

## 2016 assembly set for June

Save the date and plan to join us at the 2016 Upstate New York Synod Assembly, June 5-7, at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center ([www.rrcc.com](http://www.rrcc.com)).

Our accommodations in 2016 will be back at the Radisson Hotel Rochester Riverside ([www.radisson.com/rochester-hotel-ny-14604/nyroches](http://www.radisson.com/rochester-hotel-ny-14604/nyroches)).

Our 2016 focus is on advocacy and social justice. We plan on looking at some of the justice issues that were addressed in resolutions passed at the 2015 synod assembly, especially those around racial justice.

### Save the date

#### 2016 Upstate New York Synod Assembly

Sunday through Tuesday, June 5-7, 2016

Rochester Riverside Convention Center

[www.rrcc.com](http://www.rrcc.com)

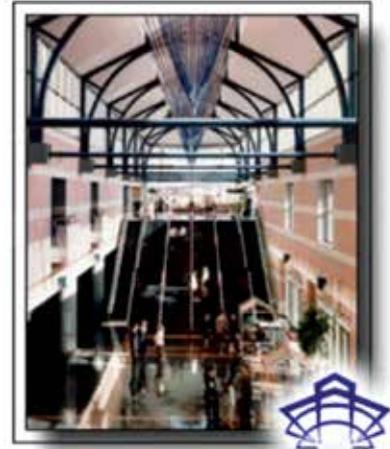
Our Synod Assembly Planning Team is working diligently to offer an exciting and energizing experience at our 2016 gathering.

Registration will open April 1, 2016. More details will be announced

closer to the opening of registration. Hotel and food costs are in addition to the registration fee and will be listed when the online registration opens.

The synod assembly is open to people of all ages who want to attend, not just rostered leaders and congregational voting members. Child care will be offered.

Watch for regular assembly information and documents announced in "The Upstate Update" beginning in mid-March. □



## Convocation & 'Means of Grace'

The second annual Bishop's Convocation will be held March 12 at St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Camillus. We will welcome the Rev. Kevin Strickland, executive for worship and assistant to the ELCA presiding bishop.

Strickland will lead us through conversations focusing on the "Means of Grace": how do we offer it, care for it and receive it? How do these gifts of grace help shape our liturgy and lives of study and prayer? What are the biggest challenges facing worship today? In an ever-changing world, how do we as church leaders continue to offer these "Means of Grace," inviting all into these as gifts and not legalistic prescriptions to our faith?

Strickland is humbled and honored to have been called into the position of assistant to the

presiding bishop, Elizabeth A. Eaton. Presently he serves on the Consultation for Common Text, Resource Management Team with Augsburg Fortress, the North American Academy of the Catechumenate Planning Team, and other churchwide committees.

Strickland is an honors graduate of Newberry (S.C.) College with a Bachelor of Arts in religion and philosophy with a minor in history. He obtained a Masters of Divinity from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, S.C.

Watch for more information about the event and registration in upcoming issues of the "The Upstate Update." □



Kevin Strickland

Thank you for spending some time reading this edition of *The Lutheran* and our synod insert. If you know someone who could benefit from our biweekly newsletter, "The Upstate Update," please tell them to visit our website at [www.upstatenynsynod.org](http://www.upstatenynsynod.org) to sign up.

# Why for God's sake do we exist?

By Norma Malfatti

**W**hy for God's sake do we exist? Where in Jesus' name are we going? How by the power of the Spirit will we get there?" When you study the Bible do you ask these questions? When wrestling with important (and perhaps not so important) decisions at council meetings, do these questions drive your decision-making? If not, 2016 could be the time to start asking them.

Lately I've been pondering these questions alongside Isaiah 43:19-21: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise."

God spoke these words to the Israelites in the midst of uncertainty and fear about the future. They were wondering how they could even be God's people when everything was different from what it was before.

While the Upstate New York Synod may not be in the same place as those Israelites, there is a fair amount of uncertainty about the future. Culture is changing faster than we can blink, which means your congregation, our synod and the whole of the church (the ELCA and Christianity as a whole) are changing too. We are learning what it means to be the church in the 21st century and beyond.

Day after day my Facebook news feed is filled with articles about how the church is failing and how we can't answer in any meaningful way why we exist, where we are going and how we are going to get there. What these articles have in common is the reality that we don't really know what it means to be church today and we want desperately to find a silver-bullet answer. The truth is, there is no silver-bullet, quick fix way to be church. The good news is that God has already told us how to be God's people.

God told the Israelites that God provides. God provides water in deserts and streams in the wilderness for sustenance, for the things of life. God continues to provide us

with what we need so we may be God's people of praise. Jesus told the disciples that to be his followers they (and we) must be people of the Great Commission (go, baptize, teach from Matthew 28:19-20) and the Great Commandment (love God, love neighbor from Matthew 22:36-40). And, just to make sure we have what we need, Jesus sent the Spirit to empower and gift us to do this work.

How do we go about living into this Great Commission-Great Commandment reality?

Over these first few months as I have traveled around Upstate New York serving as your director for evangelical mission, I've heard and seen a lot of the great ministry that congregations are engaged in as you strive to be faithful to God's calling. I also know there is much work before us, as pastors, councils and others have asked questions and sought strategies for renewed mission, stewardship and faith formation.

The first and best place to start is with Scripture. It's a new year! Maybe it's time to start a new Bible study or reinvigorate an existing one. You don't need to do scholarly exegesis (a critical interpretation of the text) to study Scripture in

a meaningful way. Just open the Bible and ask a few questions: What is God up to? Is God doing something new in this passage? What is God calling me to do or be in this passage? Who do I identify with in this passage and why? Or you can use the questions I quoted at the beginning of this article that Bishop Mark Narum of Western North Dakota asks when he and congregations in his synod study the Bible.

However you choose to engage the Bible this year, I pray that you see how God is working new things in your life, congregation, our synod and the entire ELCA. I pray that you find ways to deepen your faith. And, above all, I pray that you know and feel the power and presence of Jesus in your life and the life of this church. □

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**Author bio:**  
Malfatti is the synod's director for evangelical mission.

## ELCA Natural Systems Academy

Upstate New York was selected to be one of 12 pilot synods to send a participant to the newly forming ELCA Systems Academy.

The Rev. Gregory Tennermann, who “retired” after 40 years of parish ministry in January, will be the academy participant from Upstate New York. His long association with Peter Steinke, a well-known congregational systems consultant, and his experience conducting “Healthy Congregations” workshops and leading congregations through the systems theory-based process known as Bridgebuilder gives him an excellent background for this new venture with the ELCA academy.

Tennermann and other participants have agreed to attend all of the academy sessions over the next four years and to share their experiences with their synods.

In the Upstate New York Synod, the focus will be on training other leaders in this new way of thinking. Tennermann is hoping to establish “mini-academies” for synod clergy and lay leaders. He will also be working on training others to lead the “Healthy Congregations” workshops so those resources

become more available within the Upstate New York Synod.

The synod is looking forward to using the learnings from the academy as it continues to seek ways to be proactive in promoting healthy relationships throughout its territory. The Conflict and Healing Team is exploring ways to become more of a resource to congregations, hoping to focus on congregational health instead of just being the people you call when you are stuck in your work.

The synod is also looking to provide more missional/redevelopment training to leaders who can then coach others as they look for more effective ways to be the church in uncertain and changing situations.

Tennermann will be working to share his experience and understanding of Bowen Systems Theory and how that helps us understand and organize our relationships. Combining that with his many years in congregational and transformational ministry, he hopes to contribute to the many ways our synod and its congregations are working toward a healthy and faithful future. □

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## Quadrennial review held for synod

By Thomas Madden

In August 2015, Kenneth Inskip, director for ELCA Research and Evaluation, and his staff were on the territory of the Upstate New York Synod leading us in a quadrennial review. The review is exploratory and focuses on establishing more clear direction for the synod following the recent election of our new bishop.

Research and Evaluation staff facilitated meetings at three locations across the synod territory for conversations with pastors, who brought with them one lay member of their congregation, most often the council president or other officer. Separate meetings also were held at each location for conversations with Synod Council members.

Conversations focused around challenges faced by congregations, what is going well for them, what they would like their relationship to the synod to be, what they are willing to contribute to the mission of the whole synod and what their vision for the synod might be. The information gleaned from these conversations, along with previous dialogues

around “Appreciative Inquiry” and “Healthy Congregations and Healthy Pastors,” are to help give shape and direction to our future as a synod.

The information collected in the conversations was collated and analyzed by Research and Evaluation and formed the basis of a report, which is now the “property” of the Synod Council. At its November 2015 meeting, the council reviewed and discussed the report and established priorities based on its findings.

The report and the Synod Council’s recommendations will be made publicly available in spring 2016.

We’re most grateful to all participating pastors, lay leaders and Synod Council members for their candid reflection and input, as well as to Inskip and the staff of Research and Evaluation for their collegiality and expertise. We look forward to the opportunities before us for ministry in this synod! □

**Author bio:**  
*Madden is synod vice president.*

## ‘God’s work. Our hands.’ day of service in the synod

### A Whale of a Tale

It was indeed “A Whale of a Tale!” on the afternoon of Sept. 13 as 34 members of Atonement Lutheran Church, Rochester, took vacation Bible school “on the road” to serve their neighbors “down the road”!

With high enthusiasm, members joined with the residents of St. John’s Meadows Senior Living Community for an afternoon of multigenerational Bible school centered on the theme “A Whale of a Tale! The Story of God and Jonah.” Children, youth and adults ages 4 months to 95 years gathered together to *hear* a Bible story, *watch* a skit, *make* a craft, *eat* a snack (featuring Goldfish Crackers), *sing* songs, *pray* together and *give thanks*—knowing that God’s love for us is bigger than the biggest fish!

Perhaps most importantly, a new door was opened to a future partnership in ministry between the congregation and the people of St. John’s Meadows.

### Day of Service, Sept. 13

Three congregations of the Albany Lutheran Cluster painted classroom space for the Refugee and Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus (RISSE) in Albany.

Serving more than 100 adults and 80 children with English as second language classes, an after-school program including dinner for families and so much more, RISSE equips refugees and recent immigrants to build sustainable and independent lives as they integrate into the culture and community of the U.S.

The cluster is made up of First Lutheran Church, Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit and St. John’s Lutheran Church, all of Albany.

### 4 hands equals 6,000 meals

Greenbush Reformed Church; St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Troy; First Reformed Church of Wynantskill; and Outreach Inc. created a four-way ecumenical effort to dry pack 6,000 meals on Sept. 12. These three churches combined finances and volunteers to support this effort.

There were more than 50 volunteers from the three congregation. It was the first ecumenical event for feeding the hungry. All meals were donated to food pantries right in their home county of Rensselaer. □

