

A Word from the Bishop – 2017

This coming year, 2017, marks the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. January, as you meet for your annual meeting, is also likely to be a month of continued political turmoil as we inaugurate a new president.



This is our context. We minister in interesting and expectant times!

Our church has a 78-year history of formal refugee resettlement and relocation work through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS). In 1945, immediately following WWII, American Lutherans formed a government advocacy ministry which today is known as the Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs - LOGA. Through LOGA American Lutherans have under our belt 72 years of advocating for individual and family rights and benefits. And, for over 150 years, Lutheran hospitals have served the sick, counseling centers have worked with families, and adoption agencies have striven for the wellbeing and safety of children. Lutheran Services of America (LSA), an umbrella network for these institutions, now touches one in every 50 American lives. We give thanks for the many ways we are able to serve.

This coming year will call us from many directions to focus and refine our ministry as Lutheran Christians.

- Living in a world of the “spiritual but not religious” we seek relevant language and connections for vital ministry.
- With a large number of Oregon Synod congregations feeling the pinch of increasing ministry costs and declining member contributions, we wonder about sustainability.
- And, with new initiatives on the political horizon, we are likely to have basic Lutheran convictions and work (such as those mentioned above) challenged.

The blessing here is that these three issues all relate. Those who have given up on institutional religion often do so because they find ‘church’ politically and practically irrelevant. We are neither of those things, and this year will give us a fresh opportunity to walk our talk as socially relevant people of faith. Committing clearly and courageously to all whose daily lives we can impact is the most direct path forward. The coming 500th Anniversary of the Reformation gives us a opportunity to share our joy.

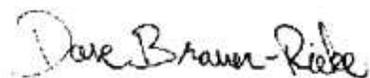
As you gather and pray around your ministry for the coming year I would ask the following:

1. Engage in celebration around the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. I have written a series of bulletin inserts for your use, (oregonsynod.org/500) and Augsburg fortress has wonderful resources as well. We are finding ways to give thanks together.
2. Send thoughtful leaders to our May 5-7, 2017 500th Anniversary Synod Assembly in Portland - individuals who will eagerly engage in conversation and bring our work back to you. We want you present. We want you active in shaping the future of our church, and we want everybody at the table. (Send Youth Voting Members, too!!)
3. Give generously of your time and treasures. We fell (possibly significantly) behind Mission Support this year and I know there are pressing needs in your local community and congregation as well. The Mission Support you give us this coming year goes 41% to the national church, another 10% to ministries outside of Oregon, with the remaining supporting the synod's operating budget. Above and beyond this, though, over \$350,000 in the form of New Beginnings grants, Health and Wellness grants, Ethnic ministry support, Transformational Leadership Initiatives, and New Ministries support will go directly to you in 2017. This money comes from synodical endowments and churchwide sources. I thank you, our national church organization, and the courage of your Synod Council. We are investing heavily in our future!
4. Consider becoming an ELCA AMMPARO Welcoming Congregation to help protect the rights and wellbeing of Latino Immigrant children and their families. The Synod voted to become a "Sanctuary Synod" in 2016 and requested resources for engaging this work. AMMPARO is a good place to start! www.elca.org/en/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/AMMPARO

I am excited about the work we are doing together. I share your concern in changing social and financial times, but rest in the words of our Risen Lord, "Fear not!" The Grace of God, which we embrace so boldly as Lutheran Christians, is given to us so that we might risk the new and resist the temptation of the temporary.

You are called – you, uniquely and by name - to be a part of God's great, gifted, unfolding of the Kingdom. Here there is room for all. And, living in the hope of the feast of life yet to come, we are bold to confess our faith, welcome the stranger, serve our neighbor, and embrace ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden.

Keep the Faith!



Bp. Dave Brauer-Rieke
Oregon Synod - ELCA