

Report of Northern Illinois Synod Bishop Jeffrey Clements

“Yes, Lord, you know I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

John 21:15

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our loving Lord Jesus!

As we approach this year’s assembly, I am compelled to begin with a word of thanks. I thank you for the opportunity to serve as the pastor of this synod. This is the most difficult work that I have been called to do in ministry, but it is also the most rewarding. It is a joy to walk with you in our life together.

We gather this year using a new mission statement as our theme. “Walking together...loving Christ, loving all, for the sake of the world.” That is our purpose. In January of this year, after several months of work, the Synod Council adopted this new mission statement along with a vision statement and an articulation of our core values.

Walking together. That is the definition of the word synod. We are a geographic subset of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. One hundred forty-three congregations located throughout twenty-two counties in northern Illinois, walking and working together in service to our Lord. One hundred forty-three unique centers for mission. We are rural and urban. We are suburban, inner-city, and open country. We are siblings in Christ, loving Jesus and loving all.

It is clear to me that we must first and foremost love Jesus. Everything we do must be grounded in God’s love for us and our love for God. Everything we do must be measured by how effectively we are serving God and serving all of humanity, especially those who live at the margins of our society.

The Synod Council developed this vision statement: “As church together, the Northern Illinois Synod will faithfully make Christ relevant to a diverse and changing world.” You know the dizzying pace at which change is occurring. One of the buzz words today is nimble. Successful businesses today seek to be nimble, so they can adjust their practices according to changes in consumer preferences. In this changing world, the church must seek to be nimble, practicing new ways to make Christ relevant. A congregation should reflect the community in which it is planted. Does your congregation reflect the demographics of your community? If not, why not? If not, what kinds of new relationships can your congregation develop within its context?

The Synod Council also studied what we value most in this synod. Our core values were determined to be worship and prayer, innovation, leadership, equipping, and evangelism. I have long said that the purpose of the synod is to help congregations do what they have been called to do. We are in this work together. Have you thought about it? What a congregation in Henry County does impacts what a congregation in McHenry County does. What a congregation in Rockford does impacts the life of a congregation in Rock Island. If we value these things then we must work together to help every congregation to worship and pray, innovate and experiment, develop leaders and raise up new ones, equip and provide resources, and tell the story of the life, love, and salvation we have in Jesus.

What is your congregation’s part in the mission that we share? Do the members of your congregation understand the important role your congregation plays in our work together as the Northern Illinois Synod?

These are the questions I will be asking you as we move through the next year. I want us all to be equipped as ambassadors for the Northern Illinois Synod. We are church together! Now, allow me to share some of what we have experienced in the past year.

In late June of 2018, I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in the ELCA Youth Gathering in Houston, Texas. We had approximately 550 youth and adult leaders from the Northern Illinois Synod in attendance. The time I spend with our youth is always a source of encouragement to me. The event drew over 30,000 participants from across the church.

I am very pleased that our Vitality Project is spreading across the synod, conference by conference. Pastor Gary Erickson, our Director of Evangelical Mission, continues to concentrate his efforts on vitality.

At the end of January of this year, I traveled with two other ELCA bishops and two Churchwide staff members to Palestine to make an official visit to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. We met with Bishop Ibrahim Azar in this office in Jerusalem. I presented him with a carved replica of the synod's cross, which he immediately put on to wear. We also visited many ministry sites of the ELCJHL, including congregations and schools. We met ELCJHL pastors, teachers, and students. We had an extensive tour of Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives. We also visited other Lutheran World Federation ministry sites.

Perhaps the most interesting and disconcerting time I spent while in Israel was when we visited the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We met the director of the Department for World Religions and the head of the Bureau of World Jewish Affairs and World Religions to advocate for the ELCJHL.

The situation in the Holy Land between the Israeli government and the Palestinian people is difficult and complex. I would dare to say that most of us in the United States do not have a comprehensive understanding of life there or the impact of US governmental policies.

We finished out the fiscal year with a deficit of about \$33,000. Mission Support receipts were unexpectedly low during November and December. This year's Statements of Intent will not adequately support the 2019 budget that was adopted a year ago, so our Finance Committee and staff created a revised spending plan.

In addition to our financial realities, our greatest challenge remains the availability of pastoral leadership. We consistently have in excess of 30 pastoral vacancies in the synod. We have not been able to provide interim pastors for all those vacancies. We have become more reliant on Synodically Authorized Ministers (formerly known as Licensed Lay Persons). We are grateful to have received three new candidates for ministry in the past year and are happy to welcome David Petersen, Paul Gebo, and Chelsey Olson to the synod!

I am grateful for the work done by our Synodically Authorized Ministers task force. The task force has developed a set of common expectations for those who serve congregations as SAMs.

Last October, I made a made a visit to Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa with two other bishops. I spent time with both faculty and students in groups and individually. I am happy to say that my impression of Wartburg is very positive. Wartburg is engaged in delivering theological education and training pastors in creative ways (distributive learning, collaborative learning, distance learning, residential learning) that will serve the church well.

In Region 5 of the ELCA, we will welcome two new bishops this year. The Western Iowa Synod has elected the Rev. Lorna Halaas and the Metropolitan Chicago Synod will elect a new bishop between the writing of this report and our assembly. I hope to attend both of these installations.

Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center has selected Mr. Rob Gieraltowski to serve as its next executive director. Rob comes to LOMC with many years of youth ministry experience and a close connection to our camping ministry. I will look forward to his installation.

A year ago, I reported that our continuing education work group had some great plans in the works. They have now provided three very fine continuing education experiences for the synod's rostered leadership and are planning for another year. We seem to be meeting a need, especially among our younger leaders.

A recently-appointed task force is studying our office needs. We are currently uncertain of our future at Luther Center in downtown Rockford. Rent and maintenance issues related to the building's new ownership have generated our concern.

In our companion relationships, we continue to grow the number of congregations with companion congregations in Tanzania and India. We are aware of three trips (one by the synod and two by congregations) being planned for 2020 to visit the North Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

In the past year, Tabor Lutheran Church in Rockford completed its work after 93 years of ministry. I thank God for the witness of this congregation and the legacy it leaves.

At this year's assembly, we will elect a new vice-president. It is difficult to adequately thank Mr. Bill Bartlett for his many years of service. He grasped and understood the mission of the synod in a way that served us well. He was a great asset to me, both as I served as assistant to the bishop and now as bishop. Our thanks are inadequate but most sincere. Thank you, Bill. We give God thanks for you.

I am deeply grateful for the work of the other officers of the synod. Ms. Tammie Farley serves so ably as our treasurer and has agreed to stand for re-election. Pastor Don Knowles does a very fine job as the synod's secretary. Please thank them both.

We had a synod staff member retire in the past year. Pastor Kurt Nordby first served full-time as director of evangelical mission and then as a part-time assistant to the bishop for stewardship and development. We miss his ever-cheerful demeanor and positive attitude. Please join me in thanking Pastor Nordby.

I am also grateful for the work of the synod staff. It is a pleasure to serve alongside Deacon Cheryl Erdmann, Pastor Marilyn Hanson, Pastor Gary Erickson (DEM), Pastor Pat Esker, Deacon Karin Graddy, Pastor Michel Clark, Pastor Denver Bitner, Ms. Nancy Corey, Ms. June Cain, and Ms. Julie Lewis. Please join me in thanking this dedicated group of servants.

In summary, we have had a good year of walking together and living in God's amazing grace. We are meeting challenges with courage, confidently recalling that this is God's church as we seek to both lead and follow. As we live into our new mission statement, I invite you to claim your spot as we walk together loving Christ and loving all for the sake of the world.

Walking with you,



Bishop Jeffrey Clements

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Anniversaries of Rostered Ministers

5 Years	The Rev. Daniel Wynard, The Rev. Jana Howson, The Rev. Neal Cannon, The Rev. William Weidenbach, Jr.
10 Years	The Rev. Carrie Ballenger, The Rev. Catherine Daharsh, The Rev. Elizabeth Mascal, The Rev. Joy Alsop, The Rev. Sarah Wilson, The Rev. Theresa Wilder, The Rev. Vicki Sauter
15 Years	The Rev. David Turner, The Rev. Jonathan Black, The Rev. Pat Esker
20 Years	The Rev. Keith Johnson, The Rev. Scott Schmidt, Deacon Karin Graddy
25 Years	The Rev. Amy Nyman, The Rev. Marcia Strahl, The Rev. Michael Thomas
30 Years	The Rev. David Schweppe, The Rev. Kathleen Burkheimer
35 Years	The Rev. Brant Clements, The Rev. Jeffrey King
40 Years	The Rev. Denver Bitner, The Rev. Mark Helge, The Rev. Ronald Larson, Deacon Myrna Andersen
45 Years	The Rev. David Ufkes, The Rev. Kenneth Storck, The Rev. Paul Johnson
50 Years	The Rev. Arlyn Tolzmann, The Rev. Dennis Heaney, The Rev. Norwood Knutson
55 Years	The Rev. Loren Nielsen, The Rev. Orlyn Huwe
60 Years	The Rev. Donald Lavelle, The Rev. C. Franklin Samuleson
65 Years	The Rev. Virgil Juliot
70 Years	The Rev. William Wittig

Rostered Ministers Who Have Retired in the Past Year

The Rev. Lawrence J. Conway, III	38 Years
The Rev. Timothy Kenyon	38 Years
The Rev. Jeff Linman	33 Years
The Rev. Kurt Nordby	40 Years
The Rev. Mark Oehlert	17 Years
Deacon Patricia Tillman	5 Years