ON THE ROAD TOGETHER

Traveling into the next 500 years
INTRODUCTION
In 2017 the ELCA, together with Lutherans around the world, will observe the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. This significant milestone provides an opportunity for the Eastern North Dakota Synod as well as the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in American to look back with joy to our deep theological roots and faith traditions. In addition, our history of being a reformed and reforming church invites us to a future filled with abundant hope and possibilities.

The preparation for moving boldly into the future began in November of 2014. Our Synod Council unanimously voted to engage in a new visioning process in order to chart the mission and ministry of the synod over the next 5 years. The primary objective was to emerge with a strategic vision, thoughtful goals and initial action steps. The result is what we believe to be a BOLD vision, strategies and goals which will not only guide but inspire the ministries of the Eastern North Dakota Synod.

Strategic planning is different from long range planning in that it assumes a constantly changing environment rather than a static environment. As a result, the process is never complete, but always evolving through continued feedback, evaluation and revision. This is not a static set of “blueprints,” rather a map for us to use to navigate into God’s promised future. It is for this reason the recommendation to the Synod Council is for endorsement of the Strategic Plan rather than for approval. It is vitally important to conduct six month and annual reviews and revisions of the plan. As the environment changes, strategies and goals may be adjusted, eliminated or added.

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
Called, gathered and sent into the world to embody the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we exist to be a reforming, renewing and reconciling expression of God’s grace as we seek to live out the mission of Eastern North Dakota Synod, “Jesus Christ calls us to live in love as we serve, equip and challenge God’s people.”

1. WE ARE CHURCH
We are what God has made us—people whom God has created by grace to live in union with Jesus Christ and have been prepared to live faithful, fruitful lives by the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10). In Jesus Christ, God has reconciled us to God and to each other. This life in Christ is what defines, shapes and guides us as a community of faith, the church. By God’s grace we can and do live confidently and generously in this community of faith and in service of others, amidst the mysteries and paradoxes of this life in Christ—including our human limitations and failings, and the ambiguities, uncertainties and suffering that we experience. (Adapted from Called Forward Together in Christ, ELCA Future Directions)

2. WE ARE LUTHERAN
We are a church that walks by faith, trusting God’s promise in the gospel and knowing we exist by and for the proclamation of this gospel word. We proclaim Jesus Christ was crucified and raised from the dead for the life of the world. As the apostle Paul wrote (Romans 1:16-17), we are not ashamed of this gospel ministry because it is God’s power for saving all people who trust the God who makes these promises. God’s word, specifically God’s promise in Jesus Christ, creates this liberated, confident and generous faith. God gives the Holy Spirit who uses gospel proclamation—in preaching and sacraments, in forgiveness and in healing conversations—to create and sustain this faith. As a
Lutheran church, we give central place to this gospel message in our ministry. We understand to be Lutheran is to be ecumenical—committed to the oneness to which God calls the world in the saving gift of Jesus Christ, recognizing the brokenness of the church in history and the call of God to heal this disunity. (Adapted from Called Forward Together in Christ, ELCA Future Directions)

3. WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER
Just as God has joined us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in baptism, we are also joined in all communities of Christian faith around the world. In Christ none of us lives in isolation from others. Jesus is our peace and has broken down the walls that divide us—walls of judgment, hatred, condemnation and violence—and has made us into one, new human community (Ephesians 2:14-15) (Adapted from Called Forward Together in Christ, ELCA Future Directions)

4. WE ARE CHURCH FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD
Christ has freed us from sin and death, even from ourselves, so we can live as ministers of reconciliation in loving and generous service of our neighbors (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). In Jesus Christ, all of life—every act of service, in every daily calling, in every corner of life—flows freely from a living, daring confidence in God's grace. Freed by the transformative life of Christ, we give ourselves freely in transforming service with the neighbor. Through a wide range of daily vocations and ministries, we nurture faith, build alliances and gather resources for a healed, reconciled and just world. As church together, we faithfully strive to participate in God’s reconciling work, which prioritizes disenfranchised, vulnerable and displaced people in our communities and the world. We discover and explore our vocations in relation to God through education and moral deliberation. We bear witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ through dialogue and collaboration with ecumenical partners and with other faiths. In all these ministries God's generosity flows through us into the life of the world. (Adapted from Called Forward Together in Christ, ELCA Future Directions)

THE PROCESS
In February of 2015, the process began with a synod ministry review. A team from outside the synod was invited to immerse themselves in the mission and ministry of Eastern North Dakota Synod. The team assembled was (names and positions to come). While in Eastern North Dakota, the team met with the synod council, conference deans, synod staff, North Dakota community leaders and lay and rostered leaders at three listening posts. Following the completion of the Synod Ministry Review, Bishop Brandt was charged by the synod council to form a visioning team. The team assembled was Dr. Phyllis Johnson, Ms. Jakelle Cornell, Dr. Joel Kangas, Mr. Jon Rustvang, Pastor Joe Johnson, Pastor Chuck Olmstead, Pastor Valerie Teppo, Ms. Kathy Fick, Ms. Becky Goetz and Bishop Terry Brandt. The process was facilitated by Jessica Thomasson, C.E.O. of Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota. The team met four times for approximately three hours per meeting. After much discussion, this team identified three key areas where the synod should emphasize its work:

1. Recruit, Develop, Cultivate
2. Equip, Mentor, Grow
3. Care and Redeem

The report of the visioning team was reviewed by the Eastern North Dakota Synod Council retreat at Red Willow Bible Camp on April 30, 2016. At the retreat, Bishop Terry Brandt, Dr. Phyllis Johnson, Ms. Shar Gumke, Rev. Jerry Rosin and Ms. Dianne Billey were appointed to complete a draft of a strategic plan to be voted on at the November, 2016 Synod Council meeting. The strategic plan “On the Road Together—Traveling into the next 500 years” was endorsed by the Eastern North Dakota Synod Council on November 19, 2016.
INITIATIVE ONE: Intentionally raise up the work we do together as a Church
Strategies: Develop a five-year emphasis that engages the congregations of the Eastern North Dakota Synod to grow in their understanding of and commitment to what it means to be the Church together. These emphases are aligned with the capital campaign themes of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. During each year, our annual Rostered Leaders gathering, Synod Assembly and other collateral material/programming will focus on the emphasis.

2015 New and Renewing Congregations
2016 Hunger and Poverty
2017 Global Church
2018 Leadership, Youth and Young Adults
2019 To be determined

INITIATIVE TWO: Increase ecumenical relationships
Strategies:

2016 Host the first of a two-year commitment to a Spring Theological Day with the Fargo Diocese for both lay and restored leaders
2016 Create a 500th Reformation Anniversary Team
2017 Create an assembly with an emphasis on ecumenical partnerships
2018 Explore interest in developing a network of denominational leaders with Ecumenical partners

INITIATIVE THREE: Implement a plan for increasing mission support and strategize additional funding streams to enhance synod ministries
Strategies:

2015 Revitalize our culture of stewardship within Eastern North Dakota Synod by forming a stewardship team, beginning congregational stewardship consultations and hosting synod wide educational events
2016 Launch the synod’s first online giving campaign on “Giving Hearts Day”
2016 Train and commission “Mission Interpreters”
   Note: Mission Interpreters are leaders who are equipped to say “thank you”, hear the stories of congregations and tell the stories of the synod and ELCA.
2016 Incorporate a fundraising goal into our annual mission plan
2016 Initiate intentional efforts toward donor appreciation and cultivation
2017 Create a volunteer Development Board
2017 Invite Victoria Flood, Director of Mission Support, ELCA to assist in developing a comprehensive plan for Mission Support
2017 Establish a grant writing team
2018 Call/hire a part-time Development Director

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)"
2018 Develop and implement a plan to understand and communicate the needs and goals of ministry partners

Note: Ministry partners are chosen annually at the Eastern North Dakota Synod assembly. Currently receiving funding are Luther Seminary, North Dakota Lutheran Campus Ministry, Dacotah Oyate, Native American Christian Ministries, First Sudanese and ministries of the Central African Republic.

2019 Identify a lead gift for a new endowment fund in the synod focused on mission

INITIATIVE FOUR: Create a “Culture of Call” and examine how all the baptized are called to share the good news of the gospel in our lives

Strategies:

2016 Focus on increasing youth and young adult participation in Synod Assembly by hosting a first annual “Youth Summit”

2016 Host first annual “Discerning Your Call” event for adults

2018 Host “Discerning Your Call” events for elementary, middle school and high school students

INITIATIVE FIVE: Increase educational opportunities for lay and rostered leaders

Strategies:

2015 Begin annual council training events

2016 Expand our efforts to further develop our plan for Lay School of Theology

2016 Compile a faith formation team to assist congregations in teaching and passing on the faith

2016 Create and implement a senior pastor’s course

2017 Create a Synodically Authorized Ministers policy

Note: Synodically Authorized Ministers (SAM’s) are lay people who are authorized by the bishop to perform pastoral acts in the absence of an ordained minister.

2018 Assist pastors in accessing our ELCA’s national redevelopers trainings

INITIATIVE SIX: Explore new ministries and assist in the work of congregational renewal

Strategies:

2015 Begin Congregational Ministry Reviews

Note: Congregational Ministry Reviews consist of a synod team immersing itself in the context, mission and ministry of a congregation and/or parish resulting in affirmations of the present and recommendations for the future.

2015 Host “Re-Rooting in God’s Mission” and “Discovering Hope” events

2016 Begin annual “Multi-Point Parish” events

2017 Develop strategies for area ministry conversations

Note: Area ministry conversations are a process of bringing congregations together to discern whether or not God might be calling them to partner in new ways.

2017 Create an “Evangelizing Congregations Ready Bench”

Note: “Ready Bench” is synonymous with committee, team, task force, etc.
2017 Create a “Mission Redevelopers” group
Note: Mission Redevelopers are pastors serving sites committed to intentional conversation regarding significant changes for the future.

2017 Host Fargo and Grand Forks Conference leaders in conversation concerning possible new mission start(s)

2018 Host summit with full communion partners on congregational renewal and new mission start(s)

2019 Facilitate a “Churches Planting Churches Conference”

INITIATIVE SEVEN: Increase efforts working towards developing multi-ethnic ministries and confronting racism
Strategies:

2016 Create a “Multi-Cultural Ready Bench”

2016 Call a Multi-Ethnic Mission Developer

2017 Host community leader conversations regarding changing culture

2018 Explore the possibility of starting an ELCA Hispanic Ministry in Eastern North Dakota

2018 Develop and implement a plan to deepen relationship and partnership with Dacotah O’yate Lutheran, Sudanese Lutheran and Native American Christian Ministry

INITIATIVE EIGHT: Deepen existing global partnership and explore new possibilities
Strategies:

2016 Create an “Inter-Faith Ready Bench”

2017 Create an assembly with focus on inter-religious dialogue

2017 Restructure the Global Missions Committee; dispersing tasks and inviting more involvement

2017 Invite Andrew Steele with ELCA Global Missions to attend a synod council meeting to help us discern other possible partnerships, i.e. South Sudan

2018 Create a 5-year campaign for support and partnership in the Central African Republic (with consultation from our synod’s Global Mission Committee) and explore other partnership opportunities (South Sudan).

EMPHASIS

INITIATIVE NINE: Foster collegiality and increase communication with our Rostered Leaders, congregations, conferences and specialized and partner ministries
Strategies:

2016 Begin meeting quarterly with Conference Deans

2016 Begin meeting quarterly with Interim Pastors

2016 Begin meeting bi-annually with Chaplains

2017 Begin meeting bi-annually with Synodically Authorized Ministers

2017 Conference caucusing at synod assembly in place of fall conference gatherings

Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
2017 Host monthly meetings among solo, associate and senior pastors and lay leaders
2017 Enhance the role of conference deans by creating a job description prioritizing pastoral care and collegial relationships
2018 Develop and implement a communication plan which will include but not be limited to social media, website, videos, creation of a writing team and yearly magazine
2018 Continue to grow the Eastern North Dakota Synod Endowment Fund to increase support for seminarians and leaders

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
As a synod, we are “on the road together” and this is the direction we feel God is calling us to in the years to come. The Synod Council has endorsed this action plan and invites our Rostered Leaders, Congregations, Ministry Partners, and members to join us in walking along this journey.

The Synod Council has appointed a team of three to four persons together with the Bishop to conduct an ongoing evaluation of this plan. Each year, at the August meeting, the Synod Council will revisit this plan and adapt as necessary.

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths yet untrodden, through perils unknown.
Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.
- Morning Prayer - Evangelical Lutheran Worship pg. 304