



Bishop Lull's Annual Report to Congregations

January 2018

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.' Matthew 9:35-38

Dear Partners in Ministry,

On Christmas Eve more than 400 persons gathered for worship at Luther Seminary. All belong to the newly launched African National Ministry mission start, led by Pastor Gilo Agwa, and co-sponsored with the Presbytery of the Twin Cities, our Presbyterian counterparts. These women, men, and children are Anuak immigrants, who have moved to Minnesota to flee the tribal violence directed against them in Ethiopia and South Sudan. In their homeland they were members of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, which shares a Lutheran and Reformed identity. Here, they are part of one of our newest mission starts as a synod. Their joyous celebration of Christ's birth reflects the new hope that God raises up for people again and again across the globe.



2017 was a year for remembering and highlighting our common witness with other Christians. There were many poignant observances of the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. In congregations and schools, Martin Luther emerged as a lively and contemporary witness to the centrality of grace in our lives of faith and the call to recognize God's active presence in our world today. The Saint Paul Area Synod joined the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Area Synod to inaugurate this observance with a Service of Common Prayer on January 22nd. This quincentenary concludes with a similar service of Evening Prayer at the Cathedral of St. Paul on Sunday, January 21, 2018 at 7:00 pm. In between these two services there have been lectures and art exhibits, renewed interest in the writings of Luther, and much good music.

God continues to call us into a plentiful harvest. This past year, five persons were ordained as pastors and one new deacon was consecrated in this synod. They include Pastor Peter Christ, senior pastor at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Roseville; Pastor Wendy Steger, associate pastor at Shepherd of the Valley in Apple Valley; Pastor Erik Doughty, chaplain at Southview Acres Senior Residence and St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church in Saint Paul; Pastor Janet Karvonen-Montgomery, associate pastor at Incarnation Lutheran Church in Shoreview; and Pastor Maggie Novak, pastor at Bethesda in Inver Grove Heights. Deacon Abby Matter was consecrated and serves at Roseville Lutheran Church in Roseville.

Much of the synod staff's time is invested in the vocational formation of candidates, who desire to serve the church as pastors or deacons. In 2017 there were 37 candidates in the Saint Paul Area Synod. In addition, the synod works with call committees during times of pastoral transition. This includes mentoring the teams that create the Mission Site Profile for the congregation, orienting and supporting the call committee with names of

prospective candidates for the vacancy, and overseeing the work and pool of interim pastors who serve in times of transition. During 2017, 19 call processes were completed with 25-30 vacancies at any given time.

During 2017 three communities of faith completed a time of discernment with the synod and reached the decision to close. This is some of the most serious work we do as a synod for such a decision is not an inconsequential matter for carrying forward God's call for us to be about God's harvest. Services of Holy Closure were held for Pueblo de Fe (a mission start) on July 23; for North Emanuel in Saint Paul (a 126 -year old congregation) on September 17; and for Light of the World in Lakeville (a 10 -year old congregation) on October 14. Members, as well as financial legacies, from these faith communities continue to enrich other congregations within this synod. In a sense, the Spirit has replanted those laborers into other contexts for witness and service.

Renewing congregations and reequipping leaders (rostered and lay) remain the key programmatic priorities in our synod budget. In 2017, eight congregations participated in the structured program known as A Year of Renewal. They include Family of Christ, Lakeville; Luther Memorial, South Saint Paul; Holy Cross, Oakdale; Saint Anthony Park, Saint Paul; St. Stephen the Martyr, White Bear Lake; Atonement, New Brighton; Lakeview, Maplewood; and Zion, Cottage Grove.

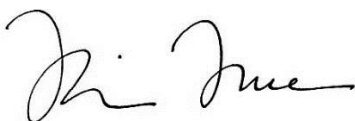
In addition, many congregations worked with members of the synod staff on shared ministry endeavors, vitality surveys, racial justice projects and skill-building for carrying the good news of Jesus into the communities in which we live and work. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus assures the disciples that God's harvest is plentiful. Then as now, the task for disciples is often that of preparing to be a faithful laborer in God's work.

On a personal note, it was a privilege for me to represent this synod at the consecration and installation of Bishop Blaston Gaville as the new bishop of the Iringa Diocese in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania in June. Like our sisters and brothers in our other companion synod in Guatemala, the testimony of Christians in this global setting is inspiring and clear. From mountain villages to city churches, I was reminded that God is in charge and that the life of faith brings joy and hope amid the challenges of daily life.

For the staff of the synod, 2017 has been a year of continuity. What we are able to do together as a synod of 112 congregations and mission starts is enhanced and amplified by the talent of those who serve as your synod staff. They include Michael Gold, office assistant; Alicia Rodriguez, office manager; Chloe Ahlf, communications coordinator; Greg Triplett, financial administrator; Joe Lees, assistant to the bishop for vital congregations, vital partnerships; Justin Grimm, director for evangelical mission and assistant to the bishop for next generation ministries; Krista Lind, assistant to the bishop for vocational formation; Anna Marsh, executive assistant to the bishop; Peter Harrits, director of Bega Kwa Bega and assistant to the bishop; and Tom Jenkins, stewardship coordinator (part-time). I know you join me in thanking them for all they do.

Always at year's end it is a gift and a joy to look back at all that God has accomplished in and through us. I am grateful for your prayers and your confidence in our common work.

Yours in God's service –

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia Lull". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "L".

Bishop Patricia Lull