

Metropolitan Washington, D.C Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The Report of the Bishop to the 2019 Assembly

Dear friends,

Writing this report, I am finishing up another one of the tasks I won't repeat. My time of service as your bishop ends on August 31 this year, so this is the last Report of the Bishop I will submit to you.

It has been a great honor to be your bishop. When I began this call, back in what now seems like my time of relative youth and ignorance, I didn't have any way to know exactly what kind of work I would be doing. For some months I just roamed around talking to people. And my first impression, that the congregations and ministries of our synod are vibrant, faithful outposts of the gospel, has only grown deeper and stronger over these almost twelve years. We have our struggles, we have our failings, we miss our opportunities. But to an extent impossible to describe, we love Jesus Christ and we look for ways to put that love into action.

Early on in my time as bishop, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly decisions about human sexuality rocked our church. I strongly support those decisions but I know they were hard on many of our congregations. But we weathered that storm and I believe we emerged stronger because we were able to talk to each other and to respect each other's faithful convictions. It is not necessary that Christian people be all of one mind about the life of the Church. What is necessary is that we each strive to have the mind of Christ, to speak our truth in love and not in anger, and to care for each other.

Two decisions we made in my time as bishop have continuing consequences. Several years ago we reduced the synod's Mission Support sharing with ELCA churchwide ministries from 50% to 35% of the money congregations sent to the synod. And we began paying by ourselves for our new and renewing mission expenses and for the salary and benefits of our Director of Evangelical Mission. The idea was that it made no sense for us to send money to churchwide offices which would be returned to us anyway. And we hoped that funding new and renewing ministries ourselves would give us better accountability and greater flexibility. This decision, made by several other synods at the same time, was not well received by our churchwide partners at first. But we have been successful. And by now we turn out to have opened a whole new conversation in our church about the way the ELCA pays for its ministry and the way synods like ours, blessed with rich resources, support others doing good work with less.

And we decided several years ago to undertake a capital campaign, "New Connections," focused on raising both new money and new people to enrich the life of our synod. The fruits of this campaign have been remarkable in many ways. We've had the funds to support new congregations. We've tithed the money we received to the ELCA's current capital campaign. We've been able to create networks of coaches and of congregational leaders like we never had

before. We're taking practical steps to build intentionally diverse communities and congregations. And we still intend to increase by 10% the number of people who have deep relations with each one of our congregations. Time will have to tell if we reach this last goal or not. But it has been a great thing to have "New Connections" as a focus that offered all of us ways forward. Thank you to everyone who has participated in "New Connections." And if you haven't participated in "New Connections," it is clearly not too late.

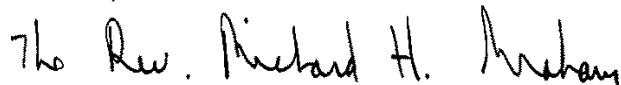
For other things of which I'm proud in our synod I can claim much less credit. The important work of our Racial Equity Team, and our ministry with the Caribbean Synod, "Building Puentes," have both flourished because the synod is blessed with strong, imaginative leaders. It is a joy to see these leaders come forward and to help them find resources to do the work to which they are calling us. The bishop in our synod is not the source of every good idea or every important initiative. For this, honestly, everyone should give thanks to God.

And our Candidacy Committee has worked faithfully and (I would say) joyfully to raise up new leaders for our whole church. It is amazing to me to realize at the end of my almost twelve years that only twelve of our seventy-five congregations have the same lead pastor as when I started. We have had a significant change in leadership in our synod and the need for Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service grows in our synod as it does across the church. I pray that our synod will continue to find ways, old and new, to train and nurture the pastors and deacons who will help move us into a new day.

I said it has been a great honor to be your bishop. It has also been a source of great joy. The people I've worked with in the synod office have been the best of colleagues and friends. On my worst days, and there have been some, I have still come to the office knowing that what we had to face we would face together. And I have had the patient support of my family every day. Our three grandchildren were all born since I became bishop. One of my favorite pictures is of them all, in red, with their parents at the 2017 celebration of the Reformation in the National Cathedral. For Nancy Ann, loving and kind, left at home sometimes while I traveled, called to sit through many a church supper, no words of thanks could be enough.

When I was elected bishop, I said I would be the synod's cheerleader-in-chief. I had no idea how easy that part of my job would be. This is a great synod. And praise be to God, our best days are still out ahead of us, not because we're so smart or so talented but because God is so obviously not done with us. May all that we say and do bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ among us. And may we all come at last to that assembly where we sing praises forever around God's throne.

In Jesus,



The Rev. Richard H. Graham, Bishop