



Sierra Pacific Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

May 22, 2016

Dear Sierra Pacific Synod Friends,

October 31, 2017, will be the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation, 500 years to the day after Martin Luther, as tradition holds, nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Church door in 1517. Around the world, across the ELCA, and here in this synod, plans are under way for observances and celebrations of this anniversary.

The Reformation500 Sierra Pacific Synod Task Force is organizing events to take place throughout the calendar year preceding October 31, 2017, and in this letter we'd like to give you a taste of the menu of anniversary events and encourage you to plan your own.

We have chosen two themes for our synod's reformation anniversary observations. The first is "***Ad fontes!* To the sources!**" We encourage every pastor and congregation in the synod to make *reading Luther* part of the celebration year. The second theme is "**Reformation past, present, and future,**" which recognizes that we are a people who are constantly being reformed, and that the meaning of reformation changes.

With these themes in mind, we invite every congregation within the synod to make plans to celebrate this anniversary. Two basic options would be to organize a class or reading group in which members read Luther texts, and to make the service on Reformation Sunday, October 29, 2017, a true festival worship. Be creative! How about organizing a play, or an Oktoberfest for the neighborhood? You might invite members to watch the Luther movie and have discussion over dinner. You might invite clergy or other leaders from other denominations for an evening of dialogue about the meaning of the reformation. Anyone with internet access can take part in a reading group being offered by Rev. Dr. Kirsi Stjerna of PLTS, called "500 Years of Protest." (More about that below.)

Finally, we want to acknowledge that many, although not all, of the events listed below are clustered in our synod's larger urban areas. We encourage deans, pastors and lay leaders to organize locally. Browse the ELCA and Sierra Pacific Synod reformation websites, look at the events listed below for inspiration, and make plans for special events in your area.

Events in 2016 (For the most up-to-date information visit www.ref500.info)

- **May 11 – June 30** – *Art Exhibit*, “Aus Wort wird Bild – The Word Becomes Image.” German artist Wenzel Ziersch reimagines words from scriptures, painting them on large glass panels. For this exhibit commemorating the 500th anniversary of the reformation, Ziersch creates images using quotes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s poem “By Gracious Powers.” Goethe Institute, 530 Bush Street, San Francisco. www.goethe.de
- **June 4** – *Synod Assembly Workshop*, “Bearing Public Witness to the 16th Century Reformation,” with Rev. Dr. Karen Bloomquist. The workshop asks, “How can we bear public witness to what Luther began 500 years ago, especially in the face of the economic and racial disparities and polarizations that confront us here and now?” Participants will be introduced to the resources of the global Radicalizing Reformation project, and how each of us can bear witness to the reformation in our contexts.
- **September 17** – *Online Synod Gathering*, “Reformation Past, Present and Future: Celebrating the 500th Anniversary in Your Congregation” with the members of the synod’s Reformation500 Task Force. The morning begins with an overview of the anniversary’s significance and themes, followed by teaching and event-planning models for pastors and lay leaders to use. After the morning session there is lunch and then gatherings of the newly formed conferences. Time and locations TBA.
- **September 21** – *Founder’s Day*, “Space Studies and New Theology: God Out of the Box” with astronomer Pamela Gay and theologian Ted Peters. Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Wednesday, September 21, 2015, 9 AM. Visit plts.edu for more information and to register.
- **September 21** – *1st Meeting of Reading Group*, “500 Years of Protest” with Rev. Dr. Kirsi Stjerna, Professor of Lutheran History and Theology at PLTS. This gathering follows lunch on Founder’s Day at PLTS. Details to come.
- **September 2016 – September 2017** – *Monthly Reading Group*.
- **October 2016 – October 2017** – *Monthly Justice Projects*. The San Francisco Welcome Ministry (*Welcome*) will host a justice project in different locations each month throughout the synod and post do-it-yourself guides for congregations and youth groups. To learn more, visit our website, www.ref500.info, and click on “Do Justice.”
- **October 29** – *San Francisco Volunteer Day and Concert*. “Volunteer Day” activities take place at congregations and non-profits throughout San Francisco, 10 AM – 3 PM, followed by a Jonathan Rundman concert, 4 PM, Grace Lutheran Church, 3201 Ulloa St @ 33rd Ave. www.ref500.info.

Events in 2017

- **2017** – *Luther Pilgrimage to Germany*. In early planning stages, dates not set. If interested, contact Rev. Dan Smith, Ph.D., at 530-756-5500 or lucidavis.org.
- **September 2016 – September 2017** – *Monthly Reading Group* continues.
- **October 2016 – October 2017** – *Monthly Justice Projects* continue.
- **March 8**. *Luther Lecture*, “Luther and Women” with Dr. Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen of Aarhus University, Denmark, at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Berkeley.
- **May 4** – *Justice Project in Fresno*. *Welcome* will host justice events around the city. Plan to arrive at Synod Assembly a day early to take part.
- **May 5 – 7** – *Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly in Fresno*. Still being planned, the 2017 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly will be a centerpiece of the synod’s celebration of the Reformation500 Anniversary. Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, across from the Fresno Convention Center, 2233 Ventura St, Fresno.
- **May 24 – 28** – *Kirchentag in Berlin and Wittenberg*. The *Kirchentag* is a biannual gathering of over 100,000 German people and international visitors for intensive discussion and critical debate about the contemporary church as well as concerts, meditation, artistic expression, worship, and more. Most participants are under 30 years old. Attendees can stay in local homes for about \$25 a night. Interested? Pastor Derek Harman of the *International Committee for the Kirchentag* can answer most of your questions. Email dmharman7@gmail.com. Visit kirchentag.de and click on the link to the English site.
- **Late Spring** – *The Luther Wedding*. Date, location and cost to be determined. A delightful re-enactment of Martin and Katie’s wedding with you as a guest, followed by a food and wine-centric reception. Period music. Costumes optional but encouraged.
- **October 29** – *Festival Reformation500 Anniversary Service*, Sunday, 3 PM, Grace Cathedral, 1100 California St., San Francisco. **Save the date** for this event, the capstone of our synod’s year-long Reformation500 celebration.

Resources

- “Radicalizing Reformation: Provoked by the Bible and Today’s Crises” (www.radicalizing-reformation.com) engages Lutheran insights with critical challenges we face today, such as economic and other disparities, violence, and environmental devastation, in the public pursuit of justice. This global theological project has developed 94 theses and published six books. The sixth volume, in English, *Perspectives from North America*, is available through Amazon. For an online guide for discussion of the 94 theses in local contexts, as well as ideas for local action, contact Rev. Dr. Karen Bloomquist, the North American coordinator, at bloomquistkaren@gmail.com or 510-871-0207.
- *The Annotated Luther*. Six volumes of Luther’s works. Rev. Dr. Kirsi Stjerna of PLTS is one of the three general editors, and these volumes provide the texts for the monthly reading group offered by Dr. Stjerna to the entire synod in 2017. Order volumes 1 and 2 now at www.augsburgfortress.org. Volumes 3 and 4 will be available in the fall of 2016.
- Visit our facebook page, SPS ELCA 500, our website, www.ref500.info, and the ELCA’s website, www.elca500.org. Visit Augsburg Fortress’ website, www.augsburgfortress.org, and search “Reformation 500” for many resources, including their planning guide, *Anniversary Resources for Congregations: Reformation 500*.

In Christ,

The Reformation500 Sierra Pacific Synod Task Force:

- Rev. Diane Bowers, Ph.D., St. James Lutheran Church, San Leandro, CA
- Rev. Derek Harman, U.S.A. Representative, *International Committee for the Kirchentag*
- Rev. Megan Rohrer, Grace Lutheran Church, SF; Executive Director, *Welcome*
- Rev. Dan Smith, Ph.D., Lutheran Church of the Incarnation, Davis, CA
- Rev. Kerstin Weidmann, St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church, SF; Vice President, DELKINA (German Evangelical Lutheran Conference in North America)
- Rev. Kirsi Stjerna, Ph.D., Professor of Lutheran History and Theology, PLTS, *honora membris*