. Since then two more First Call Candidates have been assigned to us.

The **First Annual Candidacy & First Call Pastor Retreat** was held at Camp Onomia in 2016. This was so well received that a second was held in January of 2017. This retreat provides an opportunity for candidates in the seminary process and those experiencing their first call (1-3 years) to get to know each other better, spend time with members of the Synod Staff and the Candidacy Committee learn from presenters and each other. It is also a time to be refreshed through worship and sharing conversation.

FALL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

"Faith & Firearms" was the theme for 2016 presented by Dr. Michael Chan from Luther Seminary. Deep listening to the neighbor was modeled and practiced for leading hot topic conversations. In 2017, Dr. Dirk Lange from Luther Seminary will present *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation*. Please encourage your rostered leader to participate in continuing education!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brenda Tibbetts".

Deacon Brenda Tibbetts