



Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church

2021 Annual Report

132nd Annual Meeting

January 30, 2022



2021 Annual Report of the Synod by Bishop Patricia Lull | January 2022

**“Let us hold fast to the confession of our faith without wavering,
for he who has promised is faithful.” - Hebrews 10:23**

This past year has been a wild ride. COVID-19 vaccinations opened a roadway to imagine more in-person gatherings just as political rancor made it less attractive to be together with those with views other than our own. Summer brought better weather for worshipping outdoors, fall programming was planned, and then a rise in infections from the Delta variant caused new caution and restraint in our church gatherings. Across the synod, book groups were launched, tackling tough questions of racial justice and long overlooked inequities in communities of color. Leaders embraced important soul work to understand their own bias and resistance to change. Congregation councils wrestled in new ways to understand what it means to be the church today. Live streaming became common place in sanctuaries large and small. Looking back, 2021 was both a tough year and a transformative time. Last January, did any of us really think we would still be wearing masks and keeping social distance the following Christmas? Yet, when challenged in so many ways, in congregation after congregation, we learned to hold fast to God’s promised faithfulness; a wild ride indeed.

Undeterred by not being able to gather in person, at the digital Synod Assembly in mid-May, we launched the synod-wide Planting Hope Campaign. Over the next two years we will work together to raise \$2.75 million dollars to deepen the Spirit’s work within and beyond the 109 congregations and mission starts of the synod. Your participation will help us:

- Invite neighbors into life in Christ;
- Renew the congregations of the synod;
- Raise up the next generations of leaders;
- Invest in a transformative project on the East Side of St. Paul
- with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota.

The congregational phase begins now in early 2022 with congregations setting aside six weeks this year to introduce the campaign and to invite financial participation. More information on the Planting Hope Campaign can be found at <https://spas-elca.org/planting-hope/>.

This synod places high emphasis on raising up the leaders needed for the work of this synod and across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Currently, 38 persons are in the candidacy process, preparing to serve as deacons or pastors. Five candidates were ordained this past year for service in the Saint Paul Area Synod. They include Pastor Tammy Wilkerson, Pastor Teleen Saunders, Pastor Amy Mihelich-Smith, Pastor Linqing Chu and Pastor Bristol Huffman Reading.

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John Hierlinger, Senior Pastor
2021 Annual Report



Grace and peace be to you, good and faithful servant. Our lives have been enriched by the Christmas celebration and all the wonderful events that take place each year, as we celebrate the miraculous gift God sent into this world, Jesus Christ. Amen.

So much to celebrate and be thankful for as we reflect back on another year of ministry together. Although 2021 was a deeply challenging year in so many ways, I continue to marvel at the individual ways you continued to be part of Gustavus Adolphus. Participation this last year has been different than any other. It might have included “going” to worship from your home as you joined us online. You could also have worshiped from your car at one of our drive-in worship services. You probably mastered your Zoom skills as you attended Table Talk, a book study or a committee meeting.

Indeed different, and quite hard at times, we are continuing to move forward as a congregation because the Holy Spirit continues to guide us and lead us.

We also need to celebrate that in 2021 we successfully paid off our mortgage with Thrivent Financial. Can you believe it, in the midst of a global pandemic, we reached our goal six months earlier than we anticipated. This was only the case because of you, your commitment and support. Thank you for sharing your financial gifts in a way that allowed us to complete a very important project for GALC and our future ministries.

Additionally, we were able to install a new sound system in the sanctuary and it sounds so great! The improvements are being noticed by many who have attended worship services in that beautiful space.

Again this year our staff was simply remarkable, each of them in their own ways. Maggie Kidnie is trying retirement again. She completed her work at GA back in September. Maggie, again thank you for your willingness to come back on staff and help us out for an additional 18 months. I pray your retirement is one of many adventures and time to relax.

With Maggie retiring, we were so fortunate to have Jana Dietering join our staff in July. Jana has been a wonderful addition to our team and I am so thankful for her and the great work she does.

We also welcome Mikayla Finnegan in 2021. We quickly realized with the addition of on-line worship services as well as in person, we needed someone who could manage the technical aspects of those services. Mikayla’s expertise and knowledge has been so very useful on many levels.

Pastor Amanda, Judy, Rob, Sherrie, Andrew, Kevin, Andy and Jerry-a word of thanks to each of you and your continued commitment to Gustavus and our mission and ministry again this year.

Finally, to each and every one of you from Gustavus Adolphus' congregation, I want to thank you. So many of you have taken the time to reach out with words of encouragement for us as a staff and words of support this past year. You will never fully understand how thankful we all are for you sharing these words in the midst of a difficult year. You truly have been the church to us, your staff.

Your generosity and financial support remained at a very high level this past year and I can't thank you enough. It speaks volumes of your commitment to God, your faith and your church. Gustavus is in the place we are because of you and the ways you have supported your church. Thank you!

I am grateful for your support, trust and support. You are making a difference in my life and even more importantly in the world!

Thanks be to God for you and our church Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church!

Pastor John Hierlinger

Amanda Simons Associate Pastor
2021 Annual Report



Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

~ Archbishop Desmond Tutu

There has been a lot of darkness in 2021 that I did not anticipate: the domestic attack on the US government and Capitol on January 6th, the significant percentage of Americans who have chosen not to be vaccinated against Covid, and the arrival of the delta variant in the fall and its impact upon our congregational ministries, and then right before Christmas the arrival of omicron and its impact upon us as a community of faith and our greater society. I am pandemic weary. I imagine that you may be too.

And yet there is light too.

I love the quote above from Archbishop Desmond Tutu because it encapsulates our identity as believers of God and followers of Jesus Christ. We are people of hope who see and reflect glimpses of light whenever and wherever we can.

This year has been a challenging year as one of your pastors, not because of you, dear congregation, but because I am constantly wrestling with and wondering how to be an illuminator of hope with you and for you in the midst of the darkness that you encounter in your own lives because of this pandemic and because of just living and the reality of illness, jobs, parenting, aging, etc. Pastor John and I are grateful for the Covid-19 taskforce that meets with us regularly and holds to the criteria of safety and love of neighbor in our decision-making process regarding our ministries and worship life during the different stages of this ongoing pandemic. I trust that the decisions we've made regarding worship services, faith formation, OpenTable and more were made with this criteria in mind, and yet, I often wonder: Where are God's beloved people of GA Lutheran Church and the East Side community hurting, struggling right now? And how can we as a congregation sit beside them (you) and illuminate hope? What ministries or parts of pastoring need to be emphasized at this time?

I share my internal wrestling with you because I want to hear from you. How are you? (truly, mind, body, spirit and heart). How are you weary? What is the darkness that chips away at you? Where do you see and reflect hope? What can we do, as your congregation and as your pastors, to illuminate hope for you at this time? What types of worship styles and spaces spiritually feed you and send you forth to share God's love with the world? What faith formation and spiritual practice opportunities do you seek?

I ask you to tell me - call me at 651-774-5954 ext. 881, email me at a.simons@gachurch.org, write to me via the USPS, message me through Facebook, or talk with me in person.

In the midst of the darkness of 2021 I have also seen numerous glimpses of light. With high vaccination rates in our state we elatedly returned to in-person worship services in the spring and brought back New Life worship in the fall. With the warmer weather of the summer we enjoyed Open Table community meals on Wednesday nights in our south parking lot, and as the delta variant surged and the cold weather beckoned, we transitioned Open Table to a drive-thru, continuing to feed fifty to seventy of our neighbors weekly. Confirmation and high school youth group have continued to meet, in person or online as needed. As Farnsworth Elementary School reopened for in person learning this fall so too did our GA volunteers return to fill students' backpacks with food bags from Every Meal. The children and youth of our congregation shared the Christmas Story with us in-person and through pre-recorded videos and the choir and guest musicians delighted us with the annual Lessons and Carols service. We celebrated Christmas Eve in our sanctuary with candlelight, hymns and holy communion. God is good.

Hope continues to strum along, beckoning each of us forward into our core identity as God's beloved children, set free to follow Christ faithfully in word and deed with love and hearts striving for God's justice and peace for all living beings. May the light of Christ be with you and may you see it and reflect it to others.

Rev. Amanda Simons

STATISTICS – PASTORAL ACTS 2021

Sacrament of Baptism

Quinn Raquel Buchman
Theodore Joseph DePover

Weddings

Catie Madison & Francis Chang

Deaths and/or Funerals

Tom St. Martin	Audrey Elmquist	Deb Hanson
James Hansen	Jean Muehlenther	Glenn Wahman
Don Selander	David Nelson	Jane Olsen
John Schelen	James Swanson	



xxFaith Formation through Christian Education Committee 2021 Annual Report

The Mission and Ministry of the Faith Formation through Christian Education Committee is to provide opportunities for all ages to grow in Christ and in spiritual vitality.

This past year the Faith Formation Committee has been involved in the following activities:

- Family Ministry outdoor gathering at Fort Snelling, Sunday, Feb. 21.
- Devotional activity packets and a special *Jesus Is Risen* pop-up book were delivered to GA families during Holy Week.
- Children and youth led worship on Sunday, April 18. GA children, youth and parents recorded “*Good News: A Virtual Easter Pageant*” on Zoom.
- A Sunday School team continued to plan lessons and monthly packets were mailed to families. Weekly emails were sent with a recorded Children’s Message. In person Sunday School resumed in the fall for families who felt comfortable. Monthly packets and weekly emails continue. Frolic families receive weekly emails with Bible stories and activities for parents and young children.
- Fleece graduation blankets embroidered with personal milestone dates were tied by Amy Lipetzky and Lori Howard. They were presented to the GA High School graduates at Wednesday Drive-In Worship on May 19.
- Summer Family Kits were prepared and delivered to GA families with children.
- Vacation Bible School was not held at GA this year due to the pandemic.
- 10 GA youth attended summer camp at Camp Onomia. GA picked up part of the cost for each camper.
- Our congregation is an associate member of Camp Onomia and supports the camp with a yearly contribution raised through special concerns giving during the month of April.
- GA youth and friends spent a day at Valley Fair in August with Amy Lipetzky and Sherrie Nordquist.
- Confirmation youth met with Pastor John and small group leaders in person and on Zoom as needed. In the fall in person classes moved to Sunday mornings during the Faith Formation hour. Each month the confirmation students join other area church youth for Deep Dive outings.
- SPARK NRSV Bibles were presented to children in third grade and SPARK Story Bibles were presented to children just starting Sunday School during Wednesday Drive-In Worship on October 13.
- The youth Bake Sale was canceled this year due to the pandemic.
- Our senior high youth group meets regularly on Wednesday nights with Pastor Amanda in person and virtually depending on safety factors due to the pandemic.

- ***Frolic*** is an online resource for early childhood faith formation. E-newsletters are sent to parents and caregivers of young children each month with articles about child development and faith formation. Stephanie Surine continues to connect with families through email.
- The woman's book club continues to meet once a month. They have moved their meetings to Zoom when necessary but primarily meet in person at the church.
- GA families of children and youth were presented with *The Wonder of the Greatest Gift*. A daily devotional with a pop-up tree for marking the days of Advent at home.
- GA children and youth assisted in leading worship and a Spontaneous Nativity on December 19.
- We welcome anyone who would like to join our group. We are always open for some fresh new ideas!

We hope as a committee that we have inspired members of our congregation to grow in faith through faith formation for children, Confirmation and youth group for teenagers, and resources for parents. It is our hope and prayer that our efforts have been uplifting to the congregation as a whole.

Sincerely,

The Faith Formation through Christian Education Committee –

Brenda Kiepert-Holthaus, Amy Lipetzky, Stephanie Surine, Emily Harrison, Pastor Amanda Simons, Sherrie Nordquist

Endowment Fund Committee 2021 Annual Report

During 2021, the members of the endowment committee held three online meetings with Pastors John and Amanda along with business managers, Maggie Kidnie and Jana Dietering.

The committee is responsible for the stewardship of the gifts that have been made to the GA Endowment Fund over the years. The principal of those gifts is to be preserved and invested in order to generate income that can be used to:

“...enhance the work of the church by meeting the special needs or projects of Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church or the Church at large apart from the general operation of the congregations.”

At the end of 2021, the endowment fund had approximately \$792,000 in total assets which generated approximately \$16,200 in income.

Approximately 40% of those total assets, \$320,000, is in the form of a loan to GA Church to help the congregation pay down its mortgage. Since 2013, the congregation has paid only the interest on the endowment fund loan. In 2021, the congregation was able to pay off its mortgage and begin repaying the endowment fund. The committee agreed with the church council to establish a 15-year repayment schedule with an interest rate of 2.25%.

The committee dispersed approximately \$13,420 during 2021 to support the work being done by GA Church and the ELCA in the areas of global missions, music, student scholarships, community outreach and social ministry.

In 2022, we look forward to sharing stories of the people who have benefited from the generosity of those who have given to the GA Endowment Fund in the past and how each of us can contribute to that legacy so that GA will continue to be a Gateway of Faith far into the future.

Committee members: Mary Butler, Emily Harrison, Merritt Linzie, Ted Madison (chair).

Global Missions Committee 2021 Annual Report

A huge thank you to Jean Schwartz for her years of service and commitment to GA's global missions ministry and BKB relationship in her role as committee chair. Jean has been a guiding force for Pastor Amanda in this interim time of committee leadership. Thank you to Nancy Johnson, Carol Sandberg, Catie Madison and Jeff Surine for saying yes to serving on this committee in the new year of 2022.

Our congregational financial scholarships supported 21 students from Igangidungu'u and Kiponzelo in their Forms I-VI education. We renewed our commitment to the BKB scholarships for our sister parishes for 2022. Thank you to those who donated to the BKB scholarship fund to aid these young people in receiving their education.

The ambassador trip to Iringa, Tanzania to visit our sister parishes remains on hold due to the ongoing pandemic. Many of our member who committed to this trip for June 2020 are hopeful to be our congregational ambassadors when the visit moves forward, hopefully in 2023.

Ryan and Astine Bose who serve as our BKB coordinators in Iringa have been very helpful in facilitating communication between GA and our sister parishes, making a visit on our behalf and bringing our fall congregational letter to them.

In 2022, under the leadership of this committee's members we look forward to strengthening our BKB relationship and refocusing our Global Missions partnerships.

Pastor Amanda Simons

Local Missions Committee 2021 Annual Report

The Local Mission Committee has oversight and input on our local mission partnerships and engagement, including Every Meal at Farnsworth Elementary School, Lutheran Social Services Homeless Youth Services (Lifhaven) and Refugee Services, Merrick Community services (and food shelf), Open Table, and more.

If you would like to participate in this ministry work, please contact Pastor Amanda at a.simons@gachurch.org.

In 2021 our congregation maintained our financial commitment to Every Meal at our local elementary school. A roster of twenty or so members regularly volunteer to place food bags in children's backpacks to alleviate the weekend food gap in their homes. We raised money and donated food to Merrick Food Shelf which saw an increase in need as the pandemic continued. Through our Special Concerns giving we financially supported LSS Refugee Services and LSS Lifhaven as well as Lyngblomsten, Camp Onomia, and Lutheran Campus Ministries at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Through the Christmas giving tree we sponsored over a dozen young adults living in homelessness and transitional housing, ensuring that they too would receive a Christmas gift.

Open Table resumed this spring and is was fabulous! It was lovely to gather with folks outside in our south parking lot for meal and worship. As the fall chanted into winter and delta surged,

Open Table transitioned from an outdoor meal to a drive-thru meal with worship indoors in the chapel. Many of our neighbors who participate in this meal have continued to do so, and the drive thru has served 50-70 meals per week during the winter. We all look forward to the spring when Open table can resume outdoors AND the day when we can eat indoors again too. Thank you to our core group of volunteers who prepare, serve and wash dishes.

One of my favorite stories of this year comes from God's Work Our Hands Sunday in which our congregation put together thank you gifts and card for members of our congregation who work in schools as teachers, nurses, counselors, custodians and lunch servers. A handful of older members and a handful of teenagers worked together to assemble these thirty gift bags. They took time on a Sunday morning to write thank you cards and express gratitude and encouragement for members experiencing great stress and great responsibility in their vocational calling. One of our teenagers E.L. showed up with bubbly warmth and asked me how they could help that morning. When I explained the project to them, they pitched right in, drawing in their confirmation peers to participate too. Because of E.L.'s cheer and willingness to participate, other members gathered near and pitched in too. These gifts meant a lot for the recipients. We received many thank you notes because we supported our school staff at this hard time. This is mission in action.

Pastor Amanda Simons

PROPERTY COMMITTEE

2021 Annual Report

The Property Committee, along with the staff of Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church, appreciates the congregation's commitment to all the processes and procedures created on their behalf for the smooth operations of systems. These processes and procedures are crucial for the smooth operations of the many systems that comprise the Building and Grounds of Gustavus Adolphus Church.

Our committee's long-term purpose is to involve members and staff in a cooperative effort to promote a place of community as part of the church's ministries, as well as to satisfy the requirements of Church and Synod.

To oversee as necessary for the effective use of property & building through management & facilities services; this continues to be the mission of our committee. Thereby making sure that each staff and volunteer can meet the unique requirements needs of their ministry and mission right here in St. Paul.

Top Projects for 2021 included:

- The installation of the new air conditioner for the Sanctuary
- The installation of the new sound system in the Sanctuary
- The addition of Livestream equipment in Luther Hall
- The assessment of infected trees in our south parking lot. (To be removed early 2022)

The Congregation Continues to Contribute with: *(And We are Truly Thankful for this)*

- Knowledge and Expertise
- Ideas
- Participation
- Monetary Gifts

The Property Committee is Assisted by the Ministers, the Business Manager, the Custodians, Members – notably the Friday Crew, the dedicated staff, and of course our companion Committees. We are thankful for this support!

Sincere thanks to committee members: Rick Howard (Council Representative), John Hierlinger (Pastor), Tim Himmer, Bruce Pelava, and Keith Schmalzbauer.

Sincerely,
John Hierlinger, Pastor on behalf of the property committee

Worship and Music Committee 2021 Annual Report

Committee Members: Donna Dean, Nancy Johnson, Karen Landkamer, Bruce Pelava, Verilyn Pelava, Janet Peterson. **Staff:** John Hierlinger, Council Liaison, and Andrew Parr, Director of Music.

The Worship and Music Committee oversees the scheduling of worship and music with the Director of Music and the Pastors. Developing worship during the Covid pandemic has been challenging and yet rewarding. With the return of in person worship in September, video taping of worship services, creating worship services in new and interesting styles and keeping those who attend in person worship safe, is an ongoing process.

Committee Accomplishments in 2021:

- Purchase of the new, “*All Creation Sings*” hymn supplement. New hymns have been introduced, sung, and performed by the congregation, the Chancel Choir and the New Life Band to better provide up to date worship music.
- A Commission was given to John Helgen, a Minnesota composer, conductor and performer, to compose an SAB voicing of, “Twas in the Moon of Wintertime.” This composition was performed during the Candlelight Service in December.
- A Tenebrae Service was video taped for Good Friday, in collaboration with the other East Side Lutheran Congregations.
- Festival Easter Service was made available for the congregation.
- A Tenor section leader was hired to help support the choir.
- A New Life Theme Team was initiated.
- A Cantor was used to lead Psalms during worship in the Autumn.
- A new sound system was installed in the Sanctuary in November.
- Oil candles were purchased for use in the Chapel.

The committee wishes to thank Pastor John and Pastor Amanda for their support regarding the work of this committee.

Andrew Parr has been invaluable in his work as Director of Music. Without his ideas, encouragement, marvelous musical gifts, as well as his ability to direct the Choir, New Life Band, accompany and orchestrate music for additional instrumentalists, and engender an atmosphere of comradery, and joy; 2021 might have been musically bleak. We have been blessed to have Andrew as Director of Music.

Many people have shared their time and talents to create worthwhile worship. The Choir, New Life Band, Cantors, Assistant Ministers, Acolytes, small groups of singers, instrumentalists, Ushers, Greeters, and the help of the custodians. Special kudos for Nancy Johnson, who has been the leader of the Eucharistic Ministry Team, bringing worship to GA shut ins.

In Christ,

Verilyn Pelava
Chairperson

**Approved Minutes of Annual Meeting
Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church
Sunday, January 31, 2021
Virtual Meeting**

Call to order: President Amy Lipetzky called the meeting to order at 11:07 a.m.

Welcome, Prayer, and Opening Hymn: Pastor John welcomed the congregation and led them in prayer. “We All Are One in Mission” was sung.

Pastors’ Remarks: **Pastor John** began his remarks by stating that Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church is a vital place on the East Side.

He acknowledged Jerry Brakke’s 47 years of service as the Director of Worship and announced that GA will have a proper send-off to celebrate Jerry’s ministry. Pastor John thanked members of the Director of Worship Search Committee and the Music and Worship Committee for their work in hiring Andrew Parr as the new Director of Worship. He thanked God for the gifts that Andrew has brought to the congregation.

Pastor John also thanked the staff for finding new ways to work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work has been done with grace, imagination, and a deep commitment to GA.

He announced to congregation members that the Reopening Task Force will be meeting on Tuesday, February 15th. Pastor John anticipates worshipping virtually through the Easter season. He stated that this is the best practice for the congregation. A lot of planning is involved in preparing powerful worship experiences during the Lent and Easter seasons.

On Ash Wednesday, a drive-in worship service with the imposition of ashes and Communion will be held. Small groups will also be welcomed back to meet beginning on Ash Wednesday. Pastor John reminded congregation members that wearing a mask is mandatory and if anyone is uncomfortable with this requirement, they should refrain from attending the in-person meetings.

Pastor John gave an update on the Faith Forward Campaign. The mortgage balance is currently less than \$150,000. Sound, lighting, and live stream upgrades will be priorities once the mortgage is paid off later this year. He encouraged congregation members to think about the question, “What is the future for GA?” and to share ideas with him or Pastor Amanda.

He also gave an update regarding the Endowment Committee. Dan Shogren has stepped down from serving on this committee and Pastor John thanked him for his wisdom and guidance. Merritt Linzie is the new Chair of the Endowment Committee. Ted Madison has also agreed to serve as a committee member.

Pastor John acknowledged the loss of loved ones over the past year. He named GA members who died in 2020 and shared a prayer with the congregation.

He thanked congregation members for being the eyes and heart of Jesus and for their continuing commitment to GA. Pastor John and the other staff have worked to be a better church because of them and their patience as things have been figured out.

Pastor Amanda's remarks are included in the Annual Meeting report.

Presentation of 2021 Annual Financial Reports and 2021 Mission Spending Plan: Brett Bowman presented the annual financial reports. Discussion followed. Christopher Stordalen made a motion to approve the 2021 Proposed Budget, seconded by Mike Lipetzky; motion passed.

Ratification of Constitution: Motion to ratify the revised constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions was made by Merritt Linzie, seconded by Jeff Ronning; motion passed.

Presentation of Committee and Council Candidates: Amy Lipetzky called for a vote to approve this slate of candidates:

Church Council – Brett Bowman, Carrie Fraser, and Rick Howard

Lyngblomsten Care Center – Ken Bjork, Bill Lund, Marlys Sivertson, Craig Weflen
and Jill Youngren

Gustavus Adolphus College – Barb Higgins and Nancy Johnson

Camp Onomia – Cathy and Jeff Ronning

Jeff Ronning made a motion to approve these candidates, seconded by Amanda Simons; motion passed.

Motion to Adjourn: Christopher Stordalen moved to adjourn, seconded by Mary Vangerud at 12:21 p.m.; motion passed.

Closing Prayer and Hymn: Pastor John delivered the closing prayer and led the congregation in reciting the Lord's Prayer.

Submitted by Cathy Ronning, Council Secretary

In addition, during 2021, 20 persons were installed in new calls in congregations or in specialized ministries. That's a lot of call committee meetings, prayerful deliberations, and congregational meetings. How grateful we can all be that this work did not stop during the disruptions of the pandemic.

Amid the many changes in our communities, strong ministry requires lifelong learning. We are grateful to be in the third year of a generous grant from the Lilly Endowment to support the ongoing learning of pastors and deacons. In 2021, the nine members of the first round of the Second Act Cohort, for pastors and deacons in years four through 10 of public ministry wrapped up their two years together. Ten other pastors and deacons will form a second cohort in early 2022. They will be accompanied by mentors, more experienced clergy with a commitment to walk with rising leaders. Also, the Kubernesis Seminar, for those discerning a call to senior leadership positions, continues to meet quarterly and is eagerly anticipating their capstone sailing trip adventure in August of 2022. A third cohort for Leaders of Color continues to explore how best to invest the resources from the Lilly Endowment to deepen community, learning and support.

It is not enough to have strong, agile pastors and deacons; resilient lay leadership is also necessary for congregations to thrive. This past year, five congregations participated in a Liberating Structures cohort, learning together how to embrace new opportunities for deepening faith and expanded commitment to others beyond the congregation's walls. Three additional congregations are pursuing a tailor-made renewal process. Six congregations have participated in community listening and engagement training. Do you recognize your congregation's involvement here? If not, the synod staff is here to assist you.

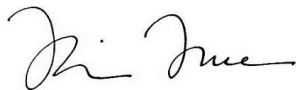
While mission support for synod and ELCA churchwide work has been shared at 96% of that budgeted for the year, many congregations do worry about money matters and seek to strengthen their stewardship skills. This past year, nine congregations – perhaps including yours – participated in a year-long training called Stewardship for All Seasons. It is good to remember that none of us need to navigate these days without encouragement from others.

Pandemic restrictions on global travel challenged the synod's long-standing partnerships in the Iringa Diocese of Tanzania and in Guatemala but Zoom and video connections opened new ways to be a church that is both local and global. We are especially grateful that in March, Astine and Ryan Bose were able to begin their two years of volunteer service with Bega Kwa Bega in Iringa. God has shown us and our global partners new ways to be connected, habits which will endure long after the pandemic winds down.

Let me end with a special word of thanks to the synod staff. Along with Ryan and Astine Bose, Rolf Lowenberg-DeBoer joined the staff as an assistant to the bishop in March. Other staff include Michael Gold, office assistant; Pastor Justin Grimm, director for evangelical mission and assistant to the bishop; Peter Harrits, director of Bega Kwa Bega and assistant to the bishop; Deacon Krista Lind, assistant to the bishop; Anna Marsh, executive assistant to the bishop; Alicia Rodriguez, office manager; David Roinas, synod finance administrator; and Mary Smith, director of communications.

It has been a wild ride of a year and yet at every rollicking turn along the way, God's faithfulness has sustained us and those we are called to serve. Hold fast, we can say to one another. Please know what a joy it is for all of us to serve with you in the Saint Paul Area Synod.

Yours in God's service



Bishop Patricia Lull



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