



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Epiphany, 2023

Dear Church,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind... God is faithful, by God you were called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Cor. 1: 3-5,9

What a gift it is to be the church together!

This past year your synod staff, including conference Deans, Assistants to the Bishop, Director for Evangelical Mission, and part-time Specialists and Consultants, have been working faithfully and diligently in restructuring and reforming our synod systems for collaborative ministry in a post-pandemic, emergent church. Thinking adaptively, it is our goal to serve congregations and rostered leaders to support God's mission in the world. We have shared over this past year the idea of the **G.R.A.C.E. Mindset**, an acronym encouraging us to grow together as the body of Christ through practices of **Generous Love, Restorative Justice, Adaptive Leadership, Collaboration, and Experimentation**. These practices guide our goals and our work as Synod staff.

This past year has been a time to re-form how we function together as synod staff. Pr. Imani Olear was called as the UNYS Director for Evangelical Mission, an ELCA-supported, deployed staff position, and as an Assistant to the Bishop. Assistants to the Bishop, Julie Grindle and Pr. Lori Kochanski have new roles and portfolios adapted to care for congregations, rostered and lay leaders. The Synod's five specialists and consultants serve in areas of clinical consulting for leaders and congregations, administration, communication, finance, and mobility. Together we are building new ways of serving congregations, communities, and leaders.

Changes in our Financial and Administrative systems began in 2021 and continued in 2022 as we moved to an outsourced accounting firm. There is much more work to do. The Finance Committee will be making recommendations to Synod Council in the new year for the sake of good stewardship of the synod's assets and liabilities, and in coordination and communication with ministry partners. I am grateful for the work of staff, the Treasurer and Finance Team, the Vice-President, and Synod Council for their work in these matters.

Cultivating a G.R.A.C.E. Mindset: Generous Love

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Support and care for congregations, lay, and rostered leaders looks different based on needs and context. It is a joy to visit with congregations in worship and on special occasions to join a community in prayer, solidarity, song, and laughter. It is a privilege and honor to be with a congregation in a time of transition as they prepare for a new chapter in ministry, or at the time of conflict, to provide a space for a wide array of emotion. It is a gift to join with the candidacy committee as we accompany future rostered leaders along the journey of discernment, and to pray with lay and rostered leaders as they wonder, “where is God calling me?” It is a sacred time to gather with the saints as we commend a congregation’s ministry to “Legacy Status” where the life of the church goes on, shared with the wider community and Body of Christ.

Looking ahead to 2023 I see a church that’s led by the Spirit of our Lord, to love all people the way Christ loved us – with a generous, hearts-wide-open kind of love. I have seen this love for neighbor and community in our congregations. What does that look like in your community? I see a church, led by Jesus’ incarnation. Jesus was, and is, present alongside the poor and those who lift their voices for liberation and justice. I see a church that is forming new partnerships and creating opportunities for collaboration. I see a church that is changing rapidly as we think adaptively about what is working and what is not. The whole synod (that is church-together) is here to support those experimental ministries which build community. What does your community need to live out the GRACE Mindset? Together, we dream a church where love activates us as recipients of God’s justice and joy!

This coming year the synod staff and deans, consultants, and specialists will continue to work together to serve congregations, lay, and rostered leaders. We will continue to reform and re-shape our work as we emerge from the pandemic, continuing to adapt and live into new ways of being church together for the sake of the world. As resurrection people we will continue to pray first, seeking the wisdom of all the saints, and follow the vision God has given to us.

Thank you for your prayers and gifts of mission support which make ministry possible in the Upstate NY Synod and our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Your gifts support our congregations and lay and rostered leaders, five campus ministries, five mission-start communities, including the newest, Journey of Faith in Vestal, NY, and outdoor ministries including Lake Chautauqua Lutheran Center. Thanks be to God!

Yours in Christ,

Alan M. Miller

