



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

We've learned over the past year how resilient we are as church and as people of God. It's been a time of pain, loss, injustice and uncertainty. It has also been a time of learning, listening and trying new things — stepping out of our comfort zones and into a more digital world. This church persevered in so many ways.

The churchwide organization has been working alongside all expressions and ministries of the ELCA and our partners to provide resources, share stories, engage members and keep our programs alive as we've shifted our focus to responding to the pandemic.

For the generosity of this church through its COVID-19 Response Fund, for the remarkable ways in which we connected to one another, and for the innovative approaches so many of you took to engaging your communities in the gospel, I want to say thank you. Thank you for your ingenuity, and for knowing that God has a plan for us and it's one filled with hope.

As we look to the future, I invite you to dream with me for a moment.

Imagine more people knowing Jesus. Imagine creating communities of love and justice online and in real life. Imagine our online communities and pews filled with new, young and diverse members. Imagine spending more of your time collaborating with others to have a bigger impact in our neighborhoods and in the world.

That is the future I want to build with you. We've all experienced God's ability to see us through challenging times and through new seasons of life. This is an invitation to be part of something that God is doing with and through us. There's never been a better moment to share the way of Jesus and introduce more people to community, justice and love.

In peace,

Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop



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“Porque yo sé muy bien los planes que tengo para ustedes —afirma el Señor—, planes de bienestar y no de calamidad, a fin de darles un futuro y una esperanza” (Jeremías 29:11).

En el último año hemos aprendido lo resistentes que somos como iglesia y como pueblo de Dios. Ha sido un tiempo de dolor, pérdida, injusticia e incertidumbre. También ha sido un tiempo para aprender, escuchar y probar cosas nuevas que nos hizo salir de nuestras zonas de comodidad y hacia un mundo más digital. Esta iglesia perseveró de tantas maneras.

La organización nacional ha estado trabajando junto a todas las expresiones y ministerios de la ELCA y nuestros socios para proporcionar recursos, compartir historias, involucrar a los miembros y mantener vivos nuestros programas a medida que hemos ido cambiando nuestra manera de responder a la pandemia.

Quiero dar gracias por la generosidad de esta iglesia a través de su Fondo de Respuesta al COVID-19, por las extraordinarias maneras de conectarnos unos con otros, y por los métodos innovadores que muchos de ustedes utilizaron para que sus comunidades pudieran participar en el Evangelio. Gracias por su ingenio, y por saber que Dios tiene un plan para nosotros, y que es un plan lleno de esperanza.

Mientras miramos hacia el futuro, los invito a soñar conmigo por un momento.

Imaginen que más personas conocen a Jesús. Imaginen que creamos comunidades de amor y justicia a través del internet y en la vida real. Imaginen que nuestras comunidades en línea y las bancas de la iglesia están llenas de miembros nuevos, jóvenes y diversos. Imaginen que pasamos más tiempo colaborando con otros para causar un mayor impacto en nuestros vecindarios y en el mundo.

Ese es el futuro que quiero construir con ustedes. Todos hemos experimentado la capacidad de Dios para guiarnos a través de tiempos difíciles y a través de nuevas estaciones de la vida. Esta es una invitación a ser parte de algo que Dios está haciendo con nosotros y a través de nosotros. Nunca ha habido un mejor momento para compartir el camino de Jesús e introducir a más personas a la comunidad, la justicia y el amor.

En paz,

Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Obispa Presidente

## *Report of the Interim Bishop*

### **For Such A Time As This**

*"...prepare the way..."*

Isaiah, Malachi, Matthew, Mark, Luke

The patron saint of pastors and bishops who serve in interim capacities is John the Baptist. Isaiah and Malachi foretold of him, and he is described by the Evangelists as the one who went before the promised Messiah, announcing the advent of another, preparing the way for a new day. Such has been the calling that I have been privileged to undertake since August 31, 2020. It has been an honor to serve for even a short time in this calling, following Bishops J. Roger Anderson, Paul Egertson, Dean Nelson, and R. Guy Erwin. While in office in the neighboring synod to the south and west, I enjoyed serving with all four of these trusted colleagues over the years. It has been helpful to reconnect with several of them during this transitional time. When I retired from synodical ministry in 2016 after a fulfilling vocational calling, I never imagined serving in this capacity again.

The primary focus of these "in between" months has not been on the past but on what is to come, namely new beginnings and a new day for the Southwest California Synod (SWCA). The election of a synodical Bishop, Vice President, a significant number of new Synod Council members, and quite a few other elected leaders will guide the SWCA Synod onto a new pathway as you fulfill the mission and ministry of the Gospel for such a time as this. Part of my calling has been to help prepare the way at this unique moment in the life of the SWCA Synod. Early on in my weeks with you, I encouraged you to pray for the unknown, yet-to-be-elected, new leaders that will be chosen to lead this Synod into its future. I urge you to continue to intercede to the Spirit of God to lead the SWCA Synod's Voting Members to vote wisely and courageously for such a time as this. The well-known hymn, "*God of Grace and God of Glory, On Your People Pour Your Power*" (ELW 705) ends with the prayer... "*Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.*" May that be one of our prayers before and after this 2021 Synod Assembly.

I write this report after nine months as Interim Bishop, with four more months remaining in my contract. Your new Bishop will begin September 1, 2021, and will be installed September 19. Much more information about that will be forthcoming.

It quickly became clear that my primary responsibility would be to work with various groups of leaders within this Synod. Those groups are the sixteen full-time and part-time Synod staff members, the eight persons of the Executive Committee, along with the other seventeen people of the Synod Council, and the nine Conference Deans. I enjoyed very limited involvements and engagements with some other teams and committees. The staff and I meet weekly, both for one-on-one times throughout the week and then all together on Wednesdays. These are hardworking and committed individuals, striving every day to carry out their specific and specialized tasks while still working together as a team. Individually and collectively, they have accomplished much this past year. Please read their reports.

These past months the Executive Committee of the Synod Council met very frequently, often two or three times a week in a variety of capacities, as we prepared for Synod Council meetings, as they served as a Mutual Ministry team for an Interim Bishop, and as they worked with some Executive Staff as a Transition Team. The Executive Committee also combined with the Budget and Finance Committee to craft a spending plan for the 2022-2023 fiscal year of SWCA. They did all that and more while addressing the issues regarding synod-owned property management and many other matters in need of their wisdom and decision-making. The Synod Council moved from quarterly meetings to monthly meetings, at least through these transitional months, and they divided themselves into five working groups to focus on some of the most important concerns and issues facing the SWCA Synod. I especially am thankful for the time our Vice President, Randy Foster, gave me every week and the work he has carried out on behalf of this Synod.

The Conference Deans have been consistently and faithfully meeting once or twice each month addressing the ministry of the nine geographic conferences, assisting in the nominations process, preparing for conference events, and more. It has been a balancing act of both governance and administration, mission and ministry with these groups of capable and dedicated leaders. While their names may be listed elsewhere in this document, I

wish to express my great thanksgiving for these people who have given many hours and much expertise and energy leading the SWCA Synod. Their names appear at the end of this report.

There have been other episcopal duties and responsibilities these past months, but on a much more limited basis than I experienced in my previous calling. I have been honored to preach a few times for various occasions and attended several congregational services and meetings in person. Most often I find your services on my computer screen. Pastors in new callings have been installed, several ordinations will take place before August, and it has been, and will be, a joy to be involved in some confirmation services as young people profess their faith and give thanks for their baptisms. I have discovered different and much easier connections with former and new colleagues. The ELCA Conference of Bishops meets every week for an hour. Their longer, twice-a-year meetings now Zoom together for several days without extensive travel and expense. The five Bishops of the five southwestern Synods (Region 2) also meet weekly to discuss our shared ministries, including Candidacy, Mobility, First Call Theological Education, and others. Gathering every month with the Los Angeles Council of Religious Leaders is a very helpful reconnection as we share with each other the ways our faith communities are responding to shut-down orders and recommendations from state and local government, and how we follow the guidelines of the CDC and Department of Health. It is helpful to hear from a wide spectrum of religious leadership regarding reopening, addressing political and social unrest, and how we will continue to cry out for justice and equality. There are the usual "situations" that need to be managed by the staff within the Office of the Bishop. My lament is how full each day has become and how few collegium gatherings I have been able to attend. I had hoped to spend more time getting to know our rostered ministers and listening to your conversations. I am thankful to the Conference Deans who carry out that ministry once or twice each month.

Coming into this role in the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic along with all its cautions, and then sitting in front of a computer screen hour after hour and day after day in Zoom meetings has been a dramatic shift from the face-to-face, person-to-person gatherings and worship services that had been such a significant part of my previous 24 years in the Pacifica Synod. Along with so many others, I have great appreciation for how quickly and effectively many of our rostered and lay leaders made the needed and necessary transitions to carry on ministry with virtual, digital, and hybrid versions of worship, Bible Study, Sunday School, youth ministry, and congregational, council, and committee meetings. At the same time, you continue to feed the hungry and care for those in need, often putting yourselves at risk for the sake of others. The Good News of Jesus Christ is being proclaimed in word and deed in the midst of the greatest global crisis most of us have experienced. Thank you for this amazing witness!

In years past, my Bishop's Report always cast a vision for the year(s) ahead, but that is not my responsibility during these months with you. As new leadership is elected, those ending their terms within this Synod will hopefully be able to gather several times with the newly elected to "pass the mantle" as Elijah did with Elisha (2 Kings 2). The newly-elected, along with those remaining in leadership, will begin to craft the vision, along with many others in this Synod, for the years to come. Great challenges and opportunities will continue to give the SWCA Synod much to do. Biblical and church history remind us how the people of God often responded to significant challenges by relying on the promises and grace of God, moving forward with enduring faith, bound together in a covenantal relationship. Such opportunities are now before this part of Christ's Church.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to dust off some of the tools of my previous work and pull a few clerical shirts and collars out of my closet. You helped me reconnect with people with whom I have worked in previous years and I have been able to meet new friends and colleagues, for which I am grateful. You have been gracious, affirming, and welcoming. I am deeply thankful! Your next Bishop will be blessed as you offer that person the same warmth and care, and as you strive together to follow the way and will of God for such a time as this.

May the grace and peace of Christ bless you now and in the days ahead,

The Rev. Murray D. Finck  
Bishop (Interim)

Below are those with whom I was privileged to work most closely. I give thanks for them and for all the people of God of the Southwest California Synod.

| <b>SYNOD STAFF</b>   | <b>SYNOD COUNCIL</b>                         | <b>CONFERENCE DEANS</b>                              |
|--|--|--|
| <b>The Rev. Brenda Bos</b><br>Asst. to Bishop for Rostered Leadership  | <b>Executive Committee</b>                   | <b>The Rev. Amy Beveridge</b><br>Central Coast       |
| <b>The Rev. Marj Funk-Pihl</b><br>Asst. to Bishop for Congregational Mission (DEM)                                 | <b>Mr. Randy Foster</b><br>(Vice President)  | <b>The Rev. Jennifer Chrien</b><br>Channel Islands   |
| <b>The Rev. Joseph Castañeda Carrera</b><br>Asst. to Bishop for Authentic Diversity and Ethnic Specific Ministries | <b>The Rev. Keith Banwart</b><br>(Secretary) | <b>The Rev. Scott Peterson</b><br>Foothill           |
| <b>Ms. Maria Paiva</b><br>Coordinator for Latino Ministries  | <b>Mr. Michael Metzger</b><br>(Treasurer)    | <b>The Rev. Tracy Williams</b><br>Greater Long Beach |
| <b>The Rev. James Phillips</b><br>Coordinator for African Descent Ministries                                       | <b>Mr. Nolan Green</b>                       | <b>The Rev. Caleb Crainer</b><br>LA Metropolitan     |
| <b>The Rev. Matt Keadle</b><br>Synod Youth Director until February 2021  | <b>The Rev. Pam Challis</b>                  | <b>The Rev. Eric Strom</b><br>San Gabriel Valley     |
| <b>Ms. Sheri Dillon</b><br>Chief of Staff  | <b>Ms. Karen Moyer</b>                       | <b>The Rev. Christopher Lindstrom</b><br>South Bay   |
| <b>Ms. Robin Lujan</b><br>Administrative Assistant   | <b>The Rev. David Berkedal</b>               | <b>The Rev. Dawn Wilder</b><br>Tehachapi             |
| <b>Ms. Samantha Henderson</b><br>Communications Coordinator  | <b>Other Council Members</b>                 | <b>The Rev. Stephanie Jaeger</b><br>Twin Valleys     |
| <b>Mr. Edward Duarte</b><br>Administrative Assistant   | <b>Ms. Jane Affonso</b>                      |  |
| <b>Ms. Holly Ann Walker</b><br>Bookkeeping   | <b>The Rev. Cesar Arroyo</b>                 |  |
| <b>Mr. Dale von Seggern</b><br>Bookkeeping   | <b>The Rev. Ryan Chaddick</b>                |  |
| <b>Ms. Lisa Higginbotham</b><br>ELCA Regional Gift Planner   | <b>The Rev. Jennifer Chrien</b>              |  |
| <b>Mr. Bill Nuzzo</b><br>Property Management   | <b>Ms. Shirley Green</b>                     |  |
| <b>Mr. Juan Mansilla</b><br>Facility Maintenance   | <b>Ms. Kir'Ra Hemphill</b>                   |  |
| <b>Mr. Thomas Yuschak</b><br>Region 2 Archives Coordinator   | <b>Deacon Jamie Hovland</b>                  |  |
|  | <b>Mr. Todd Kolberg</b>                      |  |
|  | <b>Ms. Laura Krueger</b>                     |  |
|  | <b>Ms. Ana Nieva</b>                         |  |
|  | <b>Ms. Terri Pyle</b>                        |  |
|  | <b>Ms. Cortni Rahn</b>                       |  |
|  | <b>The Rev. Marta Salazar</b>                |  |
|  | <b>Ms. Valerie Shaw</b>                      |  |
|  | <b>The Rev. Ruth Sievert</b>                 |  |
|  | <b>The Rev. Mark Witte</b>                   |  |

**Southwest California Synod  
Report to the Synod Assembly by the Vice President**

***Things aren't what they use to be!***

It's been said that fact-finding requires some form of triangulation, seeking the facts from more than one source, ideally three separate and distinct references. A trajectory is also comprised of more than one point of reference, preferably three in order to effectively mark the direction forward. In this last year, the national Churchwide office (CWO) has begun a process of discernment that equally attempts at establishing a new sense of triangulation, having set in motion the precepts for The Future Church Initiative (FCI). FCI attempts to redefine the boundaries between Churchwide, each synod and all of its conferences & congregations. In many ways, FCI has become an invitation for all synods to reevaluate and reconsider the ways in which we construct and conduct our mutual ministry together. It has afforded us the opportunity to challenge old paradigms, to evaluate alternative strategies, to measure once again the trajectory we have placed ourselves on and, most importantly, to calculate whether this direction remains the best one for us to follow.

Your Synod Council, equally, has taken on the responsibility of gathering and garnering insights and impressions about its effectiveness. Just how efficacious have we been? By what account or by which tests have we determined how well we have done? We would like to thank all of those who participated in this past summer's synod assessment process, which was the first of its kind in a quite a long while. This was our attempt at doing a self-assessment, lifting-up the attributes and struggles related to our mutual ministry, while identifying those points of distinction that make us unique and different. A lot was uncovered in conversation about who we are and whose we are! Without question, we, as a synod of the faithful - in all cultural settings - conveyed with certainty that we are a "welcoming church", open to all who wish to come into a relationship with the Risen Lord! We are also a church seeking to redefine ministry in this virtual context. How are we to address this ever-changing landscape called Southern California with all of its complexities?

***Our Hope!***

As these thoughts and reflections were formed – actually during the days following Holy Week – the gravity of the Risen Lord in our midst was once again ever so apparent. And, even more so was the revelation of God's Omnipresence in Christ Jesus. It seemed to take on an even greater reality given the constraints of the pandemic, which conceivably will define the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in ways nothing else might accomplish. Unlike Y2K, which was expected to be a defining chapter in world history, we recall that that event simply came and went without much of a whisper. Covid-19, on the other hand, was and remains defining. So what did we learn and how have we triangulated on these insights?

In selecting the theme for our 2021 Synod Assembly, several of the Synod's Executive Committee members almost in unison spoke of these times, these defining times, as our chance to change the trajectory, to alter our plans and to take a page from Churchwide in redefining the elements of our future church landscape. Almost to the person, the words of Mordecai came to mind. Scripture (Esther 4:14) captures Mordecai in great distress, declaring the plight of the Jews. It was in his expressed plea to Queen Esther that she was to act and not be silent "for such a time as this..."




Life, as we have come to know it, has changed. The lives of many have changed. More than half a million of the beloved were lost to COVID-19. Nothing stays the same after that! I, for one, have lost seven people I knew to the coronavirus, and am aware of several others who were graciously spared through quarantine, including my granddaughter.

***“For Such a Time as This...!”***

These are defining times and how we view these times of loss and uncertainty is important. Your Synod Council thought it an imperative when it issued \$145,000 in grants to congregations that saw fit to stand in the gap of food insecurity and job loss in 2020. No doubt spurred on by the testimony of their parishioners and the stories of friends, those who were adversely affected by the chasm of loss within our society, these congregations took it upon themselves to stand in the gap of despair. The prolonged closure of restaurants, gyms, theaters and other social gatherings have left many empty. The required distancing among us that now redefines what relationships are – the absence of touch and the regrettable fear that the person within our midst may be a carrier if not ourselves – marks our daily existence. Your Synod Council has struggled through strategies hoping to lessen these voids, thinking of ways to aid congregations that simply wanted to reconvene within the four walls of their sanctuary. Guided by public health experts, the Synod consulted with congregations that inquired as to “when, O Lord, when will we be able to return to normal?” And, like Mordecai... the response was not for a return to normal but for decisive intervention, a course redirection, a new and notable trajectory for both congregations and the synod alike braving this soon to be post-pandemic era not looking back but certainly looking forward.

This 2021 Synod Assembly affords us all the prospect of gazing at something new and different. Calling a new Bishop, along with electing the newly constituted Synod Council and with the accompanying insight of our Conference leadership, we should be able to forge a new direction, one that re-crafts the role of the Synod. I envision a shift from a centralized administration to one that is more decentralized and stratified. Program concentration and empowered conferences and congregations within each conference should be a natural outcome. The old paradigm of congregational independency should give way to clustered congregations working together to effectuate change over a geographic area much larger than previously claimed by any one congregation. Programs and services to the community should be re-casted in light of the technical wonders of Zoom and other virtual platforms that bring people together in a geographically limitless way. Taking full advantage of electronic communication tools lends nimbleness to and for congregations and conferences. Garnering a better appreciation for the breadth of this new e-ministry can only make matters more efficient. It has already amplified our daily communication abilities. If nothing else, this instrumentation and its capabilities have redefined the efficiencies of communication much the same as the distributed use of the telephone once did (by landline initially, and by wireless cell decades later). Where would we be without the iPhone? Well, that’s another story entirely!

We lift in prayer the newly Called Bishop and elected Synod Council as they arrive for service with open minds and an eagerness to get started for “such as time as this”. They, too, will be part of the paradigm shift sparked by the Future Church Initiative and assisted by the concentrated and dedicated support from each of us. We learned a lot this past year, or perhaps we have come to emphasize those things we thought we knew, that:

-  *We, the people, are the Church...* the buildings were just there to offer a place to congregate. Not being able to venture into our places of worship gave way to a grander appreciation of who are God’s People and what ministry really is.
-  *We are faithful and resilient...* through it all and in and through God’s grace; we have persevered. We will soon declare “such a time as this” as the pre- and post-pandemic years, those years that we reaffirmed who we are and whose we are!
-  *We are prepared...* not knowing what the future holds does not preclude us from readying ourselves for the unknown. We may not know what the future holds but we are reminded daily who holds the future.

All of those who you will elect and Call for “such a time as this” will be gifted by the Holy Spirit as they, too, are tested in spirit and in truth. We, your Synod Council, extend our prayers and thanks for their

openness to serve as we lend to them our commitment to aid and assist in all things. While we set our sights on things to come, we are reminded of what has dictated and dominated our time and effort, as delineated below. These are the accumulated actions/motions taken by the Synod Council in its governance role, having met 19 times as the Council/Executive Committee and 25 times addressing various committee responsibilities during this transition year (May 2020 – April 2021).

### **Synod Council Actions, 2020-21**

#### **April 24, 2021**

- a. **MSC** – to adjust for only one property sale the following formula for the distribution of the proceeds from the next sale of a synod-owned property (most likely the property in North Hollywood): 30% to Long Term Investment, 20% to Conference Investment, 20% to Strategic Ministries, and 30% to Undesignated Synod Operations.
- b. **MSC** (by mutual consent) – to recommend to the Synod Assembly a deficit budget as printed alongside remediation directives to achieve the constitutionally required balanced budget.
- c. **MSC** (by mutual consent) - to adopt the following **Continuing Resolution: S8.12.A21** - The Bishop's compensation is to be based on the annually approved Rostered Leaders Fair Compensation and Benefits Workbook - Ministers of Word and Sacrament scale as offered by the Synod Administration and approved by the Synod Council. Credit for years of service is to be based at 75 points for size of congregation/receipts (with Assistants to the Bishop at no more than 50 points). The term of the Bishop typically commences on September 1st.

#### **April 20, 2021 (Executive Committee)**

- a. **MSC** – to adjust the terms on the sale of the North Hollywood property with a counter-offer of a further price reduction of \$117,250 in response to specific issues found in the recent inspection of the property.

#### **March 29, 2021 (Executive Committee)**

- a. **MSC** – to authorize our agents to make a counter-offer of \$3,000,000 to the Armenian Missionary Association of America on the property in North Hollywood with other items to be negotiated by our agent Emil Akopian as outlined in his email of March 28, 2021.

#### **February 13, 2021**

- b. **MSC** - To strike Continuing Resolution *S10.07.D87: No more than four members of the Synod Council, with the exception of the Bishop, may be from the same Conference*, while charging the Council and Nominating Committee to be mindful of matters of diversity and work on a specific plan to implement a strategy for greater diversity before the 2022 Synod Assembly.
- c. **MSC** – To begin monthly meetings on the 4th Saturday of each month for the remainder of the transition year, beginning on March 27, 2021 at 9:00AM for 90 minutes.
- d. **MSC** – To approve En Bloc (including appointments, calls, and roster changes).

#### **December 5, 2020**

- a. **MSC** – To adopt the recommendation of the Executive Committee: that the Synod Council of the Southwest California Synod of the ELCA adopt the following Continuing Resolution: “S7.01.A20 This synod may hold meetings (e.g., synod assemblies) by remote communications, including electronically and by telephone conference, as long as there is an opportunity for simultaneous aural communication. To the extent permitted by state law, notice of all meetings may be provided electronically,” along with other necessary Constitutional updates mandated by actions of the Churchwide Assembly.
- b. **MSC** – To approve the proposed 2021 Spending Plan as recommended by both the Budget & Finance and Executive Committees.



- c. **MSC** – To approve the Job Description for a Synod Accountant as drafted by the Budget & Finance and Executive Committees and charge the Budget & Finance and Executive Committees with the responsibility of identifying funding for this position prior to the end of the calendar year.
- d. **MSC** – To thank the LA Metro Conference for their memorials and express to them the Council’s intention to address their memorials after a new Bishop has been elected and invite their continued participation in that conversation with some initial conversations on the matter beginning in earnest at the earliest possible date.
- e. **MSC** – To create a team to work with LA Metro to establish the conversation aforementioned regarding their memorials in partnership with Pr. Joseph Castaneda-Carrera and to place the matter on the Council’s agenda for its meeting in February.
- f. **MSC** – (by mutual consent) to accept the Report of the Treasurer, subject to audit
- g. **MSC** - To recommend for approval, funding requests from the Evangelism and Outreach Mission Team (EOMT), including funding for the program year 2020-21 for the congregations identified as Strategic Ministries: Funding to be distributed on or after February 1, 2021.

*WHEREAS the 2019 Southwest California Synod Assembly approved the use of \$250,000 in endowment loan authorization and \$270,000 in endowment transfers (grant) to help mitigate synod-anticipated deficit(s); and,*

*WHEREAS the Executive Committee and the Budget/Finance Committee recommended that those resources be applied to both calendar years, CY 2020 and CY 2021 in its submission of the 2021-22 Synod Spending Plan; adjusted accordingly to include funding for Strategic Ministries.*

- h. **MSC** – to accept the recommendation of the Executive Committee as amended to authorize the uses of pre-approved funds as follows:
  - 1. \$ 230,000 to be used in CY 2020
  - 2. \$ 250,000 to be used in CY 2021
  - 3. \$ 40,000 to be used in CY 2021  
to fund Strategic Ministries

The 2021-22 Synod Spending Plan shall be adjusted accordingly to include funding for Strategic Ministries.

**November 14, 2020**

- a. **MSC** - To authorize the creation of a Synod Authorized Worshiping Community – Trinity Faith, led by Minister David Lin (formerly of Faith Lutheran in Monterey Park), who is a current registrant in the PLTS – TEEM program. The SWCA Synod concurs that it will work with ELCA – CWO as the fiscal agent for this SAWC.

**November 7, 2020**

- a. **MSC** – Resolution #1:  
Pastor Stephen Fiechter, On Leave from Call Appeal for Extension
- b. **MSC** - Resolution #2:  
Pastor Violetta Sanders, Letter of Invitation to Extended Services
- c. **MSC** - Resolution #3:  
Pastor Lynn Enloe, Retirement Approval for November 1, 2020

**August 29, 2020**

- a. **MSC** – To approve the Vital Congregations grants as proposed.
- b. **MSC** – (by mutual consent) to refer the matter of the Synod’s banking relationship with America’s Christian Credit Union to the Budget & Finance Committee.
- c. **MSC** – The length of the 2021 Synod Assembly should be at least comparable to previous Assemblies to fully address the Bishop’s Election and the subsequent Synod Council and committee vacancies to ensure that ample thought and consideration are rendered and that the Assembly is not rushed in performing its required due diligence.

**July 31, 2020**

- a. **MSC** – To approve the Endowment and Allocations Committee’s recommendations for Mission and Ministry Fund Grants and Warner Trust Grants for 2020.
- b. **MSC** – To direct the Budget and Finance Committee and the Executive Committee to review the operational needs related to the absence of an FTE in the role of Director, Synod Finance, the position that oversees synod fiscal matters and operations. Then, to identify adequate resources to cover the costs of securing a senior manager with this level of responsibility. Then, to present the information obtained during this review to the Synod Council for its review and determination as to the next steps, which can include but not be limited to: (1) augmenting the 2020-21 salary budget to reflect the inclusion of a senior finance manager, (2) facilitating a rewrite of the job description for this important role, (3) obtaining council approval to conduct a professional search to fill the position, and to (4) proceed with a documented transition plan that ensures the uninterrupted financial operations of the synod.
- c. **MSC** – To approve Bp. Murray Finck’s designated “Housing Allowance.”
- d. **MSC** – To augment the salary of the current Chief of Staff to reflect greater responsibilities and range of work, with an adjusted base salary with benefits as before, effective July 26, 2020.
- e. **MSC** – to implement past Synod Council authorization to create a position of Assistant to the Bishop for Ethnic-Specific Ministries and Authentic Diversity, with \$50,000 in synod reserve funds as previously approved, and to authorize the interim bishop to fill the position for one year. This position may be combined with light duties in a congregation or ministry, or with Churchwide grants to bring it as close to a full-time level as possible. The initial term for this position shall be for one year.

**June 30, 2020**

- a. **MSC** – To appoint the members of the Executive Committee to serve as the Negotiating Team to work out the contractual details with the Interim Bishop (by mutual consent).

**June 25, 2020**

- a. **MSC** – To accept the Letter of Intent to enter into contract for the purpose of the sale of the property at 570 E. Orange Grove in Pasadena at a purchase price of \$ 3,600,000 with a 2.25% Earnest Money Deposit, 10% down, and a 90% note to be carried by the Synod for the initial year.

**May 23, 2020**

- a. **MSC** – To approve En Bloc as printed, including approval of the Constitutions of Rock of the Foothills, LaVerne and Glory, Torrance, and a number of roster changes.
- b. **MSC** – To approve the “Resolution on the Postponement of the 2020 Synod Assembly” as follows:
  - 1. The Synod Council postpones the Synod Assembly until June 4-5, 2021, with a place and format to be determined later, and
  - 2. The Synod Council accepts the offer of the Vice President to serve an additional year until the 2021 Synod Assembly, when an election can and will be held for a new Vice President.
- c. **MSC** - 1) To establish a Synod Grant Program for Covid-19 within the following parameters, with the leadership described, accountable to the bishop and the Synod Council. The program will sunset at the end of September, 2021 unless extended by the Synod Council; and, 2) To authorize the Treasurer to transfer up to \$150,000 of synod endowment funds to the Synod Grant Program for distribution by the program team according to the program’s process and eligibility criteria.
- d. **MSC** – To refer Resolution 19-04 to the Bishop and Synod Staff (along with the Synod Assembly Planning Committee) to coordinate a response to address the issues raised regarding youth and young adult participation at Synod Assemblies.
- e. **MSC** – To accept the recommendation of the Bishop to temporarily expand the position of African Descent Strategy Coordinator in answer to the issued presented by Resolution 19-01 with funds from his discretionary account, with the goal of continuing that expansion in latter years with funds from future Spending Plans and/or Budgets.

***Synod Council decisions and actions taken after the 2019 Synod Assembly through April 2020 were reported in the Synod’s Bulletin of Reports, published and distributed in August 2020.***

## ***Where is God leading Us?***

Perhaps what is gravely allusive in all of this is the yearly struggle required in striking a balance between congregational generosity in the form of mission support and the operations of the synod. Since 2012, our collective contribution towards ministry (mission support) in the Southwest California Synod has precipitously fallen from \$1.4M to \$818K just this past year, 2020. There are certainly exceptional reasons why synod support has reached such an all-time low and in the last year these reductions were only exacerbated by the results of the pandemic. We are the Church and we are the Church together. The Synod is not separate and apart from the body representing our Southwest California ministries and its role is integral in sharing the gospel and touching as many lives as we are able. Frankly, Mission Support has never been the only financial avenue for which the Synod has been dependent, but it was the largest. I have come to appreciate – not that I find comfort in it – that for the last 20 years, every council has struggled trying to make ends meet. This Council has judiciously used *Certificates of Deposit, Unrealized Capital Gains, Legacy congregational gifts, Real Estate sales, Interests Accumulation, Grants and even Loans* to cover its operations and those direct services to our 9 Conferences, ultimately to each congregation. Securing and aiding pastors in congregations, offering congregational assistance, providing programs and services, promoting ministry services in the area of social justice, emergency aid, planet protection, and legislation advocacy are all part of our interrelationship and interdependency. None of this is even plausible if sufficient resources are not available.

Regrettably, we have exhausted much of what one might conceive of as “reserves” in our annual attempt at balancing the budget. The 2022-23 Budget has been marked by measurable reductions in keeping with this reality. It is based almost exclusively on Mission Support projections and those constitutionally allowed income draws that can continue to be made subject to the volatility of the market. This Council recognizes that it has attempted repeatedly to mitigate these annual shortfalls only to conclude that the remaining options are now limited and dwindling. To paraphrase: “the cup is not half full, it is almost empty.”

There are four interrelated options that should be considered as you consider the 2022-23 Budget for approval:

1. Recast the Office of the Bishop, eliminating any/all functions that are not directly constitutional, moving those functions to the conferences, if plausible and practical.
2. Fully institute the precepts offered by the ELCA - Future Church Initiative (FCI) that empowers and equips conferences to manage select programs and services presently provided by the Synod.
3. Sale property held under Synod jurisdiction. Two of nine properties are presently up for sale.
4. Decouple the Southwest Synod and through a negotiated merger, realign its conferences with Pacifica and Sierra Pacific Synod. This may well be the most difficult yet most substantive action of them all, eliminating synod overheads, all indirect expenses and much of the direct costs.

These options are not new and over the years, we have considered them in one form or another. In fact, merging with other synods has been a point of dialogue for several decades. The question is: Are we really advancing ministry trying to resuscitate the existing model of doing business? Or, are we prepared to seek and accept a bolder yet quite different approach where your Council is not struggling trying to make ends meet but rather helping to develop new and exciting ways of expanding the gospel through empowered and equipped conferences, clusters and parish arrangements? While the existing Synod financing model seems unsustainable, our God remains able for “such a time as this!”

***Many Thanks!***

Many thanks are extended to those council and executive committee members whose terms of office have yet to be fulfilled and whose acumen and understanding of synod operations will be most needed in the months ahead! Special thanks are also extended to the council and Executive committee members for whom this assembly (including July and August) marks their final official actions, as they have reached the completion of their consecutive terms. They have my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks!

They offered ever-dependable poise and presence; their determination and resolve have helped advance the synod's governance in so many ways. They have truly been a blessing, especially to me!

Giving thanks to Almighty God for the acceptance, the executive prowess and the gracious shepherding of The Reverend Murray Finck, Interim Bishop whose presence, guiding spirit and extensive background has made this challenging transition year quite memorable and measurable. Without question, Bishop Finck answered the call "for such a time as this..." and we are most grateful.

So I leave you with Mordecai's admonish to be prepared for "such a time as this"... urging you to go and be willing to create a new trajectory of hope, interdependent support, and a new eagerness for what this post-pandemic period possesses. Let's not let Zoom be the only thing that emanates from this period. There is a new Zenith on the horizon, let's approach it with zeal!

Blessings to each and every one of you!

Randall S. Foster  
Vice President, Southwest California Synod  
On behalf of the Synod Council, terms of service: 2014-2021

Report from Pastor Brenda Bos, Assistant to the Bishop for Rostered Leadership

I am writing after our First Call Theological Education event offered on-line in April. About 40 pastors and deacons (called “rostered leaders”) in their first calls come together to get practical learning - things not taught in seminary - to strengthen their skills and get support. These pastors come from all of Region 2, which is the southwestern United States.

This meeting was the most diverse we have ever had. We offered real-time interpretation in Mandarin and Spanish. We *expected* the pastors to benefit from hearing the lectures in their native language. What we did not anticipate was these pastors were now emboldened to speak in their native language to the full group, with the interpreter translating to English. Leaders who have never felt able to speak in our meetings were now sharing their wisdom and inspiration. ***The entire group was transformed because we had language access.***

A key element of my work is candidacy, the accompanying of seminarians as they discern their calls and are formed as leaders. I am incredibly proud of the twenty-one candidates in our synod. *Kyle Johnson, Paul Benz, Libby Denton and Cole McGlynn* have been approved for ordination, *Amanda Berg and Libby Denton* are completing internships in this synod. *Nichole D’Onofrio, Rebekah Nelson and Diana Washington* will begin internship in the fall of 2021. *Monica Holman, Laura Krueger (our only diaconal candidate) and Samantha LaDue* continue their education. *Chelsea Kadovitz, Ále Suarez and Carlos Cortez* have entered Luther Seminary’s MDivX program, which is an intensive two year program in which the student serves as a congregational intern the entire time they are in classes. *Cortni Rahn* will begin a Collaborative Learning program at Wartburg Seminary in Iowa this fall, immediately working in a congregation as well. We have six TEEM students, who work in a congregation while in classes. TEEM student’s previous education is taken into consideration as we tailor their course work. *Johnel Barron, Edgardo Ramirez, David Lin, Jade Ortiz, Maurice Ingram and Pedro Zaragoza* are in this program. ***Eleven of these twenty-one candidates identify as female, two are non-binary and nine are people of color. Three identify as LGBTQ.*** This is very good news for a church trying to be more welcoming! As you can see, there are many paths to ordination, many choices in education. If you are feeling God’s tug toward rostered ministry, I would be delighted to speak to you about the process. [bbos@socialsynod.org](mailto:bbos@socialsynod.org)

Call processes continue, and we welcomed several pastors to new calls this year. A complete list of our roster changes is attached. ***We thank God for the faithfulness of call committees to meet and engage pastors during the pandemic. We pray for pastors who moved to new cities and congregations during lockdown, some of whom have still not been able to meet all their congregants in person.***

I am also preparing for the onslaught of pastoral care needed as we lift restrictions from COVID-19. Our pastors and deacons are exhausted. Many will need vacations or will consider changing calls. ***I ask you to check in with your leaders, offering support, prayer and encouragement as they need.*** They have worked tirelessly for you and the gospel.

Our synod staff has worked hard under Interim Bishop Murray Finck’s leadership to clarify job descriptions, integrate with synod council and work in more cohesive ways. We have come to see where we need financial clarity, communication, sensitivity and how to bring authentic diversity to every aspect of our work. While each of us was deeply affected by Bishop Erwin’s departure and the pandemic, it has been the honor of my life to serve in this position, especially in 2020 and 2021.

**ROSTER CHANGES SINCE THE LAST ASSEMBLY  
May 2020 - May 2021**

**LETTER OF INVITATION**

Rev. Violeta Sanders Eagle Rock, Los Angeles 08/30/2020

**LETTER OF CALL**

Rev. James Mericle St Mark's, Hacienda Heights as Pastor 07/01/2020  
Rev. Kevin D. Bergeson Trinity, Hawthorne as Pastor 07/19/2020  
Rev. Nichole Johnson Faith, San Dimas as Pastor 09/06/2020  
Rev. Todd J. Iverson Trinity, Ventura as Senior Pastor 10/25/2020  
Rev. Maria Paiva St. John, Gardena as Pastor 11/22/2020  
Rev. Andrew C. Stever Hope, Hollywood as Pastor 03/14/2021  
Rev. Scott C. Fritz Our Saviour's, Long Beach as Pastor 03/28/2021

**SYNODICAL LETTER OF CALL**

Rev. Dr. Robyn Provis Calvary, Morro Bay as Interim Pastor 08/01/2020  
Rev. James Phillips Christ, West Covina as Interim Pastor 08/01/2020  
Deacon Shannon Savage-Howie SWCA as Spiritual Director 08/29/2020  
Candidate Esteban Salazar Iglesia Luterana Santa Cruz, Santa Maria  
as a Mission Start Pastor 12/05/2020  
Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin United Lutheran Seminary, Pennsylvania  
as President 01/15/2021  
Rev. Mark Marius Trinity, Santa Barbara as Interim Pastor 02/13/2021  
Rev. Kenneth Davis Bethel, Encino as Interim Pastor 02/13/2021  
Deacon Nancy Ackerman California Lutheran Homes, Glendale as CEO 03/01/2021  
Rev. Scott Fielder SWCA, Glendale as Intentional Interim Pastor 03/01/2021

**TRANSFER INTO SYNOD**

Rev. Kevin D. Bergeson from South Dakota Synod called 07/19/2020  
Rev. Ellen Ayres from Montana Synod is OLFC 07/20/2020  
Rev. Nichole Johnson from Eastern North Dakota Synod called 09/06/2020  
Rev. Todd Iverson from South-Central Wisconsin called 10/25/2020  
Rev. Amber Bergeson from South Dakota Synod is OLFC 02/02/2021  
Rev. Kenneth Davis reinstated from Pacifica Synod called 02/13/2021

**TRANSFER OUT OF SYNOD**

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Rev. Marina Kings to Pacifica Synod               | **11/08/2019 |
| Rev. Ryan Radtke to Virginia Synod                | 06/08/2020   |
| Rev. Christine Buma to Pacifica Synod             | 06/15/2020   |
| Deacon Barbara Hoffman to Upper Susquehanna Synod | 06/15/2020   |
| Deacon Karen Wilson to Saint Paul Area Synod      | 08/20/2020   |
| Rev. Rustin Comer to Sierra Pacific Synod         | 09/01/2020   |
| Rev. Ioan Ittu to Southeastern Iowa Synod         | 09/01/2020   |
| Rev. Steven Jerbi to Northwest Washington Synod   | 02/01/2021   |
| Rev. Henry Martinez to Northwest Washington Synod | 04/01/2021   |

**ON LEAVE FROM CALL**

|                       |            |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Rev. Elizabeth Radtke | 06/23/2020 |
| Rev. Robert Hamel     | 08/01/2020 |
| Rev. Laurie Arroyo    | 08/14/2020 |
| Rev. David Beard      | 10/16/2020 |

**RETIRED**

|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Rev. Gary Heltsley         | 07/01/2020 |
| Rev. Donald I. Romsa       | 06/01/2020 |
| Rev. Lynn Enloe            | 12/01/2020 |
| Rev. Mark Witte            | 12/31/2020 |
| Rev. James Proper          | 01/01/2021 |
| Rev. Truls Person          | 03/01/2021 |
| Rev. Kenny Bowen           | 02/01/2021 |
| Rev. Brian Stein-Webber    | 03/01/2021 |
| Rev. Scott Maxwell-Doherty | 06/01/2021 |

**DECEASED**

|                           |            |
|---------------------------|------------|
| Rev. George McLeary       | 06/04/2020 |
| Rev. Glen Hetland         | 07/23/2020 |
| Rev. Floyd Lawson         | 11/14/2020 |
| Rev. Rowland Chandler     | 01/19/2021 |
| Rev. Kenneth R. Dahlstrom | 02/28/2021 |

**REMOVED**

|                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Ms. Chu-Wen Chen removed from roster | **02/16/2019 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|

\*\*Reporting late

## Synod Assembly Report 2021: Director for Evangelical Mission

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Rev Dr. Marjorie Funk-Pihl

Nothing can stop God from doing new things- 2020's pandemics didn't stand a chance. Here's a bit of what I had the privilege to facilitate in our synod this past year—click the links!

### **Congregational Vitality: Helping Congregations Thrive**

This year we created a website featuring blogs and workshops to support and strengthen your congregation's vitality! <https://www.livingtheresurrection.com/> The third learning community completed the 18-month version of Living the Resurrection in June!

### **Mission Exploration Team:**

Its exciting to help congregations who are between pastors to explore new areas of mission. Seven congregations completed this process— over Zoom!

### **New Starts Ministries: Nurturing relationships with new people!**

**AdoreLA** is served by new TEEM Pastor Edgardo Ramirez with support from founding pastor Joseph Castañeda-Carrera, <http://adorela.org/>

**Another Level Ministries:** Pastor Jonathan Hemphill continues to serve this exciting ministry based out of Ascension Lutheran in West LA <https://www.anotherlevella.com/>

**Bethlehem Lutheran Chinese Ministry:** Pastor John Yu serves this ministry in San Gabriel <https://trinitylutheranchurchofsangabriel.godaddysites.com/chinese-ministry>

**Fruit of the Spirit:** Pastor Hongsun Kim serves a Japanese and Korean focused ministry <https://www.fruitofthespiritlutheranchurch.org/>

**Glory Lutheran Church,** is served by Pastor Newman Chiu and will become our newest organized ELCA congregation soon! <https://glorylutheranchurch.com/>

**Iglesia Santa Cruz:** Pastor Esteban Salazar serves this lively Spanish speaking ministry in Santa Maria. <https://www.facebook.com/Iglesiahispanasantacruz>

**Redimidos,** Teem Pastor Jade Ortiz is developing a bilingual ministry in Oxnard. <https://www.facebook.com/IglesiaRedimidosOxnard>

**Trinity Faith,** Teem Pastor David Lin is developing our newest Mandarin speaking congregation in Monterey Park.

### **Strategic Ministries: Being God's hands in economically impoverished places**

**Central Lutheran:** Pastor Marsha Harris serves this bilingual congregation in Van Nuys. <https://www.facebook.com/CentralLutheranVanNuys/>

**Fe Y Esperanza:** Pastor Martha Moscoso pastors this congregation in Southgate. <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Iglesia%20Fe%20y%20Esperanza/140934555982071>

**Pueblo de Dios:** Pastor Samuel Nieva pastors this congregation in Compton. <https://www.facebook.com/pueblo.dedios.7>



## Evangelical Outreach Mission Team (EOMT)

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Rev Dr Marj Funk-Pihl, de facto chair

2020-2021 had a major impact on the work of this team! Though our focus continued to be strengthening both the vitality and sustainability of our congregations, how we went about our work changed a great deal. In the ELCA we talk a lot about being one church in three expressions: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization (CWO) – we certainly lived that out this year – read on to see what I mean!

### **EOMT Special Grants:**

COVID-19 and the restrictions it necessitated dramatically increased our neighbors need for support as they worked to feed their families. Congregations immediately adapted to the constraints of the day and distributed more food, in more ways than ever before. EOMT adjusted and began applying for grants from ELCA-Churchwide and Lutheran Disaster Relief, as well using money we had set aside for “Holy Innovations. Our synod council joined our efforts with even more financial support. We supported 40 different congregations by awarding \$250,000 in special grants through four grant opportunities.

1. Food Distribution: \$9,600 dispersed between 19 congregations
2. COVID-19 Love Neighbor: \$45,000 dispersed between 22 congregations.
3. Strengthening Vital Ministries: \$145,800 dispersed between 19 congregations.
4. Final Disbursements: \$44,600 dispersed between 12 congregations.

We funded these grants by applying for and receiving \$20,000 from the Churchwide Organization’s COVID-19 Special appeal, \$35,000 from Lutheran Disaster Response, \$10,000 from Grace Housing Inc. of Santa Barbara, \$150,000 from our Synod Council, and \$25,000 from EOMT reserves.

### **New Start, Strategic Ministry and Synod Vitality Strategy Grants.**

We annually review all New Starts and Strategic Ministries and recommend grant awards to the synod council for the coming year. The grants are funded through an endowment called the First Lutheran Los Angeles Fund (FLLAF). Our churchwide organization takes our synod’s list of awards and adds an additional layer of funding so that financial resources flow to congregations from both the local (synod) and national (CWO) expressions of the ELCA. In 2020 EOMT awarded \$60,000 from the synod, to which CWO added \$180,000 to total \$240,000 to support New Start and Strategic ministries as well as our synod vitality strategy. To learn more about each of our New Start and Strategic Ministries, click their links on my staff page as Director for Evangelical Mission.

If you are doing the math you will realize that this team awarded \$483,489.00 in 2020. We are so grateful that we have a Generous God so that we can be a Generous Church!

Your Evangelical Outreach Mission Team is: Joe Zheng, Zekiah Wright, Rev. Marsha Harris, Nolan Green, Todd Kolberg, Laura Salazar Krueger, Valarie Shaw, and Wanda Rosado. We are also grateful for the additional staff support offered by Rev Maria Paiva and Rev Joseph Castañeda-Carrera.

# African Descent Ministries Coordinator Report

April 2021

***We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 2 Corinthians 4:8-10***

I believe that this new year is a welcome stage of life for everyone. We are glad to move past the pain of too many premature deaths of Black people by the police. We survived. We are still here. The corona -19 virus has ravaged our daily lives, too many deaths, too much fear, too much isolation. We have survived. We are still here. We are coming back.

Our congregations and pastors have been forced to minister differently. Before Covid-19 many of our congregations were already challenged with meager financial and human resources. However, faith in God remains our most important asset. We have survived. We are still here.

I have always provided pastoral care in the form of prayer, counseling, and financial assistance to some of our pastors dealing with personal hardships but especially during this Covid -19 pandemic. When called upon by a Pastor and/or the Bishop assisted as a mediator for a congregational conflict. Also I have provided "ELCA coaching" for a couple of individuals within the past 4 months.

## Summary of specific actions and events.

Sharing of resources:

- a) Facilitate exchange between congregations with a high volume of specific food products with a congregation that has a low volume of specific food products for their food distribution centers.
- b) Planning and formation of five podcasts on Black Lutheran history by our African American pastors.
- c) Feb.28 Synod broadcast of Black history month worship service. Pastor Johnel Barron delivered a poignant sermon of hope. Pastor John Miller designed this important service.
- d) Juneteenth worship service synod wide led by African Descent Pastors on June 19 a parking lot service at Olivet Lutheran Church, Hawthorne.
- e) Participated as part of a team in Region 2 consultation in December.

Expended African Descent budget funds for emergency financial aid to some of our congregations' in December and February.

Weekly reporting to Bishop Finck. Supporting other synod staff members and sharing/consultation when appropriate.

Keep the Faith, Pastor James Phillips

## Synod Assembly Report – Maria Paiva, Latinx Ministry Coordinator

*“Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.” Deuteronomy 31:6*

During this last year, the Latinx Ministries of our Synod were able to serve our community with this sentence in mind: “We have to reinvent ourselves to continue to proclaim the love of God for all people.” All our ministries experienced first-hand the deadly virus with the death of several of our members of all ages, young and old. Many of our members and pastors struggled with COVID19 and were able to recover. The Latinx population of our Synod was the most affected by the virus both physically as well as with its effect. Most of the members of our congregations and our community had to continue to go out to work in order to meet their basic needs.

Congregations had to reinvent themselves by finding ways to continue to worship as communities of faith and used social media Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, Messenger, WhatsApp, etc. to continue to be connected with one another. Some congregations found ways to continue in person worship throughout the pandemic. As more and more community services were discontinuing their programs, our congregations increased their food distribution programs and hygienic kits as well as prayer services, funerals, spiritual and mental health support. Santa Cruz, Santa Maria; Pueblo de Dios, Compton; Fe y Esperanza, South Gate; First, Inglewood, and Saint John, Gardena were awarded grants both from the Synod and Churchwide, to support their feeding programs to the community. Offerings and several other income sources to our congregations decreased creating some deficit to the ongoing expenses of the ministries but great efforts are being made to find ways to continue funding the mission of our congregations.

Some of our congregations are providing sanctuary for persons predominantly from Central America who are seeking asylum in this country. With the arrival of hundreds of unaccompanied minors to the Long Beach Convention Center several members of our congregations are volunteering and helping these children. I was able to complete a powerful training provided by Fuller Theological Seminary called Response to the Migrant Crisis which provided historical and practical insights to the migration issues we face every day in our synod.

Pastors gathered on several occasions to pray and support one another during these difficult times. Many of our pastors also were able to participate in different webinars offered in Spanish by the ELCA Latino Association via Zoom in response to the Covid19 crisis. Several pastors also participated in 8 leadership training opportunities offered by the ELCA Domestic Unit with themes such as Mission, Context and Leadership; the Latinx Church and its presence in the USA Society, Theological and Ministerial Basics, Reconciling in Christ, Development of Cultural Competency in a Multicultural church; Women’s Leadership in the development of a new church; ministry among children and youth and congregational vitality. Several of our pastors also attended the Executive

Skills for Church Leaders offered by California Lutheran University, January 11-15, 2021 which offered simultaneous translation into Spanish.

Racial tensions and discrimination continue to be an issue for our community and we continue to find ways to work towards justice and inclusion to all. It is a command of our Lord that we love one another.

I want to give praise to God for all our Latinx pastors and leaders who continue to be strong and bold as we continue to serve God during these challenging times. All glory be given to God who never fails us or forsakes us.

# **Synod Assembly Report from the desk of the Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity and Ethnic-specific Ministries June 2021**

*All-powerful God, make us bold instruments of your will and give up peace in the midst of the discomfort of transitions. Let us be diverse and disciples who can gently respond to our future together. Bless us.*

## **Diversity Highlights and Opportunities**

In a short period, our synod and congregations have joined many opportunities for authentic diversity and partnered with with me, Rev. Joseph Castañeda Carrera, as their Assistant to the Bishop for Authentic Diversity (ATTBAD). The Southwest California Synod was the first to establish the new position, and many synods created similar positions.

The following are highlights and opportunities of the last seven months:

- Authentically diverse congregations who have partnered with the ATTBAD identified issues and have created plans to address concerns and reach for greater sustainability and ministry in the future.
- Nearly 50 pastors and deacons have received training on authentic diversity and are better equipped.
- Many laypersons and rostered leaders have participated in workshops, including New Council Trainings, Fundraising, Creating Diversity Goals, Processing Liturgy and Diversity, etc.
- Many congregational leaders have reached out to process conflicts surrounding diversity and create measured efforts that balance concern and bold decision-making rooted in caring for others.
- Internal issues and correlating responses were weighed more holistically and areas of unintentional-bias and resistance to transparency were challenged.
- Many synodical leaders for diversity emerged, at times even surprising themselves, taking up issues long neglected or speaking in allyship for people who have long struggled within our synod.
- Many resources for supporting all our churches moving forward were created and partnering with people in any context was intentionally pursued. Many more trainings and resources will soon be available.

## **Areas of Focus**

Since September of 2020, I have served our synod's various needs around diversity and practices of anti-racism/ anti-systemic oppression. Although the work is necessary, addressing authentic diversity during a period of interim, pandemic, and clamping down in uncertainty against invitations to growth was challenging. Our synod is filled with brave leaders who long for a future of addressing issues that stifle our progress. We are ready to meet God in dynamic solutions in the following areas of diversity, but also toward healthier and more sustainable congregations:

- Lay and rostered leaders in our synod are ready for diversity. Some are hesitant and unsure, but everyone has the energy to reassess where we find ourselves and rededicate ourselves to a future closer to heaven.
- Diversity and anti-racist discipleship must be held mutually by the majority of people, not by a few positions.
- In times of great financial uncertainty, we are invited to ground ourselves not only in cuts and austerity of our current situation, but also in the historic constructs of racism and unjust prejudice that have created the situations in which we find ourselves. On the Central Coast, as in Metro Los Angeles (LA), cutting spending directed towards African-, Latinx-, Asia-, Indigenous-, Arab/Middle Eastern-Descent communities because of lower levels of giving without recognizing that by 1940 80% of deed covenants in LA prevented the same communities from owning property is wrong. Historical context for our governance is essential.
- Diversity is not an isolated issue, but rather connected to other grave issues we face in our congregations. To advance, we must connect in the areas of concern instead of withholding the issues we face in response to shame, anxiety, or worry. We are not alone. However, at times uncomfortable problems prevent us from speaking to one another and "keep secrets" about our areas of growth. We are Christians, and growing and responding to the world's love with neighbor-love is our greatest privilege.
- Diversity is about racial and ethnic equities, and also about taking care of our elders, our siblings who are unhoused, our siblings who experience disabilities. Diversity is expansive and transforms our intentions and faith into behaviors that lift up those who are often not fully seen in our midst.

Deep and sincere thanks for the companionship in the work and the explorative journey. Let's keep going.



## THE ELCA FOUNDATION

It is important to begin this report by thanking our synod bishops, congregations and partners for their incredible leadership during a year of upheaval and challenges. When everything seemed to go wrong, your ability to direct the work of the church was one of the things that was right in 2020. Through it all, this church supported the work of ministering to the world with the love of Jesus Christ.

As of Dec. 31, 2020, the Foundation has crossed a major milestone — \$1 billion in assets managed in gifts and endowments for the ministry of the greater church. This achievement reflects being the church together in ways that equip congregations, organizations and individuals to live out their vocation. This landmark accomplishment was achieved through the work of the ELCA Foundation staff regularly engaging with donors, congregations and organizations along with your trust in the ELCA Foundation to manage gifts and assets for ministry. Throughout the year, despite limited travel and in-person meetings, gift planners engaged with nearly 900 congregations, synods and ELCA-related organizations. They spent time with over 1,500 individuals working on gift plans, logged over 5,500 interactions and continued to maintain partnership relationships with over 150 ELCA-related entities, including 54 synods.

Fund A distributed over \$30 million to ministry in 2020 while also growing the underlying investment to ensure that distribution is there for years to come. Fund A has neither missed nor reduced a distribution amount once it was established – including the volatile year of 2020. We know these distributions are vital to ministry and often used to support service in local communities.

- As of Dec. 31, 2020, the value of participant accounts invested in Fund A was \$904.2 million, compared to \$817.6 million on Dec. 31, 2019. There are 1,155 investing participants in Fund A, including 938 congregations and 54 synods.
- Throughout the year, 53 new endowment accounts were opened, totaling \$7.1 million, and 14 accounts were closed, totaling \$3.0 million. Investments made to new and existing Fund A accounts totaled \$31.1 million; withdrawals totaled \$18.6 million.

In addition, gift levels remained high throughout 2020: Due to the generosity of our members and donors distributions to ministry totaled \$59 million for the year.

- The gift-planning network, including affiliates, posted solid results throughout 2020, with \$118.2 million in total gifts and endowment assets. Of that, \$78.5 million was written in future planned gifts, \$20.3 million in current gifts (including funded trusts, gift annuities and individual endowments) and \$19.4 million in new assets invested in Fund A.
- New gift plans written during the year totaled 249. In addition, gift planners stewarded over \$60.2 million in previously written plans, in some cases increasing the estimated gift to ministry.

The Foundation exists as a separately incorporated ministry, with a network of 23 regional gift planners, working in 21 partnerships, across the United States. Critical to their work and ministry funding outcomes are the Gift Administration and Financial Services (accounting and investment administration) teams. These teams are the bench strength of the deployed gift planners, providing continuous assistance to donors, beneficiaries and Fund A investors — all this despite limited access to the building due to the pandemic.

The Foundation staff continues to work with donors and beneficiaries to create individual gift plans, administer life income and endowment gifts, distribute terminated gifts and facilitate the sale of marketable assets such as land, homes, commodities and other assets.

- Regional gift planners remain available to:
  - Guide individuals in discerning how to be faithful stewards of their estates and invite them to support ministries, congregations and synods through charitable estate gifts.
  - Assist synods, congregations and related entities in investing endowment funds and other assets in the Endowment Fund Pooled Trust — Fund A, which is structured to provide distributions to support ministry today and into the future, utilizing investments that adhere to the ELCA's social purpose guidelines.
  - Advise church leaders in the development of gift acceptance policies for congregations, which often include gifts to synods.

Thank you for your continued work with the ELCA Foundation.

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#### ELCA Foundation Regional Partners

|                              |  |   |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| ELCA Churchwide Organization | Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service | Lutheran Retreats Camps and Conferences         |
| Southwest California Synod   | Pacifica Synod                           | Lutheran Social Services of Southern California |