

2017 Indiana-Kentucky Synod Assembly Report

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“And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.” Revelation 21:5-6

“God is making all things new.” To some, this phrase will bring comfort and peace, as they long for God to change their situation or transform some aspect of their life. However, for others, these words are not a welcome message, as new things can bring fear and uncertainty. As I reflect on the mission and ministry in which I have been honored to participate in during this last year, I have walked with people and communities who both welcomed and struggled to embrace the new thing that God is doing. Below are a few summaries of where I have seen God doing a new thing in and around the Indiana-Kentucky Synod:

- God is doing a new thing in the lives of 22 women and men who are discerning and preparing for a call as public leaders in the church. Candidates from this synod are engaged in theological and practical ministry formation at 5 different ELCA seminaries. Many new things are happening in theological education, which has caused the ELCA seminaries to rethink their approach to teaching and forming leaders for the church through new degree programs and experiential learning in ministry contexts.
- God is doing a new thing in the churches and communities that called candidates from this synod to serve as their pastors and deacons. We celebrated with 4 of those candidates who completed seminary and the Candidacy process and accepted calls to ministry in Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.
- God is doing a new thing in the members of the IN-KY Synod Candidacy Committee, which is composed of rostered ministers and lay members of congregations from across the IN-KY Synod. This committee supports, encourages and discerns with the individuals who are sensing a call to ministry. In 2016, we welcomed two new committee members: Rev. Mike Crawford and Rev. Paul Offhaus.
- God is doing a new thing in the ways this synod financially supports candidates who are preparing for public ministry. The IN-KY Synod provides tuition assistance to every full-time candidate who has been granted entrance into the ELCA Candidacy process (except while on internship), and awards additional scholarships based on submitted applications. We provided \$42,950 of financial support to 13 individuals in the 2016-17 academic year, and we have over \$61,000 available for seminarian scholarship support for the 2017-18 academic year.

- God is doing a new thing in the gathered body of the 2016 Indiana-Kentucky Synod Assembly which met June 9-11 in South Bend, IN under the theme, *Spirit Filled. Spirit Sent.* The 497 voting members, visitors and special guests gathered for three days of worship, business, fellowship, and learning, and voted to reelect Bishop William Gafkjen to a second six-year term as Bishop of the IN-KY Synod on the first ballot. We heard of the new things that God is doing in our global companion churches as Bishop Izani Bruch of the Iglesia Evangelica Luterana en Chile (IELCH) and Ephorus Rev. Dr. Willem Simarmata of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP in Indonesia) shared stories of how God is at work in those church bodies. The assembly also experienced the powerful story of healing and reconciliation that occurred a few years ago between the Mennonite and Lutheran communities from Rev. Andre Gingerich Stoner, Director of Interchurch Relations and Holistic Witness for Mennonite Church, USA, and Kathryn Johnson, Director of ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations.
- God is doing a new thing as I continue to collaborate with other leaders in the synod to provide personal and congregational educational and stewardship support for rostered ministers through the Freed to Lead program. This ministry also received additional funds in 2016 which will provide the opportunity to review the financial grant assistance aspect of the Freed to Lead program for future years and serve to complement the educational component.
- God is doing a new thing in the many and various communities and congregations in which I spend my time as I crisscross this wide and beautiful synod. I enjoy being with the people and ministries across this mission territory so that I can witness firsthand how God is at work in those communities. I spend many weekends or evenings visiting, preaching, teaching, listening, equipping, and meeting with people to encourage them in their own journey of discipleship and mission. In 2016, I was present in 31 different congregations and communities, and spent time with countless other individuals.

As I prepare to mark the end of my sixth year serving the people and ministries of this Indiana-Kentucky mission territory, I am constantly amazed at all the new things that God is doing here in this place. It is a blessing and joy to serve alongside so many remarkable individuals and different communities as together we work to make Christ known for the sake of the world. I look forward to a change in my role within the IN-KY Synod as the Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership. I am excited to see what new things God will do as I let go of the synod assembly planning and office management responsibilities and focus on working with candidates, rostered ministers and congregations/ministries. Thank you for your partnership as we walk together as God's disciples who are FORMED in the image of God, REFORMED in the cross of Christ, and TRANSFORMED in the power of the Spirit.

In Peace,

Rev. Heath K. Apel