

Reports



2019 Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly Report of the Bishop

"We Are Church Together: Working in God's Vineyard"

"Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.'"

- Matthew 9:37-38

Dear friends and members of the congregations and ministries of our Sierra Pacific Synod:
Grace and Peace to you from Jesus who is the Christ, Amen.

Growing up by the waters of the Pacific Ocean in Solana Beach, I thought ALL of California was beaches and waves and perpetual sunshine. I'm pretty sure I had no idea where all the food we ate came from, or who grew it, or who harvested it. I suppose I guessed the food we ate came from a farm or a ranch somewhere, but truth be told, if it wasn't on the shelf or in the freezer case at the Big Bear Market, it didn't make it into our household. I don't think our family was all that different from many of the families in our community. Other than the avocado tree in our backyard, we simply weren't connected to the land because as far as we knew, there weren't very many major agricultural areas nearby.

Which meant church could be a confusing place on certain Sundays. When I heard lessons read in worship such as our theme verse for this year's Assembly, I really had no touchstone to help me realize the depth and power of the imagery that Jesus was using. Stories about harvests and vineyards and laborers made no sense to me, but I figured they must be important if Jesus and my pastor and my Sunday School teacher were talking about such things. It probably made me think of a time when our family flew to Nebraska to visit my mom's extended family. I remembered driving through miles and miles of corn fields and wheat fields and seeing people riding on tractors and combines and thinking how different this place was from where I had grown up. The food was different, too. It wasn't called "farm to fork" back then, but that's what we were eating, and it was amazing.

It wasn't until I flew into Stockton in 1984 for an interview for my first call that I realized just how much of California is ranches and orchards and fields and vineyards. I could not believe the amount and the variety of crops and farmland and rangeland that I was seeing from my airplane window as we flew over the San Joaquin Valley. That was only the beginning of my education about life in a place that is vitally connected to the earth. I soon learned that the San Joaquin Valley was known for being the "breadbasket of the world." "Everything grows here" I was told -- fruit and nut trees, row crops, rice, asparagus, grapes and more grapes. The valley has long been a place where people were drawn to make their living because of the variety of crops that will grow here. It has also been a place where people were drawn to work in the fields -- to pick the crops that are grown, to dress the vines, or to work in packing houses and canneries where these bountiful harvests are processed.

For many years, families have migrated to this area from other parts of the country, especially during the "dust bowl" times in the 30's and 40's, to work in the fields. During World War II, workers from Mexico, known as Braceros, were welcomed to work in the fields and on the ranches of the valley because "the harvest was plentiful, but the laborers were few." There is still a need for people to work in the fields, and while there are many who wish to do so, there is not the same sense of welcome being offered today that has been offered in the past. In fact, life has become precarious for those who come to this country to live and work -- with or without documentation. Some have come seeking a better life for themselves and their family, others come seeking asylum because they had to flee for their lives from gang violence or other forms of oppression or economic hardship. All are in need of our support.

Some of our congregations and members have become active in advocating for fair and just immigration laws, or to walk with unaccompanied minors through the immigration process, or to stand as “Guardian Angels” with people when they appear in Immigration Court. A few of our congregations have offered sanctuary for immigrants who face deportation to protect them from being returned to a situation which might result in harm or even death. Most of our congregations have worked collaboratively in their community to support food and shelter ministries that have benefitted immigrants who find themselves with neither. Thank you for offering support, in whatever ways you have done so, to all of those in our communities who are the embodiment of Jesus’ call to us in Matthew 25 –

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

In this passage, Jesus is calling all of us to open our eyes and to see people we have often overlooked. In our part of the mission “field” in which God has called us to labor, there are many we have yet to see and many who have yet to hear the saving grace of the Gospel. My prayer and hope is that we will seek ways to connect to what is becoming the largest ethnic population in California and Nevada – our Latinx siblings. At this point in time, only a very few of our congregations are true reflections of the large number of Latinx people who live in the communities we serve.

A year ago, my report to our Synod included the following words that are still relevant. I offer them again, in the belief that redundancy in the church is not a sin, it’s a necessity! I also offer them for this year’s Voting Members who may not have attended last year’s Assembly:

“In the backdrop of all these questions about our work and witness, a good number of our 192 congregations in northern Nevada and northern California are facing serious questions about the sustainability of their ministries. As our synod staff have visited with you, we have heard your concerns and your hopes for the future of the ministries you have loved and served for many years. In the last 40 years or so, most of our congregations have become smaller and older, with fewer resources of people and money and time to offer programs and ministries that were once a part of a vital witness that drew people into a walk with Christ. Some of our congregations are no longer able to support the full-time call of a pastor to serve with them. During this same period, we have become what the Pew Research Group calls “The whitest denomination in America.” I don’t believe these two trends are unrelated. I believe the decline of our denomination is due largely to our lack of agility to reflect the diversity of the amazing mission field where God has placed us.”

The good news? More and more of our congregations are embracing the challenge and celebrating the opportunity of connecting with people in their communities who have been overlooked in the past. And here’s the “even better” news -- these same people are being invited to be a part of our congregations and

ministries as decision makers, as those who bring their life experience and growing faith to be a part of conversations about outreach, service, witness, worship, education and community celebrations. We will be welcomed to Lodi by one of these congregations, St. Paul Lutheran, which is our host congregation for our Assembly. The story of how this congre

gation is seeing substantial growth in its work and witness among the Latinx people of Lodi is a blessing and an invitation. An invitation for other congregations to reimagine their ministry and discover the blessing of adding new laborers in God's Vineyard!

God has placed us in an amazing mission field where Jesus' invitation to us holds up. "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest." I look forward to seeing you when we gather for our first ever One Day Assembly on May 11th. The Lodi Grape Festival Grounds will be a fitting place for us to consider our theme, "We are Church Together: Working in God's Vineyard." May you be blessed as you make your way to our Assembly past the vineyards and orchards and fields and ranches of the San Joaquin Valley. I pray this time will be as eye-opening for you as my first trip to the Valley was for me.

Thank you for the privilege of serving with you as the bishop of our Sierra Pacific Synod. Blessings in your lives and ministries!

Peace,
Bp. Mark

2019 Report of the Vice President

Welcome to the 32st Annual Synod Assembly of the Sierra Pacific Synod ELCA. Under the banner of ***“We are Church Together- working in God’s vineyard”*** I submit this report to the voting members of the Synod Assembly as well as to the members of congregations throughout the Synod.

I want to thank you for your support as your Vice President this past year. It has been an exciting and fruitful time but I could not have done any of this work without the help of:

Office of the Bishop - Bishop Mark Holmerud, Pr. Katy Grindberg , Pr. Kathryn Gulbranson, DEM Pr. Tita Valeriano

Synod office staff – Livvy Belisle, Sabrina Casillas, Debbie Cook, Laurie Gaumer, Kathy Hamm, Rachel Line, Diana Suruki

Conference Deans – Conf 1 Rev. Bill Wessner, Conf 2 Rev. Ned O’Donnell, Conf 3 Pr. Kristen Moore, Conf 4 Rev. Charlane Lines, Conf 5 Rev. John Kuehner, Conf 6 Rev. Manda Truchinski, Conf 7 Rev. Ray Waespi, Conf 8 Rev. Sylvia Mueller, Conf 9 Rev. Brian Malison

Synod Council – Conf 1 Sue Michaelson, Conf 2 Carl Brodt, Conf 3 Rev. Jason Bense, Conf 4 Linda Babcock, Conf 5 John Allured, Conf 6 Rev. Clark Brown, Conf 7 Sheela Boddu, Conf 8 Bill Turner, Conf 9 Rev. Paul Clark
At Large Reps (3) Rev. Gregory Brown, Rev. Tuhina Rasche, Lucy Allen
Youth Rep Sophia Hofmann, Young Adult Rep Nick Hayes
Treasurer Linda Lownes, Secretary Jeffrey Pennington, Bishop Mark Holmerud

A goal in 2018-19 for Synod Council was to be present and visible with our congregations. Being present at the “Chili with the Bishop” events, attending anniversary events with our ministry partners, and/or visiting congregations were ways your Synod Council made themselves present in our congregations. In addition to visiting and attending events in our Synod, we had our five Council meetings (one via Zoom) and fulfilled our duties of reviewing the Synod’s financial reports, electing members of Synod boards/committees, carrying out resolutions of the Synod Assembly, and providing oversight as the board of directors of your Synod. I am honored to be a member of your Synod Council.

As a member of Synod Council, I had the distinct pleasure and joy of meeting and worshipping with ministries and congregations in our Synod – this is the best part of being the VP. I met many of you at:

New Life Band Concert and Shrove Tuesday Pancakes @ Faith Lutheran Castro Valley, HymnFest 2018 @ Napa Valley Lutheran Church, Mt. Cross 70th Anniversary Celebration and SPSYC Middle School Retreat, PLTS Donor Consultation, Christ the Good Shepherd San Jose, St. Matthew Walnut Creek, St. James San Leandro, Holy Redeemer Newark*, Holy Shepherd Orinda*, Our Savior Lafayette*

** For these churches, I was their substitute pianist or choir member – and yes, I am available to come to your church if you need a substitute pianist.*

I represented our Synod at a Vice Presidents’ meeting in Chicago and gained a wealth of information about my role as a Vice President and the Bishop election our Synod will be having in 2020. I had the privilege of meeting a group of loving, hard-working individuals who have been called to serve as their Synod’s Vice President – God has an incredible way of leading us to service in ways we never thought would happen.

As we live into our church year, I want to remind all of us of the aspirational mission supported budget we approved last year. Mission support is the gift we give to turn our visions into missions as well as compensating our Synod staff for the work they do which benefits all congregations. We will be using various forms of media to give our congregations an update on how our mission support is making a difference with our ministry partners so make sure you are receiving the Synod's weekly newsletter. Synod Council will continue its visibility and communication with congregations and ministry partners. Please welcome them when they come to worship and perhaps allow them to say something during your announcements or coffee hour – they really want to meet you and hear what you are doing in your congregations.

As we look to 2020, we are very thankful for the work and deliberation of the Finance and Executive Committees. In developing the 2020-21 budget, we had the ability to look at the final numbers for the 2018-19 mission support year. Our aspiration to meet our mission support for 2018-19 fell short and it is now time to view our mission support with more clarity. There will be one 2020-21 budget presented to the Assembly for vote and it will be a neutral budget. Synod Council, who are the stewards of our mission support, approved this budget to better align our ministry endeavors with the gifts we receive from all of you. This was a long and arduous task for the Finance Committee and Synod Council and I commend them for putting forward a balanced budget.

In 2020, we will have a Bishop election. Bishop Holmerud has decided not to run for another term so we will be electing a new Bishop. For those who have gone through the process of calling a new pastor, think of this as the same process but on a much larger scale. We will be submitting a Synod Site Profile to the ELCA which means everyone has a chance to tell Synod Council and your Deans what you want in the next Bishop. More information on how we will solicit your ideas and nominations will be forthcoming.

Finally, I want to thank the Synod Assembly Planning Team for their hard work and patience in preparing our time here in Lodi. Whether it is a one or two day Assembly, it is still a laborious task and we are truly blessed to have people willing to provide their time and talent for this Assembly. Thank you to our guest speakers, volunteers, Churchwide representative, and St. Paul Lodi for your faithful work during this Assembly. With so many making our Synod and Church strong, I close with the following scripture from 1 Corinthians 12:12-13; 24-27:

12 The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. 13 Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit. 24 . . . God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. 25 This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. 26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

27 All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

May God bless you and strengthen you as you go out into the world.

Gail Kiyomura
Vice President
Sierra Pacific Synod ELCA

2019 Report of the Secretary

Actions of the Synod Council May 2018 – April 2019

The **Sierra Pacific Synod Council** met in May, June, and September of 2018 and in January of 2019. There was also one Council meeting by teleconference in February 2019. During the course of the year, synod staff members, representatives of our ministry partners, representatives of the ELCA, discipling team chairs, and many others actively participated in meetings and made important contributions.

Members of the Synod Council during this year included: Bishop Mark Holmerud, Vice President Elaine Whitney (completing her term on July 31, 2018), Vice President Gail Kiyomura (commencing her term on August 1, 2018), Treasurer Linda Lownes, Secretary Jeff Pennington, Sue Michaelsen (Conference 1 – Redwood Mountain), Carl Brodt (Conference 2 – Bridges), Pr. Jason Bense (Conference 3 – Capitol Valley), Linda Babcock (Conference 4 – Sierra Nevada Foothill), John Allured (Conference 5 – San Francisco Peninsula), Pr. Clark Brown (Conference 6 – El Camino Real), Sheela Boddu (Conference 7 – Mt. Diablo), Bill Turner (Conference 8 – Sierra Central Valley), Pr. Paul Clark (Conference 9 – Central San Joaquin Valley), Nicholas Hayes (Young Adult), Sophia Hofmann (Youth), Pr. Gregory Brown (At-Large), Pr. Tuhina Rasche (At-Large), Gail Kiyomura (At-Large; resigned on July 31, 2018 to commence her term as Vice President), and Lucy Allen (At-Large; appointed by Council in June to fill Gail Kiyomura’s At-Large position effective August 1).

Following Pastor Tita Valeriano’s appointment in March 2018 as ELCA Domestic Mission Director for Evangelical Mission deployed to the Sierra Pacific Synod, Pastor Valeriano resigned from her At-Large position on the Synod Council. At its May 2018 meeting, pursuant to Synod Constitution S10.01.03., Council elected Pastor Tuhina Rasche to fill the position for the remaining two years of the three-year term.

Similarly, following her election at the 2018 Synod Assembly as Vice President, Gail Kiyomura resigned from her At-Large position, effective July 31. At its June 2018 meeting, pursuant to Synod Constitution S10.01.03., Council elected Lucy Allen to fill the position for the remaining one year of the three-year term.

At its September 14-15, 2018 meeting, the Synod Council elected John Allured, Pr. Paul Clark, and Sue Michaelsen to the **Executive Committee**, joining Bishop Mark Holmerud, Vice President Gail Kiyomura, Treasurer Linda Lownes, and Secretary Jeff Pennington, who, as officers of the Synod, serve ex officio on the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee establishes the agenda for Synod Council meetings, acts on roster and personnel matters following policies established by the Synod Council, acts in place of the Synod Council when decisions are required between regularly scheduled meetings of the Council, and performs any other functions of the Council assigned to it by the Council. Executive Committee activities are reported and reviewed at the succeeding meeting of the Synod Council. The Executive Committee met—either in-person or virtually—in November and December of 2018 and in January and March of 2019.

Roster:

During the year, the Synod Council acted on the following roster issues:

- Approved On Leave from Call (new/renewed):
 - o The Rev. David Bates
 - o The Rev. Paul Clark
 - o The Rev. Pamela Schaefer Dawson
 - o The Rev. Michael Zurek

- Called to Special Ministry:
 - o The Rev. Tomas Bayou as Hospice Spiritual Counselor for Mission Hospice

- o and Home Care, San Mateo, CA
- o The Rev. Steve Churchill as chaplain at Alma Via of San Rafael, CA
- o The Rev. Sandi Olson Decker as Chaplain with Bridge Home Health and Hospice in Monterey County, CA
- o Deacon Anurag Mani, as chaplain with John Muir Health in Concord, CA
- Called to Intentional Interim Ministry:
 - o The Rev. Pamela Griffith Pond
- Extended non-stipendiary call:
 - o Crystal Larsen, United in Grace Lutheran Church, Vallejo, CA, for service as hospice chaplain
 - o The Rev. Michael Meyer, "Healing Ministries" of St. John's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA
 - o The Rev. Tuhina Rasche, University AME Zion Church, Palo Alto, CA
 - o The Rev. Sanna Reinholtzen, University Lutheran Chapel, Berkeley, CA
- Moved to Disability Roster:
 - o The Rev. Rebecca Swee
- Moved to Retired Roster
 - o The Rev. James Elder
 - o Deacon Doug Haugen
 - o The Rev. Robin Ressler
 - o The Rev. Charles Urban
- Review and Approval of Letter of Invitation to Extended Service (for non-ELCA pastors serving ELCA congregations)
 - o The Rev. Jerilyn Dahlke (PCUSA), St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, El Dorado Hills, CA
 - o The Rev. Ed Hilton (PCUSA), Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tahoe City, CA
 - o The Rev. Deborah Hubbard (PCUSA), Grace Good Shepherd Presbyterian-Lutheran Church, McKinleyville, CA
 - o The Rev. Randy Knutson (Episcopal), Trinity Lutheran Church, Fort Bragg, CA
 - o The Rev. Monique Ortiz (UCC), Santa Maria y Santa Marta Lutheran Church, San Francisco, CA
 - o The Rev. Jim Rogers (PCUSA), Trinity Lutheran Church, Porterville, CA
 - o The Rev. Scott Trevithick (PCUSA), Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Reno, NV
 - o The Rev. Diana Turner (Episcopal), Hope Lutheran Church of the Sierra, South Lake Tahoe, CA
 - o The Rev. Friederike Wekel (Evangelical Church in Germany) to serve as vicar at Grace Lutheran Church, Palo Alto, CA

Constitutional Provisions:

The 2018 Synod Assembly passed a revision to Bylaw S7.22.01. of the Synod Constitution. The Constitution was subsequently updated to reflect this revision.

The Synod Council approved Constitutional and Bylaws changes for the following congregations:

- Atonement Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

- Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Reno, NV
- Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, Granite Bay, CA
- Salinas Valley Lutheran Outreach Synodically Authorized Worship Community
- St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, El Dorado Hills, CA

Other actions:

At the 2018 Synod Assembly, no voting member to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly was elected from Conference 4 – Sierra Nevada Foothills or from Conference 7 – Mt. Diablo. Pursuant to S9.01.01.e. of the Synod Constitution, at its meeting on September 14-15, 2018, Council appointed Pastor Mary Lou Petitjean as Conference 4 clergy voting member and Doug Miller as Conference 7 lay male voting member to the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

Over the course of the year, the Synod Council authorized the following new worshipping communities, in accordance with Synod Policy 95 - 001 Policies and Procedures for Synodically Authorized Worshipping Communities:

- Christ Lutheran Lahu Ministry, Pastor Samee Singkeovilay, servant leader, for outreach to the Lahu community of Visalia, in conjunction with Christ Lutheran Church, Visalia, CA
- Fresno Bilingual Ministry, Ms. Lucy Allen, servant leader, in conjunction with Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Fresno, CA
- Greater Stockton Area Bilingual Ministry, Vicar Frances Le Bas, servant leader, in conjunction with St. Paul Lutheran Church, Lodi, CA and Zion Lutheran Church, Stockton, CA

Likewise, over the course of the year, the Synod Council made the following appointments to Synod committees, discipling teams, and boards:

- Candidacy Committee (three-year term)
 - o The Rev. Manda Truchinski, Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, San Jose, CA
 - o Elaine Whitney, St. Francis Lutheran Church, San Francisco, CA
- Consultation Committee (six-year term)
 - o The Rev. Chad Adamik, St. Paul's Lutheran Family, Carson City, NV
 - o David Anderson, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church/La Iglesia Luterana Nuestro Redentor, Livingston, CA
- Committee on Synod Documents Committee, a.k.a. Constitutional Review Committee (three-year term)
 - o Christian Jennert, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Oakland, CA
- Finance Committee (three-year term)
 - o The Rev. John Kuehner, Unity Lutheran Church, South San Francisco, CA
 - o Sandra Schonning, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Oakland, CA
 - o Deacon Lou Smith, Advent Lutheran Church, Citrus Heights, CA
- Investment Committee (three-year term)
 - o Joan Kierhaefer, Holy Shepherd Lutheran Church, Orinda, CA
- Racial and Ethnic Ministry Strategies Discipling Team (staggered terms at first, then three-year terms)
 - o Sheela Boddu, Good Shepherd South Asian Ministry, Fremont, CA (term ends 2020)
 - o The Rev. Linda Boston, Lutheran Church of the Master, Sacramento, CA (term ends 2021)

- o The Rev. Anne Carlson, New Creation Lutheran Church, San Jose, CA (term ends 2020)
- o The Rev. Trudy Franzen, St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, El Dorado Hills, CA (term ends 2020)
- o The Rev. Brent Hillestand, First Lutheran Church, Palo Alto, CA (term ends 2019)
- o Frances Le Bas, St. Paul Lutheran Church, Lodi, CA (term ends 2019)
- o Stephanie Leong, First Lutheran Church, Palo Alto, CA (term ends 2021)
- o The Rev. Monique Ortiz, Santa Maria y Santa Marta Lutheran Church, San Francisco, CA (term ends 2021)
- o The Rev. Ned O'Donnell, Trinity Lutheran Church, Oakland, CA and East Bay Lutheran Parish – Lutheran Ministry to Nursing Homes; Dean, Conference 2 – Bridges (term ends 2019)
- Lutheran Social Services of Northern California Board
 - o Susan Taylor, St. John's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA
- Mt. Cross Board of Directors (three-year term)
 - o The Rev. Sara Pearson, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Saratoga, CA
- Elder Care Alliance Board of Directors (three-year term)
 - o Ericka Ryan (Lutheran appointee)
 - o Raja Sekaran (Lutheran appointee)
 - o Lynne Katzmann (joint appointee with the Sisters of Mercy West Midwest Community)

Every effort is made to post the minutes of Synod Council meetings on the Synod's website soon after they are approved at the next subsequent Council meeting.

In Christ,



Jeffrey A Pennington
Synod Secretary