

Director for Evangelical Mission – Annual Report to Assembly

We, the church, are living in a new season. I believe that in this new season, God is inviting us to carefully and faithfully examine how we go about the work of sharing the story of the love and forgiveness we experience in Jesus Christ. What we know with certainty is that the methodologies, modalities, and processes that have carried us this far aren't as effective as they once were. At the same time, we know with certainty that the world's need and hunger for belonging and belief has only deepened.

In this new season, we are invited to let go of what was so that our hands can be free to embrace what is and what will be. This is often grief-filled work, but it is always hope-filled work.

As Lutherans, we are a reformation people. We are a faith tradition born of disruptive change to the way things were so that more people might have access to the gospel. As followers of Christ, we worship a Lord that disrupts the status quo so new life might emerge for all of creation. Faithfully navigating this season of change calls upon us all to vigilantly lean into our identities as reformers and disruptive disciples so that we can be the means by which Christ is made known in new ways to new people in new places.

This season of vigilance is being lived out in the Southeast Michigan Synod as we reexamine our funding strategies through the Fund for Mission. Work has been done, and work continues, to bring present and future funding decisions in better alignment with the synod's mission, the strategic recommendations provided to the ELCA by Barna and Fuller, and our commitment as Lutherans to create access to the gospel. This realignment, itself, brings change so that we might better identify and support new opportunities to respond to where God is leading in this day.

This season of vigilance is also being lived out in the Southeast Michigan Synod through the work of Holy Closure. Holy Closure, while gut-wrenching, is a sacred opportunity to live into the realities of death and resurrection in the here and now. As the Director for Evangelical Mission, some of the most powerfully missional conversations I've been blessed to experience are with faith communities that have decided to close. As these faith communities reflect and share about who God has called them to be in their season of life, there is a genuine commitment to providing the means for new life as they distribute their assets (physical, financial, and spiritual) to other ministries. It might sound counter-intuitive, but walking with congregations experiencing Holy Closure has been some of the most hope-filled work for the ways that faith is able to be lived out with joyfully reckless abandon.

In this new season, there aren't any quick fixes to the challenges many congregations are facing. That being said, what I want to invite you to consider is that this new season requires every person in every church, from the youngest child to the oldest elder, to consider themselves to be the primary evangelist of the congregation. What we once tried to "hire" in a pastor was always more than one person could or should carry. The work of sharing the gospel with passion and fervor is the work of all of us every day of every week of

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every year our lives. There's a world in deep need of receiving the gift of Christ's love and forgiveness we so cherish. As people transformed by this gift, as people committed to worshiping God week after week in our churches, it's time for us all to unabashedly tell everybody we know about how wonderful God is and how impactful our faith communities are to us and our communities. This is where I believe the Spirit is leading and guiding for such a time as this, and I believe this is the way for us to be a part of bringing disruptive hope to the whole of creation.