



## Bishop's Report to the Synod, 2021

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### **“Entrusted”**

My report to the synod last June, a report filed but not delivered, was dominated by reflections on everyone's efforts – congregations, parishes, rostered ministers, synodically authorized minister, congregation officers, and synod staff – to pivot to worshiping and serving the Lord under stay-at-home restrictions. I will repeat what I have said elsewhere, that despite the anxiety, loss, and grief brought by the pandemic, God has blessed us over the past year. I do not recall another year when I have seen so much Spirit-breathed creativity under pressure as we have witnessed over the past year.

When pandemic forced postponement of the 2020 Synod Assembly, the Synod Council decided that it would benefit the synod to invite congregations to participate in implementing two of three initiatives growing out of the 2019 Synod Assembly forums. We launched these on Pentecost Sunday, May 31st, 2020. The first was a coordinated “Dwelling in the Word” across our congregations, trusting God to deepen our faith and to enlighten us to the movement of God among us and around us. The second was a “Sister Congregation” program – to randomly assign sister congregation pairs for one year – designed to lift sister congregations up in prayer and to foster getting to know one another in other ways appropriate to your congregations. The Synod Council is presenting resolutions this year to affirm these initiatives. Also at this assembly, the Synod Council will advance the third initiative, which is for the synod to fund a full-time staff position in communications and graphic design, to assist the synod office and congregations in rising to our new context in which online media present an opportunity to multiply our witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, entrusted to us by God in Jesus Christ.

I am grateful to God for your generosity, which also shined brightly during this challenging past year. Thanks to second mile giving from several congregations our income from congregations in 2020 was down only 3% from 2019. Together with the PPP loan/grant, vastly reduced staff travel expenses, and leaving one staff position unfilled, the synod financial position at the end of 2020 was stronger than it has been for a number of years.

Perhaps even more impressive is that in the past year you responded generously to a special appeal from our companion synods in Madagascar, the Ambovombe-Androy Synod and the Fort Dauphin Synod, for COVID-19 relief aid. More than \$25,000 came in and was passed on to the two Malagasy synods. We continue to provide regular annual financial assistance as well. At the 2019 Synod Assembly, we adopted a second five-year plan for financial partnership with our two companion synods. In keeping with this five-year plan, sent \$16,900 in 2020 and \$17,100 in 2021 to support a seminary, two Bible Schools for the training of Catechists, and scholarships for seminarians.

Currently, and since April 2020, office manager Laura Lee is the only staff person routinely in the synod office building. Staff continue to work primarily from their homes. I envision a shift to more in-office work by midsummer. We will maintain a hybrid arrangement of in-office and remote working from that point forward.

It continues to be a joy and privilege to serve with the faithful and gifted people who serve with me on our synod staff. I list them here in order of seniority. I also note the “full-time equivalency” (FTE) of each staff person. I think that often when people see only a long list of names, they may

assume these are full-time positions. Only the bishop and the office manager are currently funded full time by the synod.

Ms. Glenna Senters, Bookkeeper (0.6 FTE)

Pastor Maureen Stein, Assistant to the Bishop (0.25 FTE)

Pastor Ken Sandlin, Assistant to the Bishop (0.5 FTE)

Ms. Laura Lee, Office Manager (1.0 FTE)

Pastor Ken Tegtmeier, Assistant to the Bishop (0.25 FTE)

Pastor Elise Rothfusz, Director for Evangelical Mission / Coordinator of Congregational Resources and Communications. (1.0 FTE; 75% of her compensation is funded by the ELCA Churchwide Organization, not by the synod)

Mr. Brett Gosteli, Interim Administrative Assistant for Media, Communications, and Graphic Design (0.25 FTE). (Mr. Gosteli will be leaving synod staff this summer as he transitions into a full-time internship as part of his candidacy for Word and Sacrament ministry in the ELCA. God's rich blessings go with him into this venture.)

We are blessed by such a gifted, dedicated, and caring synod team. One of the unexpected blessings arising within the pandemic has been the dramatic increase in synod staff conversation and collaboration with lay people in our congregations, especially congregation and parish presidents, treasurers, council members, and stewardship leaders.

My report includes the statistical information on the synod that you will find available on the synod web-site: [www.csis-elca.org](http://www.csis-elca.org) . The statistical information includes the current number of congregations in the synod and the transitions of rostered ministers over the course of the past year (through May 31, 2021).

It is a privilege to serve Christ by serving you, as God has "Entrusted" us together to steward Christ's mission and ministry in central and southern Illinois. Be filled with the fullness of the Lord!