

## Built on a Rock 500: Rooted, Reforming, Resilient. Report of the Bishop – May 6, 2017

**M**Y wife Gretchen has served the world as a midwife for most of her professional career. That's been her calling, not mine, but going on 39 years of marriage now I imagine that I actually know something about labor.

I sat with my wife, now mother, through the labor for two of our children. There is pain and confusion for those giving birth. I remember a sense of helplessness in trying to offer support, and I am often cast back on those feelings as bishop of the Church of today. Yet, offering support, and actually giving birth, are not the same thing. There is a point of decision for a mother when she must bear down and do the job, or simply melt away as the birth demands its own moment. I remember this. We can choose how to be in the moment of birth, but we cannot choose when that moment comes.

I sometimes say to people that I am 'managing decline' as a bishop. There is reason to say this:

- Our 36,980 combined, synod, membership of 2010 was 32,047 in 2015. This drops each year.
- 44 of our 115 congregations (38%,) worshipped 50 or fewer people in 2015. That compares to only 31 congregations in 2010. Each year a few, historically strong "Program" churches become smaller, "Pastor led" communities without much traditional programming. Some that were "Pastor led" congregations become smaller yet. A church worshipping 20 or 30 people can certainly be vital and alive, but sacrifices must be made to do so and not all of us know how to make the shift. And, of course, such congregations may be unable to participate significantly in the financial life of the synod. This is not always true, and it certainly does not make them less important, but it is just a reality that affects the work we all do as a whole.
- The average age of church members is difficult to gauge. We have no synod-wide statistics to offer here. However, when we explore this question with congregations individually, it seems clear that congregational membership is older overall for most. This is a gift in terms of the wisdom and character our elders often offer. However, this also suggests that membership declines may accelerate in the years to come.

Sometimes, then, I tell people that as a bishop - as a "business man," as the CEO of the Oregon Synod - that I am managing decline. Ten years in service with you I know what this looks and feels like. So do many of you. Two thirds of Oregon Synod congregations are statistically in decline, while 20% show growth over the last seven years, and 14% report being "stable." Amazingly, the \$22 million dollars dropped into Oregon Synod offering plates in 2010 decreased by only 9% by 2015 – down to \$20 million. However, as our budget report shows, losses in congregational offerings magnify as Mission Support filters up to the synod and ELCA as a whole.

"Decline" is my CEO answer to how it's all going. "New birth" is my bishop answer. The notion of "giving birth," "reforming," being "reborn" as a church sounds a whole more hopeful – and it is. And it is not a dodge or wishful thinking. I mean, have you actually given birth? It is not easy to be in labor! suggest you talk with women who have actually been there if you have any questions. "Managing decline" may be a walk in the park by comparison!

"Managing decline" has certain implications. You can only do more with less for so long. Soon – and now – one must do less with less. Decline suggests strategies for death and respect of what has been. You

have to be real. Decline also invites celebration and wonderment, but decline is generally sad if there is no hope for tomorrow.

Giving a birth is different. I know, I've been there. The pain of birth goes somewhere. Change is the name of the game, and oh let us count the ways. It will never again be the way it was before you had children. You and your spouse will never have the alone time, or the control over your day, or the money, or the freedom from worry you once had. And, you will never experience as rich a blessing, or be filled with such hope and euphoria, or learn new things and meet new people as you do when a fresh life is placed into your arms. We all have friends, nieces and nephews, or puppies even if we don't have our own children. The miracle of new life is known to us all.

Last year I reported to the Assembly that the Synod Council had just voted to invest \$560,000 of the synod's "New Beginning" funds over three years in six new initiatives. If you are in decline you retreat and save. If you are in labor you bear down and invest. We understand ourselves to be giving birth.

- \$25,000 was set aside for the development of a Lay School for Ministry. We have been working with the ELCA TEEM program and anticipate offering a class in Confessions this fall, taught by retired Pr. Larry Jorgenson. This will be followed in the spring by a class in Christian Ethics taught by Pr. Mark Brocker. As a beginning, these efforts are directed primarily at TEEM candidates, but in time this will also serve our anticipated need for Synodically Authorized Ministers. My thanks to our DEMs, Rev. Michael Keys and Rev. Glenn Chase, who are taking initiative here.
- \$10,000 a year was set aside for new TEEM pastoral candidates. We are excited to have three such candidates studying for ministry right now. Their costs certainly outstrip our ability to fund them, but this money is being well used for future ELCA pastors who we know will be serving in Oregon. We are blessed to have Leo Bancroft, Manuel Borbon, and Jessie Liebowitz currently in TEEM. *[TEEM – "Theological Education for Emerging Ministries" is a route to ordination which allows candidates to both "do" and study for pastoral ministry at the same time. TEEM candidates will generally be called to the ministries they served during their education.]*
- \$30,000 a year, for two years, was set aside to resource local congregations. We are excited to have eleven congregations taking on imaginative new work while simultaneously being formed into a dynamic, learning cohort. Our thanks to Jamie Armstrong and Jan Wierima who are spearheading this amazing effort.
- \$35,000 a year, for three years, is being invested in Transformation Leadership efforts. We have five leaders around the synod – in LaGrande, Pendleton, Hillsboro, Portland and Junction City – reaching out and building new networks for effective ecumenical engagement and community outreach. Our thanks to Rev. Terry Moe who leads this work, and to Prs. Travis Larsen, Brennen Gullory, David Eppelsheimer, Fr. Joshua Kingsley and xxx who are leaders on the ground.
- \$25,000 a year for two years was set aside specifically for the development of a new, second/third generation Latino Ministry undertaken with the Oregon Diocese of the Episcopal Church in Woodburn – Centro Montisenos. Change happens and our founding pastor, Fr. Samuel Borbon, was 'kicked upstairs' for national work by the Episcopal Church. However, we are making adjustments and still excited for, and committed to, this ministry. It is our privilege to have Fr. Borbon as our preacher for closing worship.
- Finally, \$250,000 was set aside for the next three years to invest in "Experiments and Innovations." Most of this money is used to match ELCA grants which expand our capacity even

further. Our DEMs currently oversee 18 different ELCA grants (yes, that a lot!!) Details on these grants are included as an addendum to this report.<sup>1</sup>

The message? The birth is upon us and we're pushing for all we're worth!

We have been talking for some time about the fact that fully half of our active pastors in the Oregon Synod are 60 years of age and older. This means we have been anticipating a wave of change in congregational leadership. This wave is now fully upon us.

- Pr. Ron McCallum retired as pastor of First in Astoria in 2015. They are now in an interim.
- Pr. Rob Sachs retired from Our Saviour's Seaside this past January. They are now in an interim.
- Pr. Dennis Anderson retired from St. James Portland last November. They are now in an interim.
- Pr. Nick Doversberger retired in 2015, after 17 years at Zoar Lutheran in Canby. They are now in an interim.
- Pr. Dawn Gregg has retired after six years at Faith Albany. Welcome to Pr. Mark Bringman who was installed as their new pastor last June.
- Pr. Tom Hiller has retired after 8 years of serving Gethsemane Portland. Welcome to Pr. Suellen Bahleda who took the reins at Gethsemane this past September.
- Pr. Steve Carlson has retired from Emmaus Lutheran in Eugene after 24 years as their pastor. Welcome to Rachel Langford who was installed as their new pastor this last November.
- Pr. Paul Teyler retired from Faith Caltskanie in 2015 after seven years as their pastor. Welcome to Pr. Alyssa Augustson, former intern at Gloria Dei in Coos Bay, who began service this past December.
- And Pr. Jim Norlie retires this year as Campus Pastor at Luther House in Corvallis, after 22 years of service there. Luther House is currently in a call process.

Also new to the synod this year are:

- Pr. Andre Rickel who began serving Holy Trinity in Portland in February.
- Pr. Justin Johnson who began serving St. Paul Lutheran in Ontario in August.
- Pr. Laurie Jones now serving Central Lutheran in Eugene, having begun in October.
- And while not new to the synod, we rejoice with West Linn Lutheran which called Pr. Sara Gross Samuelson to an associate ministry position which began last April.

Assistant to the Bishop Rev. Susan Kintner has worked with congregations in every one of these transitions – and there is more! My thanks to her for her diligence work and care for us all. She has prepared a full report on transitions for your consideration, which is amended to this document.<sup>2</sup>

Part of the labor pains that we are currently experiencing is that fewer individuals are responding to a call for pastoral ministry, just as our need is growing. Synods across the ELCA are receiving about one half to a third of the candidates for pastoral ministry that they need. This reality is complicated by the fact that many of the calls available today are less than full time and new pastors with school debt simply cannot afford to take such positions.

The bottom line is this. We cannot continue to handle call processes the way we have been. Synod staff does not have the capacity, many congregations are struggling with new issues relative to their own

capacities, and we often can't find leaders able to serve. So, stay tuned. Things will be changing relative to pastoral transitions in the year ahead.

This past summer the ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to merge what were formerly known as our three "Lay Rosters" – that is Deaconesses, Diaconal Ministers and Associates in Ministry. These people collectively are now known as the "Word and Service" roster, a complement to ordained clergy who are now known as the "Word and Sacrament" roster.

Oregon Synod leaders retired from the former Lay Roster include Doris Creager in Florence, Letha May Isbell in McMinnville, Judy Jernberg in Eugene, Sabine Marecsco in Portland and Linda Smith in Milwaukie. We thank these leaders for their work. Actively serving on our new Word and Service roster are Mary Beth Weaver, hospice chaplain and member of Salt and Light Lutheran in Portland; Sue Best, a Palliative Care Social Worker at OHSU and member of Augustana Lutheran in Portland; and Matt Smith, also a hospice chaplain and member of Salt and Light. I would also recognize Deb Mantey at St. Mark's Lutheran in Salem. She is a deaconess with the Lutheran Deaconess Association, which is not formally aligned with the ELCA, but through which she brings great training and skills to the synod. Also with us this weekend is Sr. Clare Josef-Maier who lives in Eugene, but is currently on the NWWA Synod roster. The ELCA Deaconess Community traces its history back to 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, and is a women's only community, which is why she carries the title "Sister" rather than "Deacon."

Our Word and Service ministers are highly trained and formed just as our pastors are. They generally carry Master's Degrees in theology, counselling or related fields. Our deacons often bring specialized training for the broader ministry of the church, and their heart is to serve with us as bridges between our congregational ministries and the world at large. Our deacons will have a significant leadership role in the future of our church, as they have in our past.

Also, along with Pr. Jim Norlie and this long list of retiring deacons and pastors, I wish to acknowledge the retirement of Norene Goplen who has served us so faithfully and well as our synodical, Lutheran Advocate. I also wish to acknowledge our treasurer of 29 years, Grieg Anderson who has recently retired from this work. It is hard to know what to say, how to thank, or how to imagine replacing these people. Yet, we stand confident in the new birth among us and all that the Spirit is doing. *[The Synod Council and Bishop's office will find a temporary solution to our needs for a treasurer until we can hold a treasurer's election at our 2018 Synod Assembly.]*

Last year's Assembly gave us all three specific sets of marching orders.

1. The first was the instigation of our "New Beginnings" leadership initiatives. I have reported on those.
2. The second, from a resolution the Assembly passed, was to begin to shape our life and witness as a "Sanctuary Synod." This Assembly has been shaped in large degree with that resolve in mind. Hundreds of Oregon Christians, in Portland, and again in Bend, and in other smaller groupings around the state, have been stepping forward this past year asking how to make their lives and churches sanctuaries for our, primarily Latino, neighbors whose lives and families currently stand at risk. We are hearing about this work this weekend.
3. And then thirdly, last year's Assembly passed a resolution instructing us to "find a way" to allow for increased representation at Synod Assemblies from members of the LGBTQIA community – and the Synod Council has a bylaw change for your consideration as a response to that request.

Leaders are waking up and finding their voice all around the synod. Such individuals are the leading edge of the new church being born in our midst. When you speak, I seek to listen, and when this Assembly gives us direction it is ours, and all of ours together, to fulfill. We are doing as we have dreamed.

In closing there was one other direction given to us by last year's Assembly. Oregon is an increasing popular destination. The state is growing and Assembly venues like this are becoming increasingly expensive. Some of our congregations feel unable to attend Assemblies because of the cost, and while your Synod Council set aside a generous amount of money to make this 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Assembly available to as many as wished to come, we cannot always do that. So, last year's Assembly voted on an experiment for 2018. Next year we will not have an Assembly like this. Rather, we are going to have 3-5, smaller, one day, mission events around the state to which any and all of us can come, and then a one day Assembly to which official Voting Members are invited, focusing primarily on the business of church. We'll see how that goes. In 2019 we will have another Assembly like this one while we evaluate the experiment.

In 2019 both your synod vice-president, Deb Chenoweth, and I as your bishop, will be completing terms of office. That means there will be elections for both bishop and vice president in 2019. Vice President Chenoweth and I think that it would be helpful to all concerned for you to know if either of both of us will be standing for re-election in 2019, and that this would be helpful to know before our 2018 regional mission events. So, Vice President Chenoweth and I will be in prayer and discernment around this issue for the coming months and promise to announce our intentions to you by the end of January 2018. That will give us a few months to plan these events accordingly.

*"The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed." says our Lord. "Nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you."*

I give thanks for each of you. I give thanks for the good work God gives us to do, and for willing hearts and hands to serve. I give thanks that God has made us into a temple of living stones and that we are able to flex, to give, to give up, and to change as we labor towards a new birth. The work before us is not easy, but it is blessing. I, for one, am thankful that a birth is upon us.

Respectfully submitted,

Bp. Dave Brauer-Rieke  
Oregon Synod – ELCA

# <sup>1</sup> Oregon Synod Funded Ministries with Churchwide Grants

Update: February 2017

## **Ecumenical Transformational Leadership Initiative** (Synodical Renewal Grant) Rev Terry Moe

- 1) Four leader organizers in Eastern Oregon, Westside Metro, Junction City-Eugene, and East County Metro continuing the relational and assessment work. Two more area moving forward.
- 2) Training in the Core Practices in a Five-Day Training and seven One Day intro to this work.

One Day intro to Transformational Leadership Feb 11 in Oregon Trail Cluster 34 participants.  
Assessment with Congregational Vitality Survey has begun.

## **First Half of Life** (aka Millennial Engagement) Mission Developer Rev Ron Werner Jr-

- 1) Youth Collective (multi-denominational, multi-congregational) four locations around the state.
- 2) Ministers' Cohort developing lay and clergy leaders for ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (about 40 leaders)
- 3) "House" Congregation under Development in NE Portland

+Connection to GLOCAL program from ELCA. Youth/young adults leaders (8) to training in Chicago.  
+Sanctuary Movement facilitator working with Portland, Bend and other communities

## **The Flame** (aka LGBTQ Outreach) Mission Developer Leo Bancroft (TEEM Candidate)

- 1) Relational Meetings continue with pastor and others.
- 2) House community has outgrown its space and is seeking rental space. Worship is providing sign language interpretation for one participant.

A quick quote from one of my members this afternoon as we were discussing interpreters. He is a done who has now come multiple times:  
*"The Flame is the first church I've been to, that is inclusive of everyone, which is rare, and I really think that's why it's growing so fast."*

## **Cully Outreach** Portland (SAWC) Leader Organizers: Juan Carlos la Puente and Mira Conklin

- 1) Bridging Hispanics neighbors with social-political neighborhood NGO (non-governmental organizations), local schools, Faith partners living in the area for community action.
- 2) Community Kitchen connects neighbors Spanish and English speakers in joint sharing of food traditions. An arising desire for more formal ritual and spiritual practices.

Organizing research and action on excessive, physical disciplining of Hispanic students in the local elementary schools.

## **Leaven/Salt and Light** (formerly Redeemer Lutheran) Pastor Melissa Reed

- 1) 21<sup>st</sup> Century model for a sustainable, multi-generational community structural connected to an umbrella not-for-profit. Continuous leadership development a hallmark of this community.
- 2) Bridging member neighborhood connections to other social-justice work and movements.

Connecting the Cully Project outreach with Spanish speaking neighbors for empowerment.

## **Wilderness Way** Portland (SAWC) Pastor/Leader Rev Solveig Nielson-Goodin Final year of funding.

- 1) Community has chosen to remain a synodically authorized worship community to give it more flexibility as more gentle reaches many distanced or wounded by traditional church.
- 2) Provides a witness to the connections of faith—environment—justice model.

“Seeds for an Eco-Reformation” is the name of a new EcoFaith Initiative for 2017--in honor of this year’s 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. EcoFaith Recovery is a partner organization of the Oregon Synod.

**Grace and Mercy Lutheran Church** –Hermiston Congregation under Development, Rev Tom Inch

- 1) Second year as a CUD. Has moved in with the Methodist congregation exploring potential for deeper connection and ecumenical witness.
- 2) Developing an outreach to the federal prison near the community.

Move to the Methodist church has gone well. Exploring ways to share ministry life. Question remains if the Methodist lay pastor will continue after July.

**Bethel Lutheran Church** Portland (Transformational Renewal Grant) Revs Christine Core/Michael Keys

- 1) Initiating a Long-Range strategy effort to explore where Bethel needs to be positioned in 2019. This includes pastoral transitions, ending of grant funding for staffing, and deeper neighborhood engagement.
- 2) Growth in FoBs (Friends of Bethel) taking the lead in ministries of community care: Sunday morning community breakfast, Hygiene program for homeless and Youth Drop In programs.

Listening Season for strategic work engaging neighborhood youth and families, congregation imaginations and visual expressions of the work ahead. Council strategy session February 19.

**New and Reboot Ministries:**

**Connect Outreach Ecumenical Ministry** –Roseburg (SAWC) Mission Developer Jessie Liebowitz (TEEM)

\* This is an expansion of an existing multi-denominational effort which is exploring the relational and community potential for a young adult alternative worship community including Umpqua Community College.

**Third Space** (exploration-Trinity Lutheran, Gresham) Mission Developer Rachel Kramer

\* Third Space exploration which is being rebooted with new leadership. Centered around Story and Table (possibly anew way to understand Word and Sacrament).

**Oregon Synod-Mission/CSM Grants & Applications 2017**

New	Grant #	CSM 2017	CSM 2016	SYNOD 2017	Notes
Latino Outreach Salem Keizer	SAWC 031027	15,000	8,000	10,000	New Mission Developer Manuel Borbon TEEM Candidate
Millennial/Young Adult Outreach Roseburg	SAWC	15,000	N/A	10,000	New Mission Developer Jessie Liebowitz TEEM Candidate
Third Space (Trinity) Alternative community	SAWC 04870	10,000	On hold	2,000	New Developer Rachel Kramer

Salt & Light (i.e. Redeemer)	110-140 04880	5,000	15,000	2,000	Melissa Reed Last year of funding per RD
Wilderness Way	SAWC 31034	7,000	10,000	5,000	Solveig Nilsen- Goodin Last year of funding
Cully Outreach	SAWC 31112	25,000	25,000	15,000	JC La Puente/Mira Conklin
Grace and Mercy Hermiston	110-145 30990	32,000	34,000	10,000	Tom Inch-Developer "new wine"
Ministry in the First Half of Life	110-135 31139	35,000	35,500	33,000	CUD/three-fold ministry/ House church/Young Adult /FirstHalf Clergy cohort
<b>Ethnic Congregation</b>					
Living Waters Burns	110-135 30096	30,000	30,000	5,000	Native Ministry- Piute Reservation
Good Spirit Portland	110-150 20248	12,000	12,000	2,000	Native Ministry
Heavenly Peace Portland-Beaverton	110-135 30633	12,000	12,000	5,000	Dual site- SE Ptld & Westside
Casa de Sion Woodburn	110-140 30204	6,000	10,000	2,000	
Woodburn Centro Montesinos	110-135 NewStart	25,000	25,000	5,000	
<b>Total</b>		<b>229,000</b>	<b>216,500</b>	<b>106,000</b>	

<b>Transformational</b>					
Spirit of Grace Mission of the Atonement- Bvrtn	130-130	0	10,000	2,000	
Bethel Lutheran Portland	130-135	15,000	18,000	2,000	2018-10k
SE PDX - Outreach Area Min Strategy	130-140	20,000	PEM Fund 15,000	20,000	
Synod Renewal Transformational Leaders		25,000	25,000	25,000	
<b>Total</b>		<b>60,000</b>	<b>68,000</b>	<b>49,000</b>	
<b>Total Renewals</b>		<b>289,000</b>	<b>284,500</b>	<b>155,000</b>	



## <sup>2</sup> Statistical Information from the Office of the Bishop

*Note: This information reflects activity from April 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017*

### **Ordinations, Consecrations, and Commissionings authorized by Bishop Dave Brauer-Rieke**

06/18/2016 Sue Best, AIM, Palliative Care Social Worker, Oregon Health & Science University

### **Calls accepted to serve within the Oregon Synod (*listed effective date*)**

04/28/2016 Rev. Tom Struck, Chaplain, Providence Willamette Falls, Oregon City  
05/20/2016 Deacon Sue Best, Palliative Care Social Worker, Oregon Health & Science University, Portland  
06.20/2016 Rev. Mark Bringman, Pastor, Faith, Albany  
08/01/2016 Rev. Justin Johnson, Pastor, St. Paul, Ontario  
09/01/2016 Rev. James Flachsbart, Pastor, Interim Ministry  
09/01/2016 Rev. Suellen Bahleda, Pastor, Gethsemane, Portland  
09/23/2016 Rev. Kaileen Hogan-Brink, Hospice Chaplain, Serenity Hospice, Salem  
10/30/2016 Rev. Laurie Jones, Pastor, Central, Eugene  
11/07/2016 Rev. Rachel Langford, Pastor, Emmaus, Eugene  
12/01/2016 Rev. Alyssa Augustson, Pastor, Faith, Clatskanie  
02/24/2017 Rev. Bob McIntyre, Chaplain, Legacy Emanuel Medical Center, Portland  
01/19/2017 Rev. Tim Carnahan, Pastor, Trinity, Gresham

### **Transfers into the Oregon Synod**

06/20/2016 The Rev. Mark Bringman, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod  
09/01/2016 The Rev. Suellen Bahleda, Alaska Synod  
09/23/2016 The Rev. Kaileen Hogan-Brink, Central States Synod  
10/27/2016 The Rev. Kathryn King, Retired, Northern Great Lakes Synod  
10/30/2016 The Rev. Laurie Jones, Northwest Washington Synod  
11/09/2016 The Rev. Rachel Langford, Lower Susquehanna Synod

### **Transfers from the Oregon Synod**

05/26/2016 Rev. Dr. Marguerite Rourk, North Carolina Synod  
08/23/2016 Rev. Michael O'Berg, Eastern North Dakota Synod  
11/01/2016 Rev. Dave Pederson, Rocky Mountain Synod

### **Retirements**

04/01/2016 Rev. Dawn Gregg  
05/20/2016 Rev. Roger Fuchs  
08/30/2016 Deacon Letha Isbell  
09/01/2016 Rev. Stan Berntson  
09/01/2016 Rev. David Paulson  
09/03/2016 Deacon Sabine Maresco  
11/11/2016 Rev. Dennis Anderson  
12/01/2016 Rev. Dr. Joel Liabraaten

12/01/2016 Rev. Rory Scott  
01/01/2017 Rev. Timothy Carraher  
01/01/2017 Rev. Robert Sachs

**Resigned from the Roster**

11/17/2016 *Diaconal Minister Craig LeMay*

**Removed from the Roster**

*None this period.*

**Deaths**

07/24/2016 Rev. Carlton Olson  
08/17/2016 Rev. Fred Ruhnke  
12/18/2016 Rev. Joe Smith  
03/03/2017 Rev. John Paulson

**Anniversary of Ordination**

06/23/1957 The Rev. Leonard Nelson  
07/21/1957 The Rev. Wesley Sackmann

**50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination**

05/24/1967 The Rev. James Bornzin  
05/24/1967 The Rev. Edward Knudson  
06/15/1967 The Rev. David Wilder  
07/02/1967 The Rev. Lawrence Rosenkoetter

**25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Ordination**

04/05/1992 The Rev. Mark Pederson  
05/17/1992 The Rev. Siew Fong (Andrew) Yong  
08/23/1992 The Rev. Brian Brandt  
12/27/1992 The Rev. Katherine Hellier