



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

Bishop Hutterer Annual Report

JUNE 2022

"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds..."
—Hebrews 11:24

Greetings!

STIRRED UP IN THE SPIRIT, the theme of the 2022 Grand Canyon Synod Assembly, draws on the common work we do as Synod.

In a world where we can easily provoke each other in unhelpful and even harmful ways, this assembly focuses on the ways we get to provoke each other in good and Spirited ways. We challenge each other to recognize that we are called to be public witnesses of God's love and hope in the world. I pray this assembly renews our enthusiasm and confidence to provoke actions of love and good deeds.

Do you remember the conversations in March 2020 and our first responses to the COVID-19 pandemic? We were making plans to gather by Easter, then Easter turned to Pentecost, and then two church years went by. This year we gather in person, knowing there are some who cannot join us because of precautions around COVID-19. It's been a few years of back and forth. Thank you for your resilience in unknown times. The days of uncertainty are not over, so we pay attention to health officials and honor ways to be safe as we move into the future.

These years have also pushed us into experimenting and learning. (A new phrase we've all learned — "you're muted!"). Some things worked and others not so much. That is what an experimentation is about—discovery. As Barbara Carl said to me, "We are canoeing the mountains and trying to figure out what to do with the wood."

In these actions you provoke one another to love and good deeds.

Growing Generosity Appeal

THE GROWING GENEROSITY APPEAL, launched June 2021, has exceeded the initial \$500,000 goal and is working toward our stretch goal. Even before last year's launch, members of our synod's council, staff and congregations stepped forward to commit to the appeal. We kicked off Growing Generosity with \$281,656 in pledges.

Last year's focus was on individuals. This year's focus is on congregations. As of today, we are at \$543,032. Your generosity has made a difference in grants to congregations to participate in Stewardship for All Seasons and Beginning a Culture of Generosity, which helped many congregations transform their stewardship campaigns. Your financial support paid forward to financial support for many pastors, which helped reduce educational and medical debt. Your giving provided much-needed retreat, respite, and support for pastors in full-time ministry who are in the midst of various stages of burnout, stress, depression, and conflicts of all kinds.

One comment from a pastor who attended a retreat:

"Thank you for sending me to Shepherd's Canyon Retreat Center. I was able to spend time reflecting and begin healing from my call. I am at peace now with decisions and I'm excited where God is leading me. Thanks for sticking with me through these times."

Whether you were an early donor, or came to a listening session to learn more about this appeal, or have been praying regularly for this campaign, thank you. Additional donations are being sought as we work toward our stretch goal of \$750,000.

See the ways your gift has already made a difference and spurred someone else to make a gift at gcsynod.org/generosity.

Church in the Midst of Change

Even before the pandemic we knew the cultural landscape of church was shifting. We've talked about it for years. We are called forward as Christ's church in a time unlike what most of us have experienced.

It is not the first time, however, that Christians have navigated water and mountains. Turn to the Book of Acts and see how the Holy Spirit, the advocate worked through the first Christians to break the barriers that divided God's people. As they were surprised, we too, are open to the surprising ways God works in these days.

We can learn from the openness of many in our synod who are experimenting and reexamining our assumptions of how the role of race and bias inform and influence our church life. In the summer of 2020, many across the synod gathered on zoom to participate in our series of Open Conversations on Race. From the conversations there was a group that wanted to go deeper. Simon's Project was born. This group been meeting, learning, and exploring ways they, and their congregations, can embrace diversity in all of its forms. The first Simon's Project Cohort invites you to participate in the next group.

No one can predict exactly the impact these times will have on our congregations or synod life. But when we are open the Spirit's stirring and stay rooted in the basics of faith and practice, as well as openness to reexamine our church structures, together we provoke one another to love and good deeds.

Thanks to the Synod Council, Office of the Bishop Staff, and You

In this last year so much good work has been accomplished because of those who serve in the Office of the Bishop and on the Synod Council.

The Grand Canyon Synod Council members are engaged. They show up for regular and special meetings. They read pages upon pages of information and come prepared. They offer insights that strengthen this Synod. Please offer them thanks for the many ways they serve this Synod.

Your Vice President, Barbara Carl, brings many gifts to this role, and I am grateful for her partnership in this work.

Transitions are a part of institutional life but there is still sadness when we say goodbye. Thank you to Twila Burdick (who chaired the Celebration Task Force); Janis Richert (who serves in many capacities across the Synod including on the Stewardship Team); Pastor Dan Valasakos (who is pray-er extraordinaire) and Pastor David Brandfass who is completing his second term as Synod Council Secretary. The Grand Canyon Synod is richer, more organized, and more faithful because of their leadership.

There have been a few transitions since the last assembly. Pastor Doris Nolan stepped down from her role as congregation transition coach and currently serves as senior interim pastor at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Mesa and Gold Canyon. Pastor Glenn Zimbelman has stepped in as congregation transition coach. Deacon Janice Zimbelman is the Director of Congregation Transitions (replacing Pastor Sarah Moening, Rocky Mountain Synod). Clint Wasser retired as our Director of Finance. Amy Birchard is now serving in this role as Finance Administrator.

Other Office of the Bishop staff include:

- Pr. Miguel Gomez-Acosta, Director for Evangelical Mission, Bishop's Associate for Congregational Vitality;
- Pr. Jacqui Pagel, Associate to the Bishop - Candidacy and Faith Formation;
- Pr. Patricia Reed, Transition Coach;
- Dr. Jerry Kingston, Special Bishop's Associate for Mobility;
- Solveig Muus, Director of LAMA;
- Brian Flatgard, Director of Communications;
- Theresa Thornburgh, Director of Administration and Events;
- Kathye Hamm, Administration and Events Assistant;
- Molly Gary, Program Manager for Ministerial Excellence Fund;
- Lisa Marie Higginbotham, ELCA Foundation Planner;
- Josh Kerney, ELCA Foundation Planner; and
- William Ledford, Director of Advocacy, LEAN

And all of you—lay leaders in congregations, rostered ministers, loving critic and silent supporter. Thank you for taking this work seriously. I am grateful for the many ways this Synod, as church together, gets to dig into this work to Communicate Jesus, Connect People and Create Possibilities. This is team ministry.

As I shared in my April 2022 Synod Council report: "The call to serve as bishop is strange, beautiful, hard, surprisingly difficult, joyful and complex. I have never been bored and I look forward to most days. I'm grateful for the confidence the GCS has placed in me to do this work.

May God bless us all as we seek to be stirred up in the Spirit, considering how provoke one another to love and good deeds.

Grateful for how God does good through you,



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