

## 2017 Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod Assembly Report

Director for Evangelical Mission (DEM) & Assistant to the Bishop for Youth and Family Ministry

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*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.*

Ephesians 2:8-10

Thank you for this last year of ministry together! As the verses say above - we are what God makes us, created in Jesus for good works that becomes a way of living and being. It is a joy to work with you all and congregations to draw out the wisdom, passion, and gifts already present within. It is a marvelous thing to pray for each of you and imagine the ministry you are doing to reach out to those in need, to deepen faith, and to worship God. We are a small synod, but when you think of all that God is doing in and through us – it is breathtaking!

My job here in the synod is encourage, provoke, equip and walk with you in the ministry God entrusts to you and your congregation. I help plan retreats, lead workshops, help set goals and develop strategies to move forward. I teach about best practices specifically (but not limited to) around stewardship, congregation vitality, and evangelism. We have a great opportunity in being small because that means I can work with you to custom design plans, programs, and ministry.

*Please consider at least one way to invite me to do something with your congregation in the next year.*

### Updates from last year

**The Great Synod Preach Off.** As of this 2017 Synod Assembly, I will have worshipped with or am scheduled for this summer to worship/preach at 41 of our 53 ministries. Which means Bishop Mike still holds the title for worshipping with every ministry in the synod in his first 18 months! (*cue celebration music*)

**Conway Ministry Exploration.** Both a prayer and an exploration team was formed. After lots of prayer, interviews, listening to data and touring the city – the exploration team is recommending to the synod council that we continue to move forward towards calling a mission developer. The next step is making a case and presenting it to the synod council.

### Congregation Vitality & Partnership Support (ELCA Grants)

As your Director for Evangelical Mission, I work with congregations in intentional renewal, sometimes called redevelopment. Although renewal can also be about growing from one size membership to another. Currently we have three congregations receiving Partnership Support. One is Eben Ezer in Oaks, OK who are working through redevelopment (recognizing they cannot keep doing what they are doing the same way, they are trying to renovate their ministry for today's realities).

Both the Neighborhood in Bentonville, AR and Good Shepherd in Fayetteville, AR are receiving Partnership Support to help them “staff for growth” - in other words help them have the support they need to continue growing.

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Since the 2016 Assembly, we had three Ministry 360 Reviews as part of the accountability and accompaniment structure built into Partnership Support. The Ministry 360 Review consists of assembling a AR-OK Review Team who listens and observes the ministry of a congregation primarily through interviews and being present on Sunday morning. The AR-OK team presents the congregation with a set of recommendations and affirmations based on the insights they gathered from the weekend. These reviews are intense, but worthwhile and helpful for developing a strategy for ministry in the time and place your congregation is called to. *Please let me know if your congregation is interested in having one.*

**Teams.** I am the staff support for three of our five synod ministry teams: Community Outreach, Discipleship, and Youth and Family. Each team leader will be submitting a more fulsome report regarding the work we do together there.

**Community Outreach Team.** Team leader: Lance Miller.

Major projects here include the Conway Exploration, Partnership Support, and Ready to Renovate.

Ready to Renovate is a snazzy title for a new effort to find ways to help congregations start imagining and preparing for the major renovation-like changes needed in most (if not all) ministries today. We have some ideas and will be looking for congregations willing to pilot an idea or two. *Please let me know if you are willing to help us out!*

**Discipleship Team.** Team Leader: Pr. David Viles.

Major projects here include the “Welcome to the Pigpen” articles, the new BiG Network (Believe in Green), and the “From Ideas to Action” workshops.

The BiG network is for the mutual support, encouragement, and sharing of best practices between those with a calling or passion to care for the earth. Next meeting is May 11 from 7-8pm. Call to get the code to connect to the meeting or come to the Ministry Center.

**Youth and Family Team.** Team Leader: Jona Burnett. Under the umbrella of this team, there are three groups that meet.

*Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO), this is a youth leadership development ministry where our high school youth lead, organize and provide ministry opportunities for other youth in our synod. New this year is the 2017 Mission Road Trip in June. The next ELCA Youth Gathering is in Houston 2018. Please let me know who your youth contact person is as soon as possible.*

*Youth Leadership Network for adult who work with youth. This group is open (so if you or someone you know would like to be part of the group let Pr. Liz know). Currently the network meets monthly for mutual support, Bible study, and shared learning. On March 24, the network hosted a “Loving God” retreat for adults working with youth.*

*Campus ministries.* Currently we are planning a 2018 Young Adult Delegation to Tanzania.

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**Racial Justice & Building Bridges.** I get to serve with both of these groups as we look to promote racial justice in our synod. In 2017, we asked every congregation and every congregation to do at least one thing before the Summer regarding racial justice. On July 8, there is a synod-wide book discussion of The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander.

### **2017 Synod Assembly Art Show. *Words of Reformation: Faith, Grace & Wonder.***

As of the writing of this report, we have approximately 20 pieces of art from 14 artists (10 congregations represented). Thank you to the artists who help us better understand and engage these big ideas of reformation!

### **Mission Support**

There is a lot of work and ministry that happens because of you. Many of you are leaders in your congregation and still make time to volunteer at the cluster and synod level – Thank you!

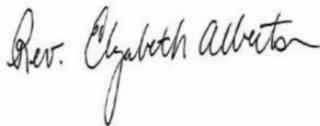
Your mission support (synod benevolence) makes it possible for congregations to have a bishop and synod staff who knows the personality and needs of each congregation. We are small, but personal. Your mission support makes it possible for us to be there to worship with you, preach, celebrate, and be there in times of trouble. Your mission support helps us to do together what we cannot do alone as individual congregations. Thank you!

We are small and every ministry matters. Your mission support makes a difference. Please consider how your congregation might be able to give *\$90 more each month*. This extra amount will go a long way in sustaining the ministry we do together as synod.

*Please also continue to hold the work of the synod in your prayers as I hold you all in my prayers.*

It is a joy to serve with you and I pray that God will inspire and provoke us to be the Church God wants us to be.

Respectfully submitted,



Pastor Liz Albertson