



# Still Reforming...

2016 Synod Assembly Highlights

“GOD IS STILL REFORMING!” Bishop Burkat declared to the 2016 Synod Assembly. Lutherans gathered from across Southeastern Pennsylvania to worship, pray, and discern in community explored how we can go outside our doors and listen to our neighbors in ways faithful to our 500-year Reformation heritage.

## Spirit Brings “A New Dawn for Christ’s Church”

When Martin Luther seized the possibilities of the printing press, he couldn’t have imagined the exponential change of the Internet age, Bishop Claire Burkat told the 2016 Synod Assembly. Despite the stresses posed by constant connectivity, racing schedules and financial pressures, “the Holy Spirit is bringing a new dawn for Christ’s Church,” the bishop said.



**“Get outside the doors ... we are called to be a reforming people.”**

*Bishop Burkat*

A glimmer can be seen in emerging generations that have little interest in institutional religion, value diversity of all kinds, and distrust most authority. The disconnect is significant: Almost two-thirds of the population of Southeastern Pennsylvania is under age 44, while Lutherans are older on average and nearly half of SEPA pastors could retire in the next 10 years. **“To reach this very young culture we need to change our old church culture now,” the bishop said.** “We don’t need to change the core Christian message... but we do need to change the ways and the places by which we proclaim Christ” to people who are now four generations removed from cradle-to-grave faith formation.

That’s why it is so urgent for the Forward Together in Faith campaign to help us reimagine how we are the church and resource our future. The goal is to raise

\$2.5 million by 2019, to create momentum for this Synod to move into the next phase of ministry.

“We need to stop just talking to people; we need to invite them to tell their stories,” the bishop said. We need to show concern for all people, and get out of our buildings. “We are not acolytes of the temple. We are ambassadors for Christ.”

Every church can’t do everything, so we launch synodical ministries that we do together. The Bishop showed a video about Living Gospel Ministries’ life-changing work with formerly incarcerated people as one example. But every congregation has something to give, she said. She shared how Jerusalem and St. Michael’s churches in Sellersville collaborated on a community garden to supply local food pantries, and St. John, Ambler and Kairos Community partnered in The Well women’s shelter, organized by the Welcome Church.

Such energy and collaborations are the “adjacent possible” that open up more diversity and creativity. “Do not lose heart; we are here for such a time as this,” the bishop said. “Just watch what God is going to be doing.”

Bishop Burkat outlined what we can - and shouldn’t - do to engage those outside church.



### DO...

- Be resilient
- Take risks
- Get out of the building
- Listen to life stories
- Embrace small initiatives



### DON'T...

- Fear failure
- Try to be all things to all people
- Punish experimentation
- Allow your own people to limit your welcome of others

## Forward Together: Being Church in New Ways

In our post-9/11, globalized world of “nones” and “dones,” what draws people to church? “This is a Kairos moment,” says the Rev. Bryan Penman, when God’s grace leads us to new ways of being the Church.

The Forward Together in Faith campaign supports congregations as they reform and become networkers, innovators, communicators and equippers, explained Penman, pastor of St. Mark, Conshohocken, and a campaign leader.

“We are called to be networks of resources to help those in need, to be innovators with the work of the Spirit, to be communicators of God’s grace, to be equippers of the saints,” he said.

The campaign is already helping congregations with mission assessments, communications advice and innovation grants to demonstrate what can happen if the Synod pulls together to support new initiatives.



University Lutheran Church on the Penn and Drexel campuses is one of more than two dozen congregations that have taken a mission assessment. Pastor Fritz Fowler says that the insights provide by the assessment “have changed the way we do church.”

The campaign awarded a \$1,000 innovation grant to Christ the King Lutheran Church of the Deaf for work helping to resettle deaf and hearing impaired refugees.

Faith, Woodhaven received a communications audit awarded at last year’s Assembly. Pastor Owen Griffiths says a consultant provided needed advice to develop their website and social media.

A Challenge from Bishop Burkat

## We Will Reach the Goal Together

For a year now, we have used start up money to begin piloting initiatives for the Forward Together in Faith campaign. We are confident that TOGETHER we will equip our clergy and lay leaders with the tools, insights, resources and navigation needed for future Lutheran witness.

You have heard the \$2.5 million goal for this campaign. It is bold. It is hopeful. **And yes, it is doable.** This goal will be achieved because we will act on it TOGETHER.

I invite all of you TOGETHER to prayerfully consider being a part of this bold initiative to fund our future. I am asking individuals and congregations to give. I am asking all rostered leaders to give. And I’m asking you to ask others who will ask others, who will ask others who love this church and look forward to the amazing ministry we can do together.

**Be prayerful.** Allow your faith story to inform and guide your response to this invitation. Think about your own family and congregation and the six generations that need to be reached through a transforming relationship with Christ. When God becomes a part of these decisions, all things are possible.

**Let this possibility take your breath away.** Imagine



doing something for this campaign that you never thought possible. Look at your capacity and challenge yourselves and your congregations to do something that is outside your comfort zone.

### **Believe it can happen!**

One-hundred percent of our deans, staff and Synod Council have committed to the Forward Together in Faith campaign. Thirty congregations are already making plans to bring this BIG ASK to their people. So far we have almost a quarter-million dollars pledged from early supporters – individuals and a few congregations. We will need \$10 gifts and \$100,000 gifts, and everything in between.

As you embrace this invitation remember – *The Holy Spirit is at work here. Christ is at the center of this vision. God believes in us.*

**TOGETHER we can make this happen!**

The Rev. Claire Burkat,  
bishop

# Reformation 500: 'Explore, Empower and Be Energized'



Rev. Dr. Kirsi Stjerna of PLTS

The upcoming 500th anniversary of the Reformation is a gift to the church. It's an opportunity to explore, empower, and be energized. It's a chance to reconnect to our deepest tradition of freedom and to reform stale and stagnant

observations of a tradition that began with Luther's fresh reading of the scriptures and the new world that opened to him as he engaged new questions.

In often wide-ranging discussions, The Rev. Dr. Kirsi Stjerna, who teaches Lutheran history and theology at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, shared two keynote addresses and led a forum through which she explored the roots and key issues of the Reformation, and possible future directions for the church as it approaches what can be an opportunity for Lutherans to renew their relationship with the ongoing work of reforming and meeting the changing expressions of culture.

**"We can't be in a bubble or our tradition will die,"** Stjerna said, noting that the church can move forward as a reforming presence in the 21st century. She spoke about paying attention to "urgencies" in our times, areas that Lutherans must engage in order to bridge the reformation begun during Luther's time with the future. These include inclusivity, marriage and sexuality, spirituality, and hospitality.

## Balanced Budget Approved

The Assembly approved a balanced budget for fiscal 2017 that reflects the continuing decrease in Mission Support contributions from churches. In 2015 Mission Support totaled \$1.97 million, a decrease of \$180,000 from 2014, reported Treasurer Janet Neff, CPA. The Synod has been responsible managing with diminishing resources, she said. **Since 2010, Mission Support has declined 16%, while the Synod has reduced its expenditures 25% over that same period.**

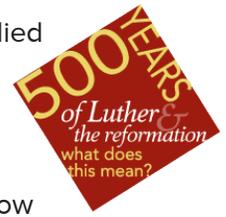
The 2017 plan was based on actual receipts from 2015, according to Sue Massey, chair of the finance committee. It maintains a 50% tithe of Mission Support to the ELCA churchwide organization, because "we are an interdependent church," Neff said. The plan also maintains contributions to the seminary, Bear Creek Camp, and other partners, as well as support for youth, new missions and global companionships.

"Lutheran theology calls for embodied presence." For Stjerna, key to understanding the Reformation movement are the new understandings that formed the foundation of Lutheran theology: how grace and freedom are connected. Lutherans have inherited a tradition that promotes equality, freedom, spiritual health, welfare and education of all, and that values children, sexuality and human relations. This tradition calls the church to be very much in the world, totally inclusive and sharing the Gospel with all.

She spoke about conflict and confusion in congregations and possible ways to address this by courageously engaging relevant questions:

*What makes us uniquely Lutheran today? Why would anybody want to be Lutheran? What is the potential for the future? What unites us? What issues do we have to overcome? Who will be "with" us? Who will lead?*

Stjerna spoke of grace as a "defiant notion" and emphasized the ways our lives are "driven by God's grace into the world." Because of the Reformation, we have more "freedom to question" and this gives us many spiritual points-of-view to add to the rich diversity across the church. The anniversary is an opportunity to observe who we have become, reflect on what is core to our tradition, and begin to express that differently as we celebrate the genesis of a new time of reformation in the life of the church.



# Now is the time for Forward Together in Faith

A perfect storm of influences, within the church and without, make it urgent for our Synod to re-imagine our future as church. Our region's population is growing younger, while Lutherans and their pastors grow older. Just 15% of SEPA congregations are growing. Costs increase as giving declines.

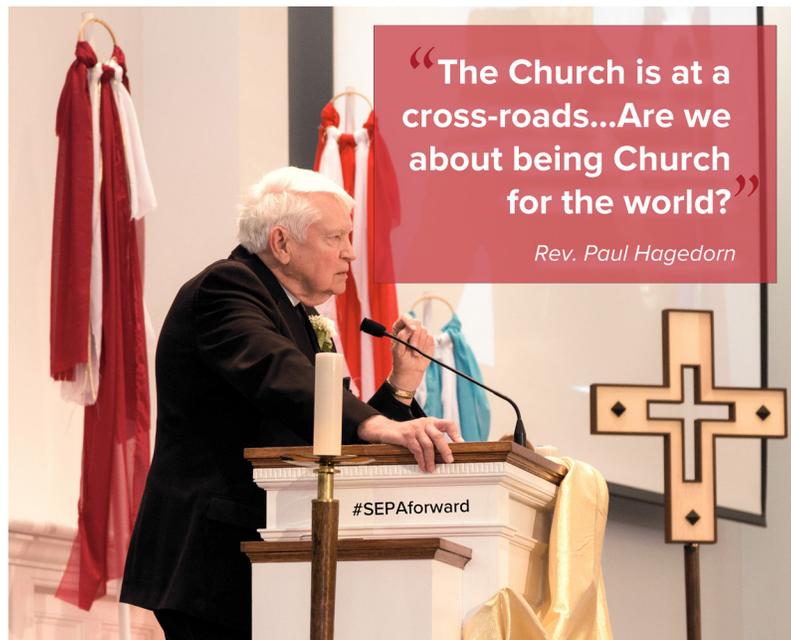
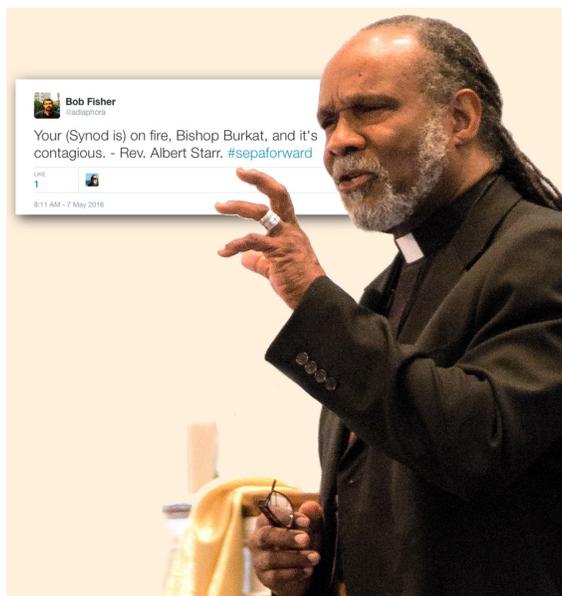
which will resource our future with \$2.5 million to **equip leaders for innovative ministry, network ministry practitioners and help us better communicate God's story** in a digital age.



Although Bishop Burkat will be completing her final term in 2018, this campaign will have great influence on the church for generations. "Please do not saddle future Synod leadership by delaying an initiative we need to do now," she says. *See more on page 2*

Our Synod is responding to these challenges with the Forward Together in Faith Campaign,

The results of the mission assessment "have changed the way we do church at UniLu." - Pastor Fritz Fowler



Living Gospel and Pastor Manson "helped me to get back into society on a foundation. And I think God every day for that. I'm so grateful." - Darryl, returning citizen.

