



BISHOP'S REPORT TO THE 2021 ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN GREAT LAKES SYNOD



...we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit...

~ from Romans 5:2-5

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

Grace and peace to you! It has been two years since I wrote a report. As you know, last year we did not meet for Synod Assembly being that we were still in the beginning months of a global pandemic. Our theme, Be Thou My Vision 2020, was more than a little ironic as we could hardly see clearly to the next step much less the next week.



Prior to the pandemic, there was already anxiety in our congregations. People lamented the emptier pews, the reduced giving, the lack of youth. I heard fear for the future of beloved communities of faith. And then the pandemic became real, and the world shifted. Pews became completely empty, yet giving, for the most part, remained steady. Together congregational leaders figured out online worship and safety protocols. Worship resources for the home became more available and widely used. Churches equipped parents to teach at home. Confirmation met by zoom. Everything took more effort: Worship, sermons, technology, staying connected. Many ministry efforts were put on hold, others were created new to meet the needs of the times. Our anxiety shifted from worrying about the future of the church to meeting the demands of the now.

And now...here we are. We are not at the end of the pandemic, but the end is coming closer. My report will focus on the past, but I also wish to consider our next steps, the "What now?" of our present moment. I urge you to consider what you wish to return to, what needs to continue to be transformed, and what should be left behind.

Some questions to ponder:

- What has the pandemic taught us?
- Where did we see God at work? the unexpected blessing?
- Do we need to offer more or less worship services?
- Can we worship outside more often, just for the fun of it? For the public witness?
- Who will I invite into my community of faith?
- For those parents who have been teaching Sunday School at home, can we build on that rather than reverting to Sunday School at church?
- How will we continue or increase our online presence? Facebook page? Website?
- What ministry efforts need resurrecting or expanding?
- What ministry efforts need to be retired?
- **Shall we give our pastor an extra week of vacation this summer?**



Walking Together Events

In 2018, we began an experiment. The Synod staff used the platform of the Fall Conference Meetings to further equip people for ministry and increase our connectedness as a Synod. These events included worship, food, conversation, and generated energy for mission.

In 2021, we hope to meet in person again. However, rather than offer 8 events in an increasingly packed Fall calendar, the Synod staff will lead four Walking Together events in 2021 and four in 2022. We hope to use our new knowledge of technology to offer a video to those conferences who will gather for a Fall conference meeting, and anyone can come to any one of the Walking Together events offered in your own or a neighboring conference. Watch for more info and SAVE THE DATE.

Here is the schedule for Autumn 2021:

<u>Conference</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>
3 Headwaters	9/18	9:30amCT	Immanuel, Rhinelander
5 Menominee	9/25	9:30amCT	Porterfield/Beaver
7 Three Lakes	9/26	3:30pmET	Faith, Sault Ste. Marie
8 Sup. Central	9/16	5:30pmET	Messiah, Marquette

Covid Relief Grants

In the spring of 2020, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton mobilized the generosity of ELCA donors and congregations. \$1,392,500 was distributed in 7 grant rounds to congregations to support ministries and the technological challenges of the pandemic.

In our synod, **\$17,500** was received and redistributed to congregations that had applied.

All Saints	Wakefield
Sharon	Bessemer
Porterfield/ Beaver	Porterfield/ Pound
Bethany	Escanaba
Bethany	Mohawk
Bethany	Perkins
Trinity	Stonington

Bethany	Negaunee
Bethlehem	Florence
Emanuel	Skandia
Faith	Calumet
Faith	Ishpeming
Faith	Rock
Faith	Sault Ste. Marie
Faith	Three Lakes
First	Gladstone
First	Iron River
Fortune Lake	Crystal Falls
Gethsemane	Wallace
Good Shepherd	Peshigo
Grace	South Range
Holy Cross	Baraga
Holy Trinity	Chassell
Immanuel	Escanaba
Immanuel	Negaunee
Immanuel	Rhinelander
Messiah	Marquette
Mission United	Pelkie
NELP	Ewen, Paynesville, Trout Creek
Our Redeemer	Newberry
Our Saviour's	Atlantic Mine
St. Paul's	Mass City
Trinity	Ishpeming
Trinity	Rhinelander
United	Crystal Falls
United	L'Anse



Grants were used to upgrade technology, replace financial support for local ministries for which the congregation traditionally held a fundraiser, provide for backpack programs and food pantries, and provide the resources to stay in touch. We are church together for the sake of the world!

Lutheran Social Service

This past year, I served on the operating board of LSS. The Wisconsin bishops are each taking a turn, a year at a time. It was good to learn more about the inner workings. I advocated for increased and restored services, both in our northern Wisconsin communities and in the U.P. I am hopeful that we will see some future additions.



Lenten Racial Equity Challenge

Thanks to the groundwork laid by the pastors of Messiah, Marquette, our whole synod was invited to participate in a Lenten Racial Equity Challenge. Pastors Andrew Plocher and Molly Eversoll launched a first effort at Messiah, and then shared their resources and their learnings for a broader audience. Six cohorts met weekly for conversation to process the material for that week which included articles, movies, TED talks, and podcasts. At least 100 people in our synod participated in conversations, and many more engaged the resources without a cohort. Resources were added that offered the perspective of our indigenous neighbors to deepen understanding and lay a foundation for future conversation. Special thanks to Pastors Molly and Andrew and to the following for leading a weekly cohort conversation:

- ~Pastor Christina Forsythe of Porterfield/Beaver
- ~Pastor Steve Gauger of Calvary, Rapid River
- ~Pastor Jared Howard of Faith, Calumet
- ~Pastor Keith Kolstad of Zion, Marinette
- ~Pastor Rich Likeness of Ascension, Minocqua
- ~Pastor Tommy Richter of Zion, Manistique

Even the Synod went Digital

We now have a Northern Great Lakes Synod Youtube channel. There you will find links to:



- Holy Saturday sermon 2020
- Synod-wide Worship May 2020
- Synod-wide Reformation Worship 2020
- Synod-wide Christmas Worship 2020

And resources for Synod Assembly 2021.

New Pastor Mentors

To support first call pastors in our synod, each is paired with a mentor to help them navigate their new call. As each context is unique and each community distinctive, it is helpful to have a more seasoned pastoral veteran to advise, listen, and support. Thank you to the following who have served as a mentor in 2019 and 2020:

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|-----------------|---------------------|
| Pastors - | Sarah Semmler Smith |
| Julie Belew | Ann Gonyea |
| Doug Norquist | Kay Richter |
| Keith Kolstad | David Echelbarger |
| Dean Marin | Melinda VanderSys |
| Diane Srutowski | Doug Johnson |

New Pastors and Possibilities

In 2019 and 2020, we welcomed the following rostered leaders to our Synod:

1. Pastor Sarah Semmler Smith: Finlandia University Chaplain
2. Pastor Brahm Semmler Smith: Gloria Dei, Hancock
3. Pastor Molly Eversoll: Messiah, Marquette
4. Pastor Brenda Greenwald: Gethsemane, Wallace and St. Stephen's, Stephenson
5. Pastor Nicole Hanson-Lynn: Zion and Salem, Ironwood
6. Pastor Kayla Keilholtz: Grace, Pembine
7. Pastor Alex Ross: Bethany, Republic
8. Pastor Bethany Rutten-Kempees: Christ the King, Escanaba
9. Pastor Kelly Ylitalo: Mission United, Pelkie
10. Pastor Rita Chirala: Faith, Sault Ste. Marie
11. Pastor Tommy Richter: Zion, Manistique
12. Pastor Sherry Van Lishout: Ascension, Minocqua
13. Pastor Grant Van Lishout: Specialized ministry at Marywood Retreat Center
14. Deacon Lori Ward, Synod Missioner.

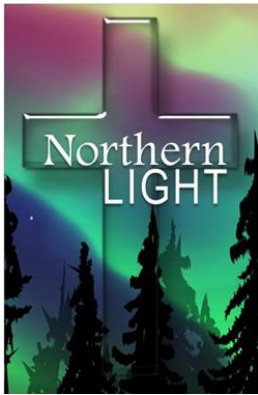
Additional new calls were accepted by:

1. Pastor D.J. Rasner: United, Crystal Falls and Bethany, Amasa
2. Pastor Doug Norquist: St. Paul's, Ironwood
3. Pastor Terry Frankenstein: Bethany, Escanaba
4. Pastor Renee MacLeod: Zion, Allenville and Bethel, Cedarville
5. Pastor Bre Kinnunen: Lutheran Campus Ministry at NMU

We also give thanks for the life of:

- **Marv Wrege**, husband of Rev. Jennie Johnson Wrege. Pastor Jennie served in the Northern Great Lakes Synod for many years as congregational pastor and Assistant to the Bishop.
- **Phil Wirtanen** who served on Synod Council and the Church Council of ELCA until his death in February of 2020.

The NGLS Newsletter, formerly known as Notes and Quotes, is now...



In January 2020, we held a contest to rename our Synod newsletter. Pastor Doug Schoen submitted his entry with the following explanation, “It’s a bit of a play on the familiar phrase ‘northern lights.’ Northern identifies our Synod geographically, as well as culturally. Light is important

to us, especially in the north country where the winters are long and so much of the time we dwell in darkness. The ‘light’ in my proposed newsletter name refers, primarily, of course, to the Light of God’s word, the gospel, the good news, that brings us hope and joy even in darkness.”

Pastor Schoen received a mug with the new moniker on it as a prize. Congratulations Pastor Schoen!

Staying Connected & Informed

- **The Website:** Go to www.nglsynod.org for a wealth of information and resources.
- **E–Notes:** a twice monthly electronic newsletter sent to your email. Full of current news and information. Sign up by going to the website or calling the synod office.
- **Facebook:** Another way to stay informed. As of March 16, 2021, the Northern Great

Lakes Synod page has 996 likes. Churchisgood, an



outreach effort, has 78 likes. If you are on Facebook, please go to our page and “like” us.

- **Newsletter Articles:** Did you know that any letter or article written by Bishop Finegan or Pastor Duehring is posted on our website and can be included in your own congregational newsletter? It’s true!

Dear Northern Great Lakes Synod,

As we continue to be challenged by the transformation of the Church, I trust in the work of the Holy Spirit of Christ. In many ways, the pandemic has increased our connectedness.

- Our pastoral leaders have had the opportunity to meet with colleagues from across the synod on a weekly zoom Leader Check-in, sharing ideas and offering support.
- Our Lifelong Faith Formation classes and our Lenten Racial Equity Challenge connected people across conference, county, and state lines without the burden of travel.
- Those congregations that offer a digital presence have increased their worship attendance and broadened the impact of that proclamation.
- People have been equipped for worship, devotions, and Christian education in the home.

As the pandemic gives way to more predictable routines, my hope is that we build on what we have learned. I hope we can spend energy and time on who we are becoming and not try to put everything back just the way it was. Together, we move forward, in the name of Christ, with the Spirit of Jesus to guide us, inspire us, and show us the way.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan