

Bishop's Report

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Central States Synod Assembly 2018

This past year marked the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, an event we commemorated with a number of activities and worship services throughout the Central States Synod. Thanks to the creativity and efforts of Team 500 we were able to provide congregations with a vast array of resources with which to honor the anniversary.

But looking to the past was only part of our celebration. The most significant part relates to the future, and that initiative is the focus of Team 501, which will help us look ahead not simply as inheritors of the Lutheran tradition but participants in shaping it as we continue to engage God's mission to love and bless the world.

I was privileged to participate in two Reformation commemorations, one in Kansas City and the other in Wichita. Both were hosted by the Roman Catholic Church. The prevailing sentiment of those exiting those services was the same, summed up by a Catholic woman in Kansas City, who told me: "We are so ready for this, for the past to be the past so we can get on with the future together."

What we are commemorating is the reformation – the re-forming – of the Church. We recognize that the old, traditional forms of doing and being Church are fading and losing relevance to our contemporary world. Put another way, the church has traditionally operated as a centralized structure, but we're now operating in an increasingly decentralized context. So, as synod staff our mission is to equip networks as well as individual congregations to more effectively engage their missions. For example, the Parish Ministry Associate program, the St. Louis Area Transition initiative, the Area Ministry system, the 23 churches collaborating in parish arrangements all are networks that we resource and equip for their various work. This approach is a departure from the past, when "leadership" meant that all direction and responsibility for missional emphasis came from a central source and was followed (or not) by individual churches. Now, leadership is a shared enterprise.

The emphases of the past several years – Leadership, Stewardship, Discipleship, and Evangelism – all lead naturally to the initiative of Congregational Vitality. More information about that initiative will be available at the Synod Assembly, but it's important to note the purpose: *To help our congregations view our changing culture as an opportunity and invitation to refocus energy and resources on becoming communities of Jesus that nurture life-changing relationships with God, one another, and the world.* How that purpose is addressed will be the essence of the project's work.

It is a great privilege to serve as Bishop of the Central States Synod and to work with an extremely gifted staff: the Rev. Keith Hohly, Bishop's Associate; the Rev. Susan Candea, Bishop's Associate and Director for Evangelical Mission with responsibility for Stewardship and Congregational Vitality; the Rev. Dr. Donna Simon, Director for Evangelical Mission with Responsibility for New and Renewing Congregations and Congregational Vitality; Ms. Sandy Van Tuyl, Synod Administrator; and Ms. Dawne Bockelman, Synod Administrator; and Mr. Tim Anderson, Director of Communications.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Roger Gustafson, Bishop
Central States Synod, ELCA