

Bishop's Annual Report for 2021

God's grace, peace, and hope be with you through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

I begin by sharing my profound gratitude to you – for your faithfulness, perseverance, and compassion revealed in countless ways during this global pandemic, now nearing the start of its third year.

As I reflect on the ministry of our synod in 2021, I am surprised to discover a number of “firsts” – something I did not expect in a pandemic year. In 2021:

- We received an unprecedented \$285,000 gift to provide educational debt relief to synod rostered leaders who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Currently, 12 percent of rostered leaders serving synod congregations are BIPOC, a sign of growth which will be strengthened by this gift.
- With our first ever million-dollar grant from the Lilly Endowment, we called Nick Tangen and Maya Bryant to lead our [Faith and Neighboring Practices](#) program, currently working with 13 congregations.
- In October, we set a goal to **raise \$500,000 in three months** to partner with our global companion synod in launching the first ever [Lutheran University in Nigeria](#). As of this writing, we have \$298,000 in gifts, \$56,000 in pledges, and are awaiting word about a significant gift from the ELCA World Hunger Program!
- We rejoiced with Alleluia! Lutheran Church in St. Michael as they dedicated their brand-new church building. We have celebrated many remodeling projects in our synod, this was the first completely new structure built in more than ten years.
- We welcomed Holy Cross Lutheran Church, originally a Missouri Synod congregation, into the synod.
- Led by VP Felecia Boone and Eric Howard, a task force has been working to apply a racial equity lens to the way our synod distributes funds and utilizes resources.
- We helped launch the [Center for Leadership and Neighborhood Engagement](#) (CLNE) led by Rev. Kelly Chatman. CLNE convened a virtual prayer tent for 77 straight days during the trial of Derek Chauvin. Now, they host “Come Together,” a virtual conversation on the third Thursday evening of each month.
- We held our first [Zoom Synod Assembly](#) with speakers Dr. Drew Hart and Michael Osterholm; offered our first online [Tool Kit](#) (to be expanded in 2022); and provided four online worship services to provide respite and build unity across the synod.
- Listening to the weariness of our rostered leaders, we cancelled Bishop's Theological Conference for the first time and organized the whole staff in a caring process for our leaders, “Tending Weary Souls.”
- We are preparing to host the [ELCA Youth Gathering](#) – the first ever held in Minneapolis, July 21-28, 2022.

Though a list of “firsts” can make for an interesting annual report, the ministries that continue day-in and day-out are the work that sustains. We are blessed with over 675 rostered leaders, 307 serving in calls and 370 retired or without call. In 2021, we supported 57 persons preparing to become deacons or pastors. We work hard so the church has the loving, faithful, and theologically well-formed ministers it needs.

Our monthly conference meetings and other synod gatherings continue to reveal a real hunger for leaders to stay connected and discern best practices for ministry in these times. We are honored and humbled by our calling to serve as convener of such holy conversations.

It is the generosity of congregations like yours that make the synod's work possible. Thank you! We seek to be careful stewards of every gift.

A year of firsts. More importantly, we gather around the unique, first-ever, Word made flesh – the Christmas miracle of God becoming human for us and our salvation. And even more, this Word made flesh abides with us – through all our firsts and lasts and everything in between.

With a grateful heart,
Bishop Ann Svennungsen