



God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away. And the one who was seated on the throne said,
“See, I am making all things new.”

Revelation 21:4-5

Report of the Bishop for the 2021 Synod Assembly

“I’m tired of figuring out new things...” said everybody.

Some day in the future we’ll look back on this pandemic and remember how amazing and very hard it was to figure out how to worship, serve, learn and keep our homes and congregations going during this time. And how very different this experience has been depending on where you lived, if you had a job, had children at home, or elders to care for. We’ve learned technical skills and adapted along the way.

We rescheduled our April 2020 Assembly to October then canceled that. It wasn’t wise to gather in person. Our congregations were asked to work with their local health officials on determining when to meet in-person and when not to meet. Our ELCA Polity doesn’t let a bishop make a blanket decision stopping public worship in synod congregations as in the United Methodist or Roman Catholic traditions. Congregations adopted mitigation plans that provided for mask wearing, physical distance, hand sanitization, less singing, not passing the offering plate and learning to wave or bow to share the peace. Many congregations offered worship services in the parking lot or parks. Flashing car lights, honking horns and swinging windshield wipers became the “Hallelujah” and “Amen.”

Some congregations used Zoom, some used Facebook Live or YouTube or FM radio to share their worship service or studies. Pastors, musicians, office staff pivoted weekly to learn how to deliver the gospel message online or on the phone. Resurrection Lutheran and Seward UMC shared services for most of the year. Fairbanks Lutheran did their entire call process online. Folks figured out pretty quickly that we still needed to talk with each other so Zoom coffee hours became popular. And, the reality is that in some parts of Alaska, people don’t have an internet connection in their homes, so the benefits of this experimentation have not been equally shared but Alaska Native Lutheran Church has had between 200-1000 viewers a week for their Facebook worship service.

An idea from Lutheran Church of Hope’s Worship Committee blossomed into a synod-wide Prayer Vigil in the midst of this pandemic of a virus and George Floyd’s death. Thank you to all who planned and participated in this twenty-four hour of prayer.

In 2019, the Hukilau Conference of Hawaii, invited me to talk with them about leaving the Southern California Synod and joining the Alaska Synod. Ironically, in the planning of the ELCA, Hawaii and Alaska were put together as a synod but some Hawaiian pastors had grandkids and golf buddies in California so Hawaii became part of that synod. These pastors currently serving in Hawaii experience isolation, cultural differences, and challenges very similar to Alaskan pastors. Their joining our synod would not relieve any of that but they would have more people who understand those dynamics. I have thought of the Hukilau

pastors often this past year as our Alaska Synod pastors and deacons have met online for support and study. Technology does offer a bridge for building relationships from afar. Whether the Hawaiian congregations ask to join ours is first their decision to make.

Our pastors and staff offered online youth activities and confirmation classes. Bible Studies and Adult Studies continued over Zoom. I'm aware of four congregations who have spent time learning about racism in the US and in their communities. Those conversations have included learning from local native leaders. Thank you. Pastoral care has been offered online and by phone. We've had to adjust how to do things. The synod office focus on equipping and connecting moved to online workshops on online annual meetings, hybrid worship, collecting stories and sharing them, stewardship during a pandemic and digital media.

We've had online or conference call annual meetings. Our Savior's Lutheran Church had the highest participation yet because they used a conference call for their meeting.

And, we've missed the usual cues for our time together. I have missed children squirming, and elders harrumphing or delighting in them; the smell of candles and coffee, the visual of paraments, the greetings and the recognition when someone isn't there, the process of getting up and traveling to gather for worship... Our opportunities to gather in sorrow or in joy have been impacted. Funerals, memorial services, weddings, baptisms, were driven to online venues or smaller gatherings by our need to mask, keep distance, or not even meet... Many families still plan to gather to celebrate or grieve when we can do that in person. It is a rare congregation that did not face and meet these challenges.

Because we haven't been mingling, we're more prone to scatter into smaller camps of the same opinion. We've missed those opportunities to pour someone a cup of coffee after worship and ask what they've experienced that shapes how they're approaching an issue, especially a disagreement. We've missed the parking lot conversations that clarify and inform a person's position. We've missed the reminders of that couple who took your kids to the park when your mom died so that you could make phone calls or the elder you brought dinner too. When people have been through trauma; we look for a safer place, more comfortable people. So, people are getting cranky with their congregation. It isn't surprising when church folk's first inclination is to do that because we've missed out on being together and remembering how God has been and is at work in the mix. Hang in there. God does amazing things through people who stubbornly insist that God is at work through a disagreement.

Some have asked why seminaries didn't teach their pastor how to do all of this online stuff. Seminaries do offer online classes but prior to this pandemic, would you have voted to have your congregation's worship only online? It just wasn't in our imagination. But now that it is, we have new tools to work with. Many of our congregations intend to continue with a hybrid service sharing their worship service online with friends and family joining them from around the world, and from work, or an elderly parent's home. How we might be a hybrid synod will continue to develop as the internet connectivity of western Alaska is developed.

We've had our fill of doing new things this past year and we're not done yet. This assembly will meet entirely online. The schedule is in smaller chunks of time allowing voting members to get up and move around in-between sessions. While voting members will be the only ones in the Zoom meeting for this assembly, anyone can register for the workshops which are offered via Zoom, which is free to use, and the assembly will be shown on the Alaska Synod ELCA Facebook page.

Here's the good news. That new stuff? God has been doing new things all along. When we recognize it, we call it imagination, insight, hindsight, and maturing... God works in and through the ups and downs of daily life. Very few of us grow in faith when things are going smoothly. It is too easy then to think that our immense talent or skills or family pedigree are responsible for things going so well. When things change, we blame God. That just doesn't compute. Have you read one story in scripture of a person whose life had no challenge? Do you know of one story where the person sailed through life making a difference without being immersed in the reality of grief or injustice or disappointment? I don't know of any. If you are tired, rest. Do not lose sight that God is at work; Jesus is the Messiah, you are not.

The Creator of the universe loves you every day and in every way and is not about to leave any of us to our own habits and prejudices. God is at work in and through you, beloved. Recognize God's abiding love for you and all of creation. Death, despair, injustice, disorientation will not have the last word. God has spoken in the Risen Jesus Christ. God is making all things new.

Part-time Calls

By the fall of 2021, eighteen of our thirty congregations and four mission developments might be served by pastors who are serving less than full-time or who are compensated below what the synod guidelines suggest for fulltime compensation. When a congregation begins with a less than full-time call, the congregation has an easier time of understanding the dynamic of the pastor working less than a full-time pastor. When a congregation reduces compensation and the pastor works less than full-time, folks often feel like the congregation has failed rather than regrouped to meet new challenges and ministry opportunities. Shifting to $\frac{3}{4}$ time or half-time requires a new Letter of Compensation and Benefits for your pastor. Being on the same page as pastor and congregation for part-time expectations makes for a healthy working relationship.

My first call was to serve half-time as pastor developer in Dillingham. Working in the community was a gift to us as we developed our congregation. I am eager to work with your council and pastor in navigating what could be a rich missional opportunity alongside hard work in negotiating expectations that are fair for all.

The Alaska Synod Synodically Authorized Minister Program is overseen by Pastors Carol George and Tari Stage-Harvey. This program prepares individuals lifted up by their congregations to serve as Synodically Authorized Ministers. Some focus on offering pastoral care, some teach, some are worship leaders, all are enriched through this focused time of study. Every congregation benefits from adults who are engaged in robust Christian education.

Current Students include:

Linda Bender, Central, Anchorage
Richard Clinch, Trinity, Palmer
David Ingram, Fairbanks
Kim Michaud, Epiphany, Valdez

Twyla Mundy, Christ, Soldotna
Archie Kiyetelluk, Shishmaref
Marge Stoneking, St Mark, Anchorage
Padi Wallace, River of Life, Chugiak

First Call Theological Education (FCTE) is a three-year structured program of theological education designed to assist newly called leaders in the transition to rostered ministry. One of the most dramatic transitions in the life of a newly rostered person is the transition from seminary or non-rostered status to the first call to public ministry. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has prescribed standards and expectations for continuing theological education during the first three years of rostered service under call. Theological education doesn't end with graduation ceremonies at our seminaries. Rather, theological education is a process of lifelong learning which addresses ministry in our changing community and societal contexts. This requires faithful leaders with abundant gifts and special qualities such as:

- depth in the faith
- practical congregational skills
- competence to communicate across cultures
- capacity to reach out to unchurched people
- ability to make connections between faith and everyday life.

Foundations for these competencies have been laid in seminary education. To a large extent, however, the ministry skills are finally realized only in the practice of ministry in the setting of a specific congregation and its larger social, economic, and cultural context. Newly called leaders learn to do ministry and develop a "habit of the heart" for lifelong learning during these early years of service.

Alaska's 2019-2020 participants included Pastors Kaitlin Pabo-Eulberg, Ron Rucker, Erika Bergh, and Lucas Peters. Five synods of Region 1 share this event with the bishops sharing in planning. Our Region 1 deployed churchwide and agency staff provide workshops. Thank you Beth Adams, Andrea Arey-Perlick, The Rev. Phil Streufert, The Rev. Joel Wudel for your partnership. In 2020, the bishops of the partnering synods taught from the book *Fierce Conversations*.

Thriving Leadership Formation is being developed by California Lutheran University through a nearly \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. to help pastors and church leaders throughout the 11 ELCA synods of the west. Pastor Kaitlin Pabo-Eulberg has convened our synod co-hort.

Every bishop has duties beyond the synod in partnership with the larger church. My responsibilities in 2019-2020 included:

- Pacific Lutheran University Board of Regents, Academic Affairs Committee
- Bishops Assignment Consultation – This group of bishops assigns seminary seniors to a region in fall and spring meetings.
- Bishops Roster Committee which receives requests for on-leave-from-call extensions and exceptions to the three-year requirement before a pastor or deacon engages in specialized ministry.
- Ready Benches convene groups of bishops around specific areas of focus. I've chosen to focus on Care of the Environment and "Justice is Not Just Us." Those groups often meet together because non-dominant cultures often face larger impacts of climate change.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Work

Our constitution describes the role of the bishop as the chief ecumenical officer for the synod. In that role, I've participated annually in the Providence Interfaith Service and continue work with our full-communion partners in shared accountability as judicatory leaders and in exploring potential ministry opportunities. We periodically write letters of mutual concern to our legislators. My participation as your bishop is grounded in our ELCA Social Statements and policies.

Youth

Outdoor Ministries: In 2020, one camp was held at Glacier Bible Camp, led by pastors and lay leaders from the Southeast Cluster with pandemic protocols in place. Salmon Lake Bible Camp and the Southcentral/Knik Clusters camp were not held due to the pandemic.

Candidacy Committee

Theological education has changed its delivery system. Students used to move to campus for two years, move to serve an internship for a year then move back to campus for a final year. Now students can take classes on campus or online from their home and meet on campus for intensive courses. All ELCA seminaries are offering web-based courses that broaden a student's options for study.

Two of our candidates are enrolled in Distributive Learning through Luther Seminary; two are enrolled in Wartburg Seminary's online program; one is enrolled in Luther Seminary's 24-month MDiv X Program and one student is in TEEM, Theological Education for Emerging Ministries, who studies at home and attends onsite courses three times a year earning a certificate. TEEM focuses on preparing leaders for underserved congregations that are rural or ethnic-specific. TEEM does not require a college degree (though some students have PhDs) and the student enrolls at the recommendation of the synod bishop.

Alaskans currently preparing to serve as ELCA rostered leaders:

Amanda Lindquist (Amazing Grace, Anchorage) Deacon candidate

Dena Luchsinger (Trinity, Palmer)

Zach Manzella (St. Mark Lutheran, Anchorage)

Amanda Van Vliet Snyder (Our Savior's, Nome)

Melissa Vesco (St. Mark Lutheran, Anchorage) interning with St Mark

Ollie Bergh is serving his seminary internship with Central, Anchorage. Ollie is under the care of the Oregon Synod Candidacy Committee.

Alaska Synod Coaches List

All coaches listed are considered Level 1 coaches in the ELCA, having taken the basic coaching course. Some coaches have completed additional training and are called ELCA Level 2 coaches; their specialty area is indicated. Several synod coaches have availability for new clients. You may contact Pastor Tari Stage-Harvey at stageharvey@gmail.com or Pastor Lisa Smith Fiegel at alaskadem@gmail.com to inquire about coaching.

Kristina Abbot, Shepherd of the Valley
Willie Anderson, Shepherd of the Valley
Becky Corson, Shepherd of the Valley
Rev. Meredith Harber, Christ-Soldotna
Teresa Kissel, Shepherd of the Valley
Wayne Mundy, Christ-Soldotna

Rev. Lisa Smith Fiegel, synod director for
evangelical mission, Level 2,
Stewardship (in process)
Rev. Carol George, St. Mark-Anchorage,
Level 2, Stewardship
Rev. Dustin Lenz, Christ-Fairbanks, Level 2,

Kristin Price, Shepherd of the Valley
Rev. Tari Stage-Harvey, Shepherd of the Valley
Joy Will, Shepherd of the Valley

Stewardship
Zach Manzella, St. Mark-Anchorage,
Level 2, Discipleship

Alaska Synod Mobility

The Synod Council assigned the work of the call process (mobility) and candidacy to the bishop in 2011. This work includes an orientation of the congregation to the call process, of the Ministry Site Profile team to their duties, and of the Call Committee to their responsibilities. The bishop searches for candidates willing to serve in Alaska at that particular congregation based on the Ministry Site Profile. An exit interview is conducted with the exiting pastor, interim pastors are sought and the new settled pastor is installed.

Congregations in call process in 2018- 2020

- Christ Lutheran, Fairbanks celebrated the installation of Pastor Dustin Lenz on February 17, 2019.
- Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church celebrated the installation of Pastor Erika Bergh on August 11, 2019. Pastor Bergh was ordained in her home congregation in Olympia, WA.
- Lutheran Church of Hope celebrated the installation of Pastor Liz Lowry on February 9, 2020. Pastor Lowry comes to LCOH from Messiah Lutheran Church in Reynoldsburg, Ohio.
- Our Neighbor's Children's Theater and Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church celebrated the online installation of Sister Annette Janka as mission developer on April 26, 2020.
- Faith Lutheran celebrated the ordination and installation of Pastor Richard Mauer on July 12, 2020 with a hybrid service.
- Fairbanks Lutheran celebrated the installation of Pastor Lucas Peters on September 20, 2020 with an outdoor service. Their entire call process was conducted online. He was ordained in Iowa in the One in Christ Lutheran Parish.
- Our Savior's Lutheran has contracted with Amanda Van Vliet Snyder to serve as intern pastor while she completes TEEM coursework.
- Island of Faith Lutheran Church in Wrangell voted to call Pastor Suellen Bahleda from Gethsemane Lutheran Church in Portland, Oregon. Pastor Bahleda started Ash Wednesday of 2021. Her installation will be in May.
- Joy Lutheran Church in Eagle River has voted to call Sean Avery who will be ordained June 11 in Bellingham, Washington. He will start July 5.

Congregations in the Call Process Currently

- Shishmaref Lutheran Church, lay leadership
- Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Anchorage with Intentional Interim Pastor Karin Albaugh

Serving Under Specialized Call from the Synod Council

- The Rev. Susan Halvor, Manager of Spiritual Care, Providence Medical Center
- The Rev. Ron Rucker, Pastor-developer of Table of Grace and Trapper Creek Fellowship.
- Sister Annette Janka, Mission Developer of Our Neighbors Children's Theater
- The Rev. Karin Albaugh, Intentional interim
- The Rev. Karen Sonray, Intentional interim

Ordinations 2019-2020

- Erika Tobin (Bergh) June 30, 2019 at Gloria Dei, Olympia, WA
- Rachel Swenson, at Christ, Fairbanks) January 3, 2020 called to Grace Lutheran in Des Moines, WA.
- Rich Mauer, (Faith, Delta Junction) July 12, 2020

Rostered Leaders Who Left Alaska for New Calls 2019-2020

- The Rev. Martin Eldred from Joy, Eagle River to Holy Cross, Herndon, VA
- The Rev. John Van Haneghan from Fairbanks to Intentional Interim Ministry in Texas

Chaplains

The Rev. Lt Christina Mauntel, USN

The Rev. Susan Halvor, Manager, Providence Medical Center, Anchorage

The Rev. Kaitlin Pabo-Eulberg, Providence Valdez Medical Center

Transfers From the Active Alaska Synod Roster to Retired Status

The Rev. Karen Sonray, Intentional Interim

The Rev. Curtis Matz, New Hope Methodist Presbyterian Church

Deacon Greg Meyer, Kenai Peninsula Food Bank

Pastors Who Died in 2019-2020 and the Alaska Synod congregations served by them

Larry Rorem 12/22/20 Shepherd of the Valley 1990-2007, Teller (Internship)

Donald Kruse 11/20 Lutheran Church of Hope, 1967-76

Fritz Youra 2/14/21 Lutheran Church of Hope 1980-88

Anniversaries of Ordination in 2020 and 2021

10th The Rev. Diane M Krauszer 1/10/2010

The Rev. Mark H Orf 2/28/2010

15th The Rev. Karen D S Perkins 1/15/2005

The Rev. Lisa A Smith Fiegel 10/30/2005

20th The Rev. Susan M Halvor 8/25/2000

The Rev. Curtis V Matz 8/26/2001

Deacon Gregory S Meyer 5/20/2001

25th The Rev. Michael G Schwarte 5/24/1995

The Rev. Timothy B Christensen 7/16/1995

30th The Rev. Brian M Crockett 9/19/1990

The Rev. Daniel M Bollerud 12/2/1990

35th The Rev. Eric J Olsen 2/17/1985

The Rev. John J Hackler 6/9/1985

The Rev. Lisa M Hackler 6/9/1985

The Rev. Rick Cavens 10/18/1985

55th The Rev. Theodore A Conter 6/3/1965

60th The Rev. James K Pearson 6/12/1960

Thank you to those who've represented the Alaska Synod 2019-2020

- ELCA Church Council: Leslie Swenson (Christ Lutheran, Fairbanks)
- Lutheran Men in Mission: David George (St Mark)
- Pacific Lutheran University Board of Regents: Dr. Ose Matsutani (Amazing Grace)
- SYMBOL Youth Leadership Summit: Melissa Vesco (St Mark), and youth from Amazing Grace Caleb Asselin and Garrett Simon
- WELCA Board: Karen Voris
- Lutherans Restoring Creation: Dr. Henry Huntington (Joy)
- California Lutheran University Convocators:
 - The Rev. Erika Bergh (Christ Our Savior, Anchorage)
 - Katie Bourdon (Our Savior's, Nome)
- Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary Advisory Board:
 - The Rev. Ron Rucker (Trapper Creek and Table of Grace, Bethel)
- Suzzuk Mary Huntington (Shishmaref) and Sue Delgado, (Alaska Native) AIAN Response to the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery

Alaskans continue to support the Kuwaa Mission: *Healing the Kuwaa People of Liberia through our prayers, funding, and action.* The following ELCA Alaskans serve on the board: Acting CEO Stan Olsen (Central), The Rev. Carol George, (St. Mark) Chairperson; Karen Voris, (Central) Congregational Coordinator; Carol Norquist, (Central); Karen Kuhnert (Lord of Life), Fund Raising.

Region 1 Financial Services Office continues to serve all six synods through bookkeeping and accounting services for our congregations and shared agencies. Your congregation sends your mission support to FSO who then disperses 100% of it as requested. Reports of your giving are sent quarterly to your congregation.