

Bishop's Report to the Synod Assembly

17-19 May 2012

I had a choice, dear friends. It became clear to the Assembly Planning Committee that we needed to have *either* Bible Study led by the bishop *or* an oral report presented by the bishop. What you are reading now is the oral report! I had a choice, and chose to lead Bible Study.

In fact, all of the material in the pre-assembly bulletin which I trust you have reviewed and the documents that have been and will be distributed during our time together is a kind of report of the bishop. Or at least I have seen the activities and ideas represented in them and, in some cases, have officially endorsed them.

Let me say very clearly as we gather: I am wholeheartedly in support of what I have called the four “turning-point” resolutions before us in these days, and in the years to come, specifically, the Strategic Plan, the Resolution on Congregational Viability Norms, the statement on Preaching and Sacramental Practices and the Process for the Election of a Synodical Bishop. I hope that the Assembly will concur with the Synod Council’s recommendations that we adopt each of these resolutions using the “consent agenda” process. For the first two of these, there will be presentations and “quasi committee of the whole” conversations in addition to the conversations that have already occurred in various places throughout our synod in preparation for this Assembly. I also want you to know in advance that I support the recommendations of our Committee on Reference and Counsel which will be presented to you.

We have tried to be faithful stewards of creation by offering much of our assembly material in electronic form; as I mentioned above, I hope that you have read the pre-assembly report. Much has already been reported to you and much will be shared as we gather here these days, but I wanted to specifically mention a few items in this written Report.

Our synod staff has done extraordinary work on behalf of all of us over the past year. I am deeply grateful to

Pr. Perucy Butiku, Assistant to the Bishop for African Descent Ministries
Mr. Branden Dicks, Administrative Assistant
Ms. Sarah Gioe, Director of Communication and Interpretation
Ms. Kim Grate, Administrative Assistant
Pr. Jack Horner, Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission
Pr. Jeffrey Kolbo, Candidacy Coordinator
Pr. Kathleen Koran, Assistant to the Bishop for Congregations
Pr. Jonathan Linman, Assistant to the Bishop for Formation
Mr. John Litke, Director for Synod Administration
Pr. Gary Mills, Assistant to the Bishop for Global and Multicultural Mission

Deacon Gayle Ruege, Executive Administrative Assistant to the Bishop
Ms. Kathleen Schmidt, Assistant to the Bishop for Administration and Finance
Ms. Mary Tennermann, Administrative Assistant

While Sarah Gioe is on family leave, following the birth of Zachary Elliot Gioe Neel, we are pleased to have Ms. Rebekah Wedge helping us with our communications.

I also thank Ms. Ardath Heard, Ms. Joan Schwarz and Ms. Lois Ann Lawless who have been tireless volunteers in our office.

As we acknowledge these servants of the church, I hope you will join me in giving thanks to Ms. Kim Grate, Mr. John Litke, and Pr. Gary Mills who are leaving our staff in June. We are grateful to them.

I also want to give thanks to our Synod Council for their fine work this year and especially to the Executive Committee who have done so much to facilitate our strategic planning process and to lead this synod with grace and courage. I especially want to thank our remarkable Vice-President, Maria del Toro, who has been fearless in her leadership. I look forward to your having the opportunity to hear Maria at this Assembly and to thank her in particular for her service.

Pr. Albert Ahlstrom
Mr. William Anderson
Pr. William Baum, also serving on the Executive Committee
Pr. Rosalind Brathwaite
Ms. Kelsey Brown
Mr. Robert Buescher, Treasurer
Diaconal Minister Christine Connell
Ms. Maria Del Toro, Vice-President
Deacon Charles Germain
Ms. Hazel Goldstein
Ms. Barbara Hansen
Mr. F. Eugene Hiigel
Ms. Barbara Holm
Pr. Brenda Jack
Ms. Barbara Johnson, also serving on the Executive Committee
Pr. Perry Kirschbaum
Dr. Carlos Lopez
Deacon John Malone
Ms. Minerva Melendez, also serving on the Executive Committee
Pr. Paul Milholland, also serving on the Executive Committee
Pr. Craig Miller
Deacon Roberta "Bobbi" Paulik
Mr. Brian Reardon
Pr. Kit Robison
Pr. Robert Schoepflin, Secretary

Mr. Jonathan Westerlund

I also want to thank Mr. Robert Buescher who has served as Treasurer of this Synod for eight years and is not seeking re-election. We will honor Bob with the Distinguished Disciple Award at this Assembly, but this is my opportunity to say a word of gratitude.

As we gather in assembly, other synods are doing the same; I ask your prayers for these synods: Southeast Michigan, North/West Lower Michigan, Sierra Pacific, Southwestern Washington, Saint Paul Area, Northwestern Ohio, Northwest Washington, Pacifica, Southwestern Texas and Northern Great Lakes. As I think of partners, I give thanks for the relationship we have with the Arkansas/Oklahoma Synod, the North Western Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Romania. We also give thanks for those from our synod who are serving in our companion synods: Aaron and Alison Schutte, Stephanie Schmiede, Pastor Terri Church and Pastor Michael Church.

I am delighted that you will be able to meet and receive greetings from two of our Full Communion partners on Friday afternoon: The Reverend Doctor Rita M. Root, Interim Conference Minister of the New York Conference, United Church of Christ, and The Right Reverend Lawrence Provenzano, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island.

This past year was filled with opportunities for me on the ecumenical level. I was delighted to be a co-consecrator for the Ordination of Bishop Andrew Dietsche, bishop-coadjutor and soon-to-be-diocesan bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. I was also delighted to participate in the ecumenical Morning Prayer marking the elevation of Cardinal Archbishop Timothy Dolan.

I am also happy to welcome our friend, Pastor Ruben Duran, who is serving us as ELCA representative, whom you will hear both in his report and in his preaching on Saturday. Pastor Duran has helped us in our synod in countless ways, and I am grateful to him.

Since the last Synod Assembly, we have welcomed new leaders in many places. I am pleased to mention these servants of the church and I hope you will welcome them as you have opportunity:

Ms. Julie Hagen, *Associate in Ministry, Advent, Manhattan*
The Rev. Rebecca Pollicino, *Grace, Uniondale*
The Rev. Johanna Andritz, *St. Paul, Liberty*
The Rev. Robert Rainis, *Epiphany, Bronx*
The Rev. Benjamin McKelahan, *Mission Developer, Brooklyn*
The Rev. James Smith, *Wagner College, Staten Island*
The Rev. Omar Ortiz, *Trinity, 18th Avenue, Brooklyn*
The Rev. Stephanie Kershner, *Grace, Scarsdale*
The Rev. Dan Ruth, *Lutheran World Relief*
The Rev. Donald Lemke *Christ, Ozone Park*
The Rev. Harry Schenkel, *Transfiguration, Harlem*

The Rev. Daphne Burt, *Interim, Trinity, Staten Island*
The Rev. Vanessa Cardinale, *Trinity, 46th Street, Brooklyn*
Deacon Ursil Silcott, *Prince of Peace, Cambria Heights*
Deacon Gloria Taylor, *St. John's, Poughkeepsie*

I continue to work at building relationships with and among the people of our Synod. Conference Visitations continue to be very well-received, and now staff members accompany me to preach and to listen to the people of our synod. I have identified our task in those gatherings as an opportunity to “take the pulse” of our congregations, not to offer a “dog and pony show” for what our Staff is doing. Likewise, I have been pleased to host conversations with our retired pastors and with our pastors in specialized ministries, both groups most recently addressing the proposed strategic plan.

I invite you to read carefully the reports from our Synod Council, our Synod Staff, our Conference Deans, and our Committees; they may be found in Section B of the Bulletin of Reports. Many of our partners in ministry have written reports in that same section and I also urge you to be attentive as some of these partners offer words of greeting at this Assembly.

When people ask if I am enjoying my ministry, I customarily reply, “75% of the time – the remaining 25% is like being in a pit.” I think that this is a fairly good ratio, actually. Now people are beginning to ask if I am willing to serve another term, and I customarily reply “I’m discerning that right now.” This is a serious question for me, and I am seeking help in my discernment from trusted friends, my spiritual director and my family. When I have some clarity, I will share that with the synod.

I am very thankful for the loving support of my spouse, Lois, and for our children, grandchildren and extended family. This past fall and early winter were difficult times for me as I struggled with muscular pain in my hips, experienced physical therapy which was very helpful, and ultimately had my perforated appendix removed. I am now feeling quite well most of the time.

I invite your continuing prayers for the work of our Synod, especially as (I hope) we enter into implementing our Strategic Plan. I also invite your prayers for the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Our partnership in the Gospel of Christ propels us into a bright future and I am thankful for your company as we journey together as the people of God who are claimed, gathered and sent!

The Rev. Dr. Robert Alan Rimbo
Bishop