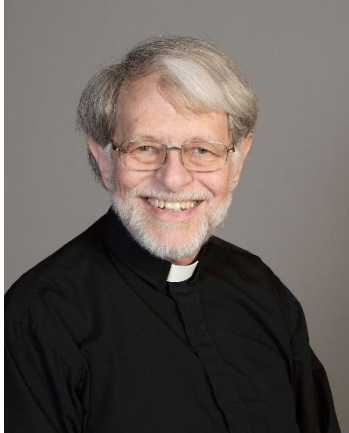


## **Pastor Ken Sandlin**

### **Assistant to the Bishop / Staff Report**



I look forward to Synod Assemblies. I always have. Pastors and lay members from congregations across central and southern Illinois gather for fellowship and worship, to hear reports and conduct business, and to learn about and help shape the future of ministry in our synod. And, of course, this year is especially special for our Synod. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, our assembly will reconvene in Peoria to continue the process of choosing our next Bishop who will lead us and our synod into the future of our ministry together.

For me, this will be my last Synod Assembly as a member of Synod Staff, and it has been a joy and a privilege to serve as one of Bishop John's assistants. During the past nine years, I have worked with many congregations who, after saying farewell to their pastor, began the process of calling their new pastor. For some the process went quickly. For others, it involved a lot of prayer and patience. A few received a nomination almost immediately after finishing their paperwork. Some waited for months, others for years. And there are congregations in our synod who are still waiting. Waiting is difficult. Not knowing is difficult. The prayers of the people continue, and we all know that God hears our prayers and is with every congregation as they wait to welcome their new pastor.

It has also been a joy working with the candidacy committee and walking with those in our synod who have felt God's call to serve as Word and Sacrament or Word and Service Ministers. The road through seminary can be long and difficult. Those who travel that road from entrance to approval to ordination, have heard God's call to ministry as pastors and deacons, and dedicate their lives to serving God and God's people wherever God sends them.

At the end of June 2014, I retired as Pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Hillsboro and began my new half-time position at the Synod Office in Springfield. At the end of August 2023, I will retire again. I have truly enjoyed the opportunity to get to meet and know so many of you. I pray that God will continue to bless you and your congregations. And I look forward to seeing you around the synod and at future synod assemblies.

## **Pastor Maureen Stein**

### **Assistant to the Bishop / Staff Report**



People of God in the Central/Southern Illinois Synod,

As the effects of the pandemic continue to unfold in congregations and parishes, we rejoice with the people who have returned to worship, service and fellowship in person and mostly unmasked. At the same time congregations and pastors acknowledge the losses and disorientation of the past few years. At the Fall Theological Conference in September 2022 Kristin Wiersma led our discussion and reflections, presenting the question, “Are We Out of the Woods Yet?” As we described the changes experienced in congregational life, she encouraged us to look at ways we can identify and embrace adaptive changes while we are in the woods.

In the spring session of First Call Theological Education (February 27-28) eight first-call pastors gathered at Villa Maria Retreat Center in Springfield to reflect on their ministry settings and their formation as parish pastors in the first three years of ministry.

The Anti-Racism Working Group sponsored a workshop led by the Rev. Sunitha Mortha from the Metro Chicago Synod in February 2023. The group met at Peace Lutheran Church in Springfield. Rev. Mortha led us through a set of experiences focused on diversity and inclusion. Her thoughtful approach was both challenging and gracious.

The Zoom format remains a significant tool for conversations and meetings among those who otherwise would be unable to travel from distant parts of the Synod. Zoom also allowed us to have the first session of Synod Assembly and the nominating ballots for bishop and other elected positions on-line. We will resume the Assembly in person in East Peoria in June.

We celebrated new and newly-ordained pastors who accepted calls in the Synod during the past year, even as other pastors left congregations. The need for interim pastors continues—to shepherd and guide congregations in transition, to provide worship and administrative leadership, and to encourage accountability in all aspects of congregational life. To that end, interim pastors and Synod-authorized leaders gathered in April to review their responsibilities and to receive encouragement for the tasks of interim ministry.

As the year since our previous Synod Assembly has unfolded, I am aware of doing things as Synod staff for the last time. I so appreciate the leadership of Bishop Roth and my colleagues on the Synod staff during these past years as the landscape of our world and our country has changed so unexpectedly. I’m also grateful for the chance to relate to congregations, pastors, and lay leaders in this work and pray for God’s blessings on the Synod and its ministry going forward.

## **Pastor Ken Tegtmeier**

### **Assistant to the Bishop / Staff Report**



In my quarter time position, I relate to all the congregations of the Southern Conference (18) as well as 17 congregations of the West Central Conference for a total of 35 congregations.

In addition, I relate to three Committees of the Synod and convene the Anti-Racism Working Group.

#### **Adult Faith Formation**

The Adult Faith Formation Committee has met every other month throughout the past year. Since the beginning of COVID, our meetings have been on ZOOM. This online venue has worked well for our committee as it continues its work.

I offer a word of thanks to Pastor Kara Wiechmann for her leadership of the committee and to Pr. Blake Duncan for his service to the committee as Dean of Education for the Synod Authorized Ministry (SAM) Program.

The committee continues to proceed in the broader context of providing faith formation opportunities for all adults across our synod. Currently, all our course offerings are open to all members of the synod.

We currently have 5 students taking courses in preparation for synod authorized ministry.

#### **Global Mission**

A word of thanks to our chair, Pastor Mauricio Viera. Pastor Mauricio brings great enthusiasm to his work with the committee. Over the past year we began preparations for the 2024 visit of the Madagascar Presidents to the United States and our synod. (Synod Presidents serve their synods as our Synod Bishops do in the ELCA.)

#### **Social Ministry, Justice, and Advocacy**

The Committee met several times this year to discuss the work and ministry of the committee in the hope of discerning an area of concentration for the future. In April, the Committee acted on seven Social Ministry Grants. All seven were approved. Many thanks to Stefan Munker for his convening and work with this committee over the past year.

#### **Anti-Racism Working Group**

The Anti-Racism Working Group has met monthly over the past year.

The Committee attended a Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging seminar in Milwaukee last fall. The committee members were so impressed with the presentation, they worked to bring the presenter, Rev. Sunitha Mortha (Northern IL Synod Assistant to the Bishop) to provide a sampling of the workshop here on our territory for the Synod Council and other invited leaders in the synod. It was very successful as well and we hope to make this available over the next year at the Conference level.

Bishop Roth and I have been taking the lead with this Working Group. Over the next couple of months, we will be working on transition to new leadership from among the conference-appointed committee members. Ms. Arlis Dittmer has graciously agreed to convene the Working Group until new leadership is raised up from within the committee.

### **Thank You**

As we elect a new bishop for our synod at this Assembly, I will be leaving my work on synod staff. I thank Bishop Roth for asking me if I would be willing to serve the synod as one of the Assistants to the Bishop. It has been a privilege to serve you in that capacity and has been a blessing to meet and greet so many of you and work alongside you. Seeing the faithfulness of so many of our congregations, I have been strengthened in my hope for the future of the church – even amid many and great changes ahead. It has also given me new appreciation for the daily demands of the ministry of the synod office. I will be ever more appreciative of those who take on this work on our behalf. As with so many things in life, we have no idea what goes on in the life and work of others until we “walk a mile in their moccasins.”

This is an exciting time in our synod as we give thanks for one synod bishop and elect another. We do not know what the future holds, but as Christ’s Church in every age... we walk by faith and not by sight. Christ is with us and so we are always people of hope as we look forward with anticipation to see what God is doing among us and where His future will take us.

## **Pastor Elise Rothfusz**

### **Director for Evangelical Mission & Congregational Resource Coordinator / Staff Report**



I was recently reminded of the passage from Matthew where we hear that Jesus had compassion on the crowds that gathered around him because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). In response, Jesus sends his disciples out to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of God has come near, to cast out demons, and to cure the sick. Luke reports that Jesus sent his disciples “ahead of him in pairs, to all the places he himself intended to go” (Lk 10:1).

As Jesus’ followers we are called to continue Jesus’ ministry, to extend his good news into our neighborhoods, communities, and networks – in places and with people Jesus has compassion for and intends to meet. As Christians, we gather to be nourished by God’s Word and then we are sent out with Jesus’ love in our hearts and his compassion embodied in our hands, feet, and voices. We are not simply recipients of the good news of his grace, but disciples who carry out Jesus’ ministry in this time and place. As the Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) for our synod, it has been a joy and privilege to accompany and equip congregations to continue the ministry that Jesus began two thousand years ago. The role of the DEM is to support, equip, and serve the synod in areas related to congregational vitality and new ministries, that is, to assist congregations in continuing Christ’s ministry in this day and age. This work happens in a variety of ways.

**Faithful Innovation Learning Communities** — Faithful Innovation is one way congregational teams can begin to discover how God is calling them to extend their ministry in new ways. It can be difficult to break free of old ways of doing and thinking about ministry, and we can easily be paralyzed through lack of imagination. Faithful Innovation teaches a congregational team a process for listening more deeply to God and neighbors, trying a simple experiment with the purpose of learning about themselves or their neighbors, and then sharing what they’ve learned. The process is rooted both in ancient Christian practices and in modern design thinking. Our first cohort of teams was online during the pandemic. The second cohort met in person; the two teams finished their process in August, having been surprised by their experiments and renewed engagement by people in their congregations. The third cohort began in September and has been an experiment in itself: a hybrid format, with some teams in person and other teams online, with people in Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, and even a coach from Montana! I meet regularly with pastors from Faithful Innovation teams for ongoing support and resourcing as they continue to model the faithful innovation process. I also meet with other DEMs who are leading the Faithful Innovation in their synods so we can learn from one another. I am grateful for the partnership of Eden Blair (First English Lutheran, Peoria) and Larry Dodds, the C/SIS lead team members, coaches Ellen Koester and Shelley Rossmiller in the C/SIS, Janice Hawley (Central States Synod) and Marilyn Hall (Montana Synod), and team members from the Central States Synod.

**New Worshiping Communities** — Continuing Jesus's ministry into the world means we intentionally extend the good news of Jesus to those who do not yet know him. This past year I began a monthly prayer group who gathers on Zoom to pray for the ways our synod congregations can be more intentional in efforts to share the story of Jesus with others. Last fall Deacon Ellen Koester and I co-led a synod book group for *Deep Roots, Wild Branches* (by Michael Adam Beck), about fresh expressions of church. Fresh Expressions is a movement of church taking root in and among our networks and communities, where people live, rather than solely in the church building. The focus is on gathering people who are likely to never set foot inside a church building, and forming Christian community. Existing congregations (referred to as the "inherited church") have an important role to play in equipping and supporting disciples who begin these fresh expressions of church. In January the New and Renewing Congregations Committee met with a Fresh Expressions trainer to plan for this movement in our synod, and then hosted a Fresh Expressions Vision Day in April, with about 50 people from our synod congregations attending, many who are interested in learning more, beginning a fresh expression of church, or assisting the synod in shepherding this movement. The C/SIS has joined with three other synods who are also exploring fresh expressions of church through a Holy Innovations project and grant from the churchwide organization to learn, experiment, and report out what is working in each of our contexts.

The synod is also receiving a churchwide grant to explore the possibility of forming a new mission community in Mt. Vernon.

**Area Ministry and Geographic Parishes** — Carrying out ministry in Jesus' name most effectively often means partnering in some way. DEMs shepherd conversations about ways congregations can share resources to continue their ministry and develop new ministries. I meet with councils to facilitate conversations that lay the groundwork for new shared ministry opportunities. I also meet regularly with the pastors and the presidents of our synod's geographic parishes as we continue to learn together about the challenges and best practices of shared ministry arrangements.

**Food for the Journey** — Congregations can carry out Jesus' ministry most effectively when leadership is confident and willing to work through challenges. A number of our synod congregations do not have a called pastor to provide leadership or guidance for ministry; Food for the Journey is a series of online sessions for council members who do not have a called pastor. These sessions begin with a time of dwelling in the Word and focus on the ways God is continuing to provide for them during this time. Topics have included basics about council leadership, how reactivity flows through relationships and has the potential to escalate situations, developing guiding principles, and how a congregation's history and story shapes its present and its future.

**Holy Closure and Mergers** — All organizations, similar to biological life, follow a pattern of birth, generative work, and death. Sometimes a congregation is unable to continue its local ministry, and drawing their active ministry to a close is an appropriate and holy act. While this can be a difficult decision, we celebrate the ministry that has been done in Jesus' name. A congregation can distribute its final assets in such a way that their legacy provides ongoing and new ministry in Jesus' name. As the DEM, I assist in the

conversation and process about concluding a local ministry and how final gifts can continue Jesus' ministry in the world.

**Stewardship** — All that we have, and are, is from God, and we follow Christ in generously sharing ourselves with the world. As individuals and congregations, we trust in God's provision and consider how best to manage all the resources we have to join in the ministry of Jesus through our congregations. The C/SIS has partnered with GSB Fundraising to offer stewardship support to help congregations inspire generosity for Christ's mission. C/SIS congregations have taken part in both Building a Culture of Generosity and Stewardship for All Seasons. I am the staff liaison to the Mission Support and Stewardship Education Committee which also seeks to inspire generosity across our synod, helping to connect stories of ministry with financial giving.

**Called by the Churchwide Organization** — The Director for Evangelical Mission is called by the churchwide organization, so while most of the DEM's ministry is with the synod, the DEM's work is on behalf of the whole church. As such I have served on the Evangelism Working Group, developing models and resources for congregational evangelism with an Evangelism Network (whose monthly meetings are open for anyone to join: [www.elca/evangelism](http://www.elca/evangelism)). I sit on a Review Table for grants related to the Anchor Church ministry model, and I have served as the dean of the Region 5 DEMs for the past two years.

**Congregational Resource Coordinator** — While I am called by the churchwide organization as the DEM for the C/SIS, I also have an additional ¼ time position on synod staff. My responsibilities in this area are to provide consultation from a Bowen Family Systems Theory lens, promote healthy congregational leadership, coordinate with the Director of Communications, provide an orientation for rostered ministers new to our synod, and offer other support to synod ministry as needed. This past year, Bishop John and I created a new synod ministry called Abiding Together, which supports councils and rostered ministers who are new in their ministry together. This is cohort model meets four times over about a year and facilitates important conversation about expectations and communication as both the rostered minister and council members transition into a new ministry partnership. These sessions are facilitated by synod pastors and lay people.

I am immensely grateful to the congregations of the C/SIS, who generously support Christ's ministry through the synod and churchwide organization and who have welcomed me as a partner in ministry, so that together we can lean into our call to go ahead of Jesus with compassion and love for all he intends to meet. It has been a privilege to journey with congregations and to witness God's Spirit at work in both times of joy and possibility and in times of challenge. I am encouraged by the thoughtfulness, dedication, and generosity of the disciples in our synod and look forward to seeing what God's Spirit will bring forth in the years to come.