



Report to the 2018 ELCA Southeastern Synod Assembly

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The ELCA Youth Gathering 30 congregations and 355 youth and adults will be travelling to Texas the end of June from our synod. I have been serving as the Synod Gathering Coordinator over the past 2 years. In April, I led a Getting Ready event for youth leaders at Reformation Lutheran Church in Greeneville and will also lead a workshop at this year's assembly too. Our secret Synod Gathering Facebook Group has been invaluable as I have been able to post information for our leaders. It has also been a place where ideas have been shared and questions asked and answered. Our synod is one of 8 that will be hosting a booth in the interaction learning center. Our theme is Putting the pieces of God's Puzzle together. Our team of young adults, Jordan Becker, college student, recently ordained, Pastor Chris Smith, Seminarian Justin Marx, and Catalina Ontiveros from Good Shepherd and I will man our booth each day. We will have spiritual gift surveys and personality tests that youth can do. Our trained team will be ready to talk about how God has created each person uniquely and discuss how they have an important part to play in God's big world. We will have puzzles for youth to do and a Large Frame made up of puzzle pieces so youth groups can drop by and take a group photo. As we journey to Houston, please keep us all in your prayers. Before the Gathering starts, we have volunteers from our synod who will get to Houston early to train and prepare for this event. On Wednesday evening, June 27, over 30,000 ELCA youth will gather at the NRG Center for the first evening gathering. Musicians and speakers have been chosen by the Gathering team to encourage and challenge our high school youth in their faith. Thursday, our synod will go out into Houston for the Service Learning Day. On Friday, our synod will gather at the NRG Park for the Interactive Learning Day (that's when they will see our team and booth) and on Saturday we will gather together for our SYNOD Day with an emphasis on We Belong Together. Pastor Katherine Museus is our Synod Day Coordinator. Bishop Gordy is very involved in this day as well. And we will have a special guest with us, Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. What an honor it will be to have her with us and an opportunity for some great pictures of our two favorite bishops!! Our own Kevin Strickland, Elizabeth L. Bryant, Michael Jannett, and many other folks who are volunteering from our synod with the Gathering will also join us. Then on Sunday, all 30,000 will gather for a final worship and sending.

ALL-STATE EVENTS The All-Georgia Youth Gathering was held at the FFA-FCCLA Camp in Covington, GA Feb 23-25. We had over 250 youth and adults participate! Rachel Kurtz was our special guest for the weekend. She shared stories and song with our youth about the theme "Together." Kelly Glow and a DJ led us in a Glow Party and dance on Saturday! Special thanks to the Atlanta Area Youthworkers who gather monthly to share, support, and mentor one another but also work together to plan this event. With over 150 participants at All-Tennessee this year, we've seen both these events grow by more than 50 participants this year. That is good news!

AFFIRM As the director, I am ever so grateful to all those who've given of their time to this important event over its 50 plus years. Affirm continues to follow the vision of equipping youth to be disciples and leaders for the church. We haven't lost sight of the founding leader's vision to gather youth from across the synod to worship, pray, play and learn. Special thanks to Brandon and Gail Pittman from St. Mark's Lutheran in Huntsville who gave over 7 years of their time on the Affirm administrative team as Director of Operations and Affirm Registrar. I have no idea how to measure the amount of time they spent in preparation for the event, creating an online registration program, talking with pastors and parents, and being there during the week of camp but I know it adds up to a lot of days and hours!! Another special thanks to Pastor Arne Walker, without his generous heart of giving all the proceeds of a book he wrote to the Affirm Scholarship Fund, we would not be able to help as many young people come to Affirm as we have. This year alone over \$6200 has been given out in scholarships to help 38 youth get to Affirm as well as a \$100 grant to our 8 Young Adult Youth Ministry Institute Participants. Last fall, our new Affirm administrative team began meeting regularly as we planned for Affirm 2018. On the weekend of February 9-10 at Prince of Peace in John's Creek the administrative team met with the unit directors to pick stick staff, do some intentional leadership training on welcoming youth, and plan the week. Emily Gantert who serves as our new registrar has updated the registration forms and process. It is possible to register for Affirm now completely online even with signatures as well as payment. Among Jonathan Awtrey's many duties as Director of Community Life, he has coordinated with Kelly Glow, a hip hop musician from our synod to give a concert on Monday. Kelly will be on the Worshiptivity staff as well. Jennifer Dunn, Director of Operations has been working with our registrar, unit directors, and the college to coordinate space and specific needs. And our medical team has been buying supplies and getting ready to provide care if needed. Pastor Ed Myers, our Affirm Chaplain Pastor Katherine Museus, and Jenny Berk have laid out a plan for the youth to create worship surrounding the SESLYO theme of "Together in worship, service, work, and love." And our other 18 Unit Directors have been spending countless hours preparing for the 10 different themed units. As I complete this report, we have almost 200 registered. While, this is a lower participation number than last year, it is a Gathering year, and we planned and expected that families could not afford to send their children to both. There are still spots in some units open. Affirm is for youth who've finished grades 6th-12th and young adults 2 years out of high school. Affirm will be June 10-15 at the University of West Alabama. Cost is \$425. Contact Emily Gantert, at Affirm2018@gmail.com if you would like to register.

SESLYO Assembly was March 9-11 at Lutheranch. The SESLYO board planned and led an amazing weekend based on their theme of “Together.” They board led workshops on Work, Service, Love, and Worship. All the participants worked and served together by cleaning up limbs and trees off of the trails after a winter snow storm. They painted cornhole boards and a giant Jenga for summer campers. They spent a lot of time updating their constitution, taking out the “he’s and she’s” and inserting “them and they” to make the document more inclusive. The assembly also voted to add an additional board member who will represent the LGBTQ community. The assembly was only two weeks after the Parkland Florida shooting so you can imagine that the shooting was on the heart and minds of our youth who began writing a resolution on youth and mental illness, encouraging the church to have a serious conversation about mental illness. On Saturday evening, the assembly elected their new board for 2018-19. This year the Synod Council voted to let the SESLYO Board be voting members of the synod assembly. They are excited and ready to learn and serve. And in the evenings at assembly they will be meeting to begin theme planning and preparations for the upcoming year. I promise there will be more to come from this amazing group of young leaders!

Congregations I ask you to encourage as well as to help financially your youth have experiences like Affirm, the Gathering, All State Events, SESLYO assembly, or a week of summer camp at one of our NovusWay camps. There is proof that these type of experiences will be remembered by youth as a significant part of their faith journey. They will experience God, feel the presence of the Holy Spirit and be in a faith community like no other. And perhaps like me and many others, hear the call to serve God and the church. These events and offerings are not meant to replace your congregational ministry, instead, they are to enhance what you are already doing. We are all in this journey together of helping our young people grow as disciples, become leaders, and teach them to share the Good News of love and grace to the world.

Campus Ministry We celebrate the inaugural year of ministry with the Episcopal Lutheran Campus Ministry at Mercer in Macon. Special thanks to Pastor John Barichivich and Pastor Andrew Lewis and their congregations for getting involved and supporting the students. Led by Pastor John Tirro, Tyson House continues to provide a church home to over 60 students each week at the University of Tennessee. They feed students through their Smokey Pantry as well as dinners hosted by local congregations on Sunday evenings before worship. They continue to equip student leaders through Peer Ministry and their Intern program. Also congrats to Pastor Nathan Hilkert, Amanda Spangler, and the folks at Holy Cross in Athens for reenergizing the ministry at UGA. Pastor Everett Flanigan will finish his first year as the Director of Campus Ministry at the Atlanta University Center. Through his leadership, the ministry has ministered to a number of students across the 5 campuses. Pastor Ed Myers is about to get some new amazing young freshman at East Tennessee State University where he gathers twice a week with the students on campus as well as at church or out for a meal. Georgia Tech began a new program on Tuesday evenings where students gather for dinner, song, and conversation called THRIVE. On Thursday they serve over 100 students a cup of coffee. The board and call committee finished their Mission Site Profile this semester. And this month will begin interviewing candidates for their full time pastor position. They hope to find a pastor who will

help their campus ministry be the heart and soul of Georgia Tech's campus and help grow the partnership with the Episcopal church.

Global Mission The Guatemala team continues to meet regularly led by Pastor Stephen Friedrich and Pastor Leland Armbright. We have 7 congregations heavily invested in the ministry and partnering with congregations in the Lutheran Church of Guatemala. The team has been preparing for Pastor Karin, president of ILAG, to visit with us at Synod Assembly. She will be the presenter at the Global Mission Breakfast at Synod Assembly as well as a speaker and preacher over the weekend. The Guatemala Team is also planning a Huge Gala to help fund the New Women's Center. You can reserve your tickets at their table. It's going to be an amazing evening!

Our German partnership team has met a number of times and have made plans for the visit from our partner congregations in Bavaria, Germany, in June of 2019. Special Thanks to Bill Alderfer and Debbie Lundell for leading this team. If your congregation would like to become a partner or help with next summer's visit, we'd love to have you join us!

Please remember to keep in your prayers Adrienne and Ben Gray who serve in Israel and Eric and Wendolyn Trozzo who serve as missionaries in Malaysia through prayer and giving directly on the synod site.

And finally congratulations to Isaac Taylor who will represent our synod in 2018-19 in the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission and will serve for a year in Australia! It is through the support of individuals and congregations that we are able to accompany our Global Mission Partners, Missionaries, and Young Adults in Global Mission.

I continue to serve as an adult advisor for the ELCA Youth Core Leadership Team which met in Chicago in March and meets monthly online. I serve as the Region 9 SYMBOL Board Member (Synod Youth Ministry Band of Leaders) and am currently working on a team to write a new vision statement for the group. I attended the ELCA Youthworkers Extravangaza Training in Houston in January.. I will address all 65 Bishops at a dinner sponsored by SYMBOL at the Gathering. I attended the Region 9 Gathering of Assistants to the Bishop at the Isle of Palms Retreat Center. I serve as an ecumenical leader on the Maryville College Board of Church visitors. I attended the Deans Meeting at Lutheranch. I serve as a consultant at Synod Council Meetings. I participate weekly in an online meeting with Bishop Gordy and the other assistants and DEM's.

It is an honor to work with our amazing Synod staff and all of the volunteers who give of their time and energy to the many ministries of our synod. May God continue to bless us and challenge us to love our neighbors, be disciples and learners, and serve those who need our help.

In Christ,

Rachel Alley