

## **2017 REPORT OF INDIANA-KENTUCKY SYNOD VICE-PRESIDENT TED MILLER**

As I report to the Indiana-Kentucky Mission Territory for a fourth time as Synod Vice-President and reflect on our work together to empower, equip and encourage the people of God to make Christ known since we met in Assembly in South Bend in June, I continue to give thanks for the privilege to serve with an exceptionally dedicated and Spirit-filled Synod Staff and 26-person Synod Council.

In this year in which we observe the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, we continue the constant process of reforming our church to do the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our time and place. In a camp retreat setting on September 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, Synod Council met with seven of our ten conference deans to begin reexamining the role of our ten conferences and especially the role of conference deans. In the absence of Bishop Gafkjen because of his father's death in Minnesota, the beginning of the visioning process was ably facilitated by Assistants to the Bishop Pastors Heather Apel and Rudy Mueller and Director of Evangelical Mission Pastor Nancy Nyland. Following up on the initial work and at the Synod Council meeting held at the Synod Office on November 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, preparations were made for further work with the conference deans at the next meeting scheduled to be held at the Synod Office on January 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, the ice storm that weekend delayed our work on concrete proposals with the conference deans, but through the use of technology 24 of the 26 Synod Council members were able to meet electronically for over two hours on the morning of January 14<sup>th</sup>. Although the necessary business was accomplished by using ZOOM and thus included nearly all of the Synod Council in the decision-making which otherwise would have included only the seven members of the Executive Committee, all agreed that we much prefer face-to-face meetings in which we are able not only to conduct business but also to worship together and to share each of our stories of where we see God at work. As I write this report in the first week of March, Synod Council is scheduled to meet twice more before our Synod Assembly in June in Covington.

A real highlight of the past year for me was the opportunity to serve as part of the 15-person voting member contingent from the Indiana-Kentucky Synod at the triennial ELCA Churchwide Assembly held in New Orleans from August 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>. In addition to the opportunity to meet with the other 64 Synod Vice-Presidents for a day prior to the Churchwide Assembly, the many highlights of that week included daily worship and learning more about the many aspects of our work together as the ELCA, especially in assisting migrant minors through the AMMPARO strategy as well as in the numerous and varied global and ecumenical relationships. The Indiana-Kentucky Mission Territory was very much in evidence even at the podium at the Churchwide Assembly, with not only Bishop Gafkjen making presentations as Chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops as well as regarding unifying the Word and Service roster but also with ELCA Church Council member Pastor Vicki Garber making presentations as Budget Chair and as Co-Chair of the Assembly Reference and Counsel Committee.

In the area of interchurch relationships, last year's Synod Assembly focused on the improved relations with the Mennonite Church on our Mission Territory. At the upcoming Synod Assembly, I look forward especially to the presentations from Rabbis Dennis and Sandy Sasso as a significant step in our relationship with our Jewish brothers and sisters. The overwhelming Churchwide Assembly approval of the "Declaration on the Way" provided yet another example of how far we have come in our Lutheran/Roman Catholic relationship. All of these developing relationships, of course, depend upon our continued work locally as well as synodically, nationally and globally.

On a personal note, the global scope of the Lutheran Church became even more real to us when Lisa and I were privileged to be part of a 10-day 29-person tour group of Lutherans in November and December in Germany, where we especially were inspired by several Advent concerts, Christmas markets and visits to significant Luther sites in places such as Wittenberg, Eisenach, Erfurt and Eisleben. As we stood beside the Indiana-Kentucky Synod tree planted in the Luther Rose Garden in the shadow of the Castle Church in Wittenberg with our friends and Synod Mission Interpreter Co-Chairs Phil and Susan Schmidt we were reminded vividly that our ties as Lutherans span the globe. Seeing such historical locations placed in context the significant work which we as Lutheran Christians have done and are challenged to carry forward into our world still very much in need of hearing about the grace of God.

In closing, I give thanks to God for this opportunity to serve and for the privilege of serving with so many who give so much of their time, talent and treasure for the sake of the Gospel in our shared ministry. Special thanks go those Synod Council members who are completing terms of office with the Synod Assembly this June, lay conference representatives Jim Swinford (who returned to Synod Council this year to complete the unexpired term of the late Bernie Augenstein), Amy Kruse (who completed a full three-year term) and Marilyn Saum (who served the maximum six years) as well as our energetic and inspirational youth member for the past two years, Noah Smith. Three clergy members (Pastors Amy Beitelschees-Albers, Jessica King and Randy Schroeder) are completing three-year terms but are eligible for reelection. Yet another word of thanks goes to one who for over 16 years has provided much of the stability for Synod Council and the entire Indiana-Kentucky Synod behind the scenes, Pastor Rudy Mueller, who in January retired from his long and faithful service as an assistant first for a decade to Bishop Jim Stuck and then to Bishop Bill Gafkjen. Ever since my first Synod Council meeting as Synod Secretary in 1999, when Rudy was a clergy member of Synod Council, I have been privileged to count him as a close friend and brother in Christ as we have served together and shared the joys and challenges presented over the generational changes of our families. Finally, as always, I thank my wife Dr. Lisa Miller for her love and encouragement in supporting me in this service as we complete our 40<sup>th</sup> year of marriage this year, blessed by the opportunities God has given us to serve in our church, our professions and our growing family now including a fourth grandchild in addition to our three children and their spouses.

In His Service, C. Theodore Miller, Vice-President