



**Grand Canyon Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

## *Bishop Hutterer Annual Report*

**JUNE 2021**

*For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters,  
only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence,  
but through love become slaves to one another.  
For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment,  
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."  
—Galatians 5:13-14*

### *Greetings!*

**L**AST YEAR, the Grand Canyon Synod Council wisely postponed the 2020 assembly. Though we long to interact, learn, and worship with one another, the Synod Council decided to conduct the 2021 Synod Assembly on a digital platform. Fortunately, we are all much more experienced with online technologies than we were a year ago. Though it will be via screen and not a handshake, I look forward to greeting you when we meet for the 2021 Synod Assembly.

At this year's assembly, you will hear how we are strongly supporting congregational vitality. We are strengthening our partnerships with our global companion in Senegal. With the Episcopal Church and United Church of Christ, we share our Cruzando Fronteras ministry in Nogales. We are creating new relationships with the Mexican Lutheran Church. We are intentionally engaging in conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion for our common life. And we are investing in God's future through an appeal, Growing Generosity. These are reminders that people of faith do not ever sit idle, even in a pandemic.

### *A Year of New Gifts*

**A**S WE LOOK BACK, I am grateful for the ways you have embraced the world as it is, not as you want it to be. You ensured that the witness of the church continued even when it was not safe to gather in-person. I rejoice with you in the many creative ways we remained church together: recorded and live-streamed worship and prayers and bible study, socially-distanced confirmation instruction, even drive-in outdoor worship services. Day by day you continued to adapt new skills. Lay leaders lifted up and encouraged their rostered ministers when the way forward was not clear or when their spirits were low. You shared responsibility for new ways of being. You served on phone trees, email chains, and re-opening teams. You prayed. You were creative, conscientious, and faithful.

Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, you went well beyond what you might have imagined possible. Through uncertainty, you spoke words of hope and offered reminders that **nothing** will separate us from the love of God.

You were living into our strategic plan: communicate Jesus, connect people and create possibilities.

## *A Year of Challenges*

THESE PAST MONTHS CONTAINED MANY DIFFICULTIES AND TRAGEDIES: deaths from COVID-19; the limitations placed on in-person funerals; the ceasing of in-person visits at homes or hospitals or nursing homes. All of these deeply affected the grieving families of the dead, and those who were ill for any reason this past year, along with their loving caregivers and family and friends. It was hard for our pastors and deacons, unable to minister in traditional ways and left feeling isolated.

It will be important for us to find ways to remember the lives of those who died during this year of pandemic. One of our own leaders, Pastor Daniel DeFassio, who served at Shepherd of the Desert, Sun City, died of complications from COVID-19. His funeral was March 30, 2021.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not the only crisis that confronted us this past year. With an increased urgency, we faced the toll taken in our church and our nation by generations of racism, practices, and policies. We found various ways to come together and address these issues. I am encouraged by the number of individuals, groups and congregations who are on a course of listening, learning, repenting, and changing attitudes and behaviors. In other communications you will hear more about this common work.

## *Welcome New Pastors*

I ALSO WANT TO WELCOME two newly ordained pastors in our synod: **Pastor Pam Reynolds**, called to serve Lord of Life Lutheran in Sun City West and **Pastor Elizabeth Gallen**, called to serve New Journey Lutheran in Fountain Hills.

## *Mission Support and Synod-Wide Generosity*

THE PANDEMIC paused many things we enjoy doing as a synod, but it did not stop the generosity of support for our common work. In fiscal year 2020-2021, your mission support was 16% over the anticipated gifts. Thank you for your constancy in sending in those dollars to support people and projects within this synod, as well as our synod mission partner institutions and the work of the ELCA at the churchwide level.

With the additional gifts, the Synod was able to offer additional support to Native American Urban Ministries, Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Cruzando Fronteras, and various food ministries, including Grace Lutheran in Phoenix, St. John's in Glendale, and Reformation in Las Vegas. We helped rebuild an earthquake-damaged parsonage outside of Mexico City. We increased our support to seminary students. Led by **Solveig Muus** as director, we helped launch Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Arizona, which is focusing its advocacy energies on hunger.

Like many congregations, the synod received a Payroll Protection Plan loan of \$29,000 from the Small Business Administration. We hope to hear soon that the loan has been forgiven. The report of the treasurer includes more detailed information on finances in 2020, but undergirding all those figures is a shared commitment to directing resources to God's mission within and beyond this synod.

## *Growing Generosity*

The assembly includes the formal launch of an appeal, Growing Generosity. Our goal to raise \$500,000 from congregations and individual donors between now and the end of 2023. Learn more on our website at [gcsynod.org/generosity](https://gcsynod.org/generosity). I think you will be moved as you hear about the work we plan to do together.

We have already asked for initial pledges to the Growing Generosity appeal. I am glad to share we have 100% pledged financial commitment from every member of the **Grand Canyon Synod Council**, the **Office of the Bishop staff**, and the **Growing Generosity Leadership Team**, chaired by **Myrna Wells-Ulland**. I hope you will also see value in supporting this appeal to meet the goals set before us.

## *A Year of Gratitude*

**I**N A STRANGE YEAR, so much good work went smoothly and faithfully because of those who serve on the synod staff. I remind myself that we have never hosted a digital assembly before this year. **Theresa Thornburgh**, Director of Administration and Events, **Brian Flatgard**, Director of Communication, and the amazing tech team at **Community Lutheran**, Las Vegas dove in and figured out how to make such a gathering possible.

**Pastor Mark Holman** has faithfully and professionally served the synod as Bishop's Associate for Mobility and Transition since January, 2019. His original one-year stint turned into two much needed years. One goal of our strategic plan is to share ministry with Rocky Mountain Synod. Building on the success of our shared Lilly grant and 3-E program, we went deeper. **Pastor Sarah Moening** (rostered in Rocky Mountain Synod) is the Director of Congregation Transitions. **Pastor Doris Nolan** serves as a congregation coach and offers administration support to the Grand Canyon Synod and the Rocky Mountain Synod. **Pastor Patricia Reed** serves as our other congregation coach. **Dr. Jerry Kingston**, special assistant to the bishop, researches and surfaces possible candidates for us as well as the Rocky Mountain and Southwest California Synods. We believe this holy experiment is a promising model of shared ministry.

I am grateful for the members of this team that serve our very busy Grand Canyon Synod, often working in ways far outside of their job titles: **Clint Wasser**, Director of Finance, **Pastor Miguel Gomez-Acosta**, Director for Evangelical Mission and Bishop's Associate for Congregational Vitality, **Pastor Jacqui Pagel**, Bishop's Associate for Candidacy and Faith Formation, **Bill Ledford**, Director of Lutheran Engagement and Advocacy in Nevada, **Solveig Muus**, Director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Arizona, **Molly Gary**, Program Manager for the Ministerial Excellence Fund, and ELCA Foundation planners **Lisa Higginbotham** and **Josh Kerney**.

I also thank the conference deans who opened their time and hearts and minds in our weekly and sometimes hastily arranged meetings during critical moments: **Pastors Sharon Brown, Steve Crittenden, Don Lorfing, David Pavesic, Peter Perry, Adele Resmer, Sarah Stadler, and Christine Stoxen**.

Many words of thanks are also due to the entire synod council, who pivoted from meeting quarterly and in-person to far more regularly on Zoom. I thank the Synod Council Executive Committee for their commitment to meeting weekly during the height of the pandemic: **Pastor David Brandfass, Mr. Paul Gryniewicz, Mr. Erik Rehms, Ms. Barbara Carl, Ms. Sue Jensen and Mr. Roger Bailey**.

## *Paul Gryniiewicz*

A SPECIAL THANKS GOES TO **PAUL GRYNIEWICZ**, who completes his 4-year term as vice president of the synod on September 1, 2021. During these years, Paul helped to orient and support both an interim bishop and a new bishop. He served as a key leader in shaping the appeal and our strategic plan. He tirelessly led the synod council through this past year of pandemic as we increased our working tempo. His breadth of knowledge, his deep commitment to God's mission for the church, his love for the wider community, and his steady presence are a gift to this synod and to me.

## *Thank You!*

**A**ND FINALLY THERE IS ALL OF YOU: the lay leader in a congregation, the rostered minister, the prayer partner, the curious reader, the loving critic, and the quiet supporter. Thank you for taking seriously the work of the synod and of the wider church. It is all part of God's splendid activity in this messy and divided world in which we are called to engage.

Martin Luther said we are "God's rusty tools." God uses us as we are, and I thank God for the good work done through you.

Freed in Christ,



The Rev. Deborah K. Hutterer  
Bishop  
Grand Canyon Synod of the ELCA