



Report of the Bishop 2016

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God is mending the whole universe together. And here's the wonder: God has invited you through your personal life, through your congregation, through our synod and through this church to be part of it. What greater purpose is there to life? Boldly step into your gift of faith.

You

You are no accident. You are reminded in Scripture that you were known and loved "before the foundation of the world" and given life, salvation and faith as a gift. And Martin Luther reminds you that God has given you- in Christ- all the riches of righteousness and salvation! You belong to God's plan and will always be part of it. You have purpose beyond the consumeristic culture you live in.

Your congregation

You belong to one of 135 congregations in this synod - and you are part of nearly 10,000 congregations in the church we call our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Jesus never intended people to go at this faith business alone. He gathered original followers, to hear the good news and continues to gather us today into his church. In the spirit of Martin Luther, we are called to be a church that proclaims God's unconditional love in Christ, to the whole world.

Northeastern Minnesota Synod

You belong to one of sixty-five synods, all connected through our common confession of faith. There are five Deans and five Conferences in our synod, with 60,000 baptized servants of God! We do things together as a synod - just as you do things together as a congregation. You blessed people through the Northeastern Minnesota Synod that you'll never meet!

Our Churchwide Organization, the ELCA

Together with the other 64 synods we support missionaries, global leaders, disaster relief, ecumenical partner projects, 53 new starts, Young Adults in Global Mission just to name a few.

This past August 16 sixteen from our Synod went to New Orleans as voting members for the Churchwide Assembly (held every three years) where we worshiped, prayed, and deliberated together on many issues including supporting what some women from our Synod began with the PV for Phebe solar power system in Liberia. This was the finest Churchwide Assembly I've ever been to, with many young people leading the way in faithful, respectful, forward-looking conversations at the microphone. I am proud of our church which addressed racism, immigration and refugees, agreement after 50 years of conversations with Roman Catholics on 32 articles that are no longer church dividing, strong support of peace and justice in the Middle East, care of creation among many others.

Synod Staff

We have a great staff that is dedicated to resourcing and assisting the mission and ministries of our Synod.

Kathy Wimer is our Office Administrator and she supervises communications as well as handling all the finances! She has worked on staff the longest of all of us, 20 years in fact!

Catherine Anderson is our Coordinator of Youth Ministry, and has been for 18 years, encouraging and helping young people to grow into the gift of their faith and to equip youth in leadership roles.

Deacon Brenda Tibbetts continued this past year as our staff person who handles Call Process, First Call Theological Education, healthy congregations, planning for our Fall Theological Retreat and roster details.

Tammy Segel-Crilly began a half time position in Jan 2016 and in addition to the normal office support, works on the Web Site, coordinates communication and creates necessary documents and other pieces that bring us together.

Pastor Amy Odgren joined our staff in November as our Director of Evangelical Mission. This position is paid $\frac{3}{4}$ time by our Churchwide organization and $\frac{1}{4}$ time by our Synod. Pastor Amy has been out and about our synod with Mission Planning, renewing congregations, congregational stewardship, and preaching regularly as she is invited. She also oversees our Synod Candidacy Committee, assisting people who sense a call to Rostered Leadership in this church. You'll enjoy her gifts as you create your Intentional Mission Plan for your congregation.

It is my privilege to serve as your Bishop.

Now 8 years into this call, I take seriously my role to preach and teach the gospel, to support your congregation and leaders in hearing the gospel and serving your neighbor. I make time for regular Bishop Visitations to Confirmation Students and their parents across our synod, reminding them of their call in Christ and anointing them for service. It has been my passion, as you know, to encourage your congregation to form your *Vision Team* and grow into the joy of creating your intentional Mission Plan, with the help of both myself and Pr. Amy Odgren. (See our Website for the Document: *The Mission We Share*.)

We are not simply a gathering of like-minded people. We're not a social club. The church is Jesus' idea, gathering a people to hear and be nurtured in the gospel, grow into faith, then bless the world. When congregations end up focusing on their culture or cuisine, when the building becomes a shrine, or when the purpose becomes to cater to the members we have lost Christ's purpose for us; Time for new vision and planning. Through your written Mission Plan, new ministries and priorities will emerge and some things will look different from the past. Closing one chapter, whether in your personal life, or the life of your congregation, and opening the door to a new vital chapter is

what life and faith is about. 52 congregations are currently doing this or have completed it.

I want to lead us into becoming a synod that is focused on developing **vital congregations** and creating a **culture of leadership**.

This past year I ordained four people into the Ministry of Word and Sacrament:

1. Sierra Westerman, serving Immanuel in Brunswick.
2. Eric Thiele, serving Northern Lights Parish (Palo, Hoyt Lakes, Aurora)
3. Susan Johnson, serving Jesse Lake and Suomi Lutheran congregations
4. Beth Pottratz, serving Salem Lutheran in Mahtowa

I am working with our Regional Coordinator to tap qualified lay folks to be trained as lay preachers. This past year I appointed David Erdmann to serve as a Synodically Called Minister in the SALT Parish; Culver, Brookston, Meadowlands, Canyon, Saginaw.

Seven pastors died this past year:

- + The Rev. Gregory Daher
- + The Rev. John Estrem
- + The Rev. Richard Lafer
- + The Rev. Thomas Hallowell
- + The Rev. Karl Lunder
- + The Rev. Norbert Mokros
- + The Rev. Fernard Norlien

We thank God for their life and their witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ over the years.

I continue on the Executive Board for Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota. You already know that the Center for Changing Lives, Duluth is almost completed and will open its doors to homeless youth this spring. Thanks go out to 88 congregations who supported this!

Our Ministry Work Funded Together as a Synod

In the area of Mission Support, that portion of our Sunday offerings that goes to our shared mission together, both Synod and Churchwide, I'm concerned that we ended up behind 2015 year's giving. I want you to know the facts. Through you we made 91.9% of our goal. (Last year we made 96%). We came out in the "black" by \$36,639, due to under spending on the expense side of our budget.

As a Synod we gave **\$1,080,582** in Congregational Mission Support. We were able to fund our own synod "Ministry Partners" at 100%.

Here's what giving to our Ministry Partners looks like at the end of the 2016 fiscal year:

Luther Seminary.....	\$25,200
Lutheran Campus Ministry.....	\$47,000
Minnesota Council of Churches.....	\$ 1,650
Twin Ports Ministry to Seafarers.....	\$ 5,400
Lutheran Advocacy – MN.....	\$ 3,000
Region 3.....	\$ 9,000

Our annual in-gathering for the ELCA Disaster Relief and World Hunger Program through Quilts and Quarters and Marketplace during the 2016 Synod Assembly raised \$23,480 in one weekend! An additional \$124,081 for World Hunger came in throughout the year.

Gifts to Disaster Relief and Lutheran World Relief totaled \$9,248. Missionaries were supported at \$20,105 as well as Global Church Sponsorship for \$6,533.

Our Companion Synods: the Lutheran Church in Honduras \$22,786 and the Lutheran Church of Ingria in Russia \$34,193.

In our "Seminarian Debt Relief" fund there is \$13,565.

The Phebe Hospital Solar Project total for the year was \$177,483.

Out of all the intents received going into 2017, 52% of our congregations have promised more in Mission Support than last year. It is never too late to turn in this important form!



We have a goal to raise \$1.2 million above and beyond regular Mission Support to be divided between our National "Always Being Made New" Campaign, and our own local synod Campaign, "Renewing the Promise" which would undergird these Northeastern Minnesota Synod Ministries by 2019:

- Lutheran Campus Ministry
- School of Lay Ministry
- Lutheran Church in Honduras
- Lutheran Church in India
- Lutheran Church in Russia
- Seminarian Debt Relief Fund
- Seminary Scholarships
- Twin Ports Ministry to Seafarers

Look on the Website for ways to fund online.

Thank you for listening to our Lord as he calls you into new ways of living out God's love. Thank you for supporting new mission plans in your congregation. Thanks for helping create a climate of leadership and ministry rather than simply marking time.

Be bold in trying new things.
Live in the joy of serving Christ and the gospel

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Thomas M. Aitken".

+Bishop Thomas M. Aitken

