

From the bishop:

Synod launches new strategic plan

OUR MISSION
Together we proclaim and embody
God's unconditional love for the sake of the world

We've just completed a strategic planning process that paints a compelling picture of who we are as the ELCA Rocky Mountain Synod. What we see in this picture is that we are congregations and ministries, we are ministers and leaders, and we are partners and people of Christ's church who together proclaim and embody God's unconditional love for the sake of the world.

That's our mission. That's our reason for being: to so live in the fullness of God's love—a love that seeks us out in Jesus; that claims and inhabits us through the Spirit; that without exception is for each and every person, for each and every part of us—that together we proclaim and share and embody it for all people, for the whole creation. Can you think of anything more important or a better reason for getting up each day?

As the Rocky Mountain Synod, together we proclaim and embody God's unconditional love, and we do so for the sake of the world, a world that is divided and hurting, a world living in all kinds of death. Ours is a world yearning for new life and hope, which is exactly what we have to offer as Christ's church.

As our particular part of Christ's church, we will proclaim and embody

God's unconditional love through four mutual commitments, listed in our plan as our "Ministry Result Areas" (MRA).

First we will **claim our distinct gifts**—distinct gifts of theology and practice, distinct gifts that come from our legacy and our understanding of what church means. We will use those gifts to partner well with others in sharing God's love with all.

Second, we will **connect in ministry and witness**. No one part of us is in isolation from the other, and we have a commitment to deepened communication and collaboration.

Third, we will **equip all leaders** for the sake of our ministry together. Whether you are a minister or lay leader, whether your vocation is in the church or in the world, we will ask what is most needed for a faithful and vibrant witness to God's unconditional love and we will seek to equip everyone for that witness.

Finally, we will **accompany one another into God's future**. As

communities of faith, as leaders in this synod, with our colleagues in our churchwide ministries, we will commit ourselves to walking together in these changing times, with creativity and flexibility while still holding one another accountable to our shared life. We will do this because we are Christ's church and we are better together.

Yours in faith,
Bishop Jim Gonia



Strategic plan: Ministry result areas



MRA 1: Claiming our Gifts

Teach, proclaim and share the significance of our ELCA way of being part of Christ's church with a clear and contagious vision from abundance.

Summary of goals:

- Offer a clear and contagious vision about the unique gifts we offer to the larger church and world as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- Root our congregations, ministries and witness in the abundance of our unique gifts.
- Name our gifts as we tell our story, both as a wider church and through our congregations.

Where you will see this in 2017:

- 2017 synod assembly: "Re•Formation: Then. Now. Always."
- Lutheran-Roman Catholic Common Prayer Service: Seven services around the synod.
- Global Church and Campus Ministry Sundays.
- Video messages from Bishop Jim Gonia.
- Stories of our life together in the synod newsletter, "Connection."



As the church together, Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp worked with six congregations and two colleges to raise money for ELCA World Hunger through an annual Grace Race 5K.

Connecting in ministry: The Border Conference

As a deacon, I feel called to use my gifts for ministry not only in the congregation I serve, but for the benefit of the larger church. I'm most energized about ministry when I'm working and collaborating with others, whether that is with my congregation's Faith Formation Mission Team or coordinating a conference youth event.

When I first began my call in Las Cruces, N.M., Bishop Jim Gonia shared a dream of the Border Conference working together to send youth to the ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit. I was energized about this idea, and as I shared the concept with other leaders, it was quickly clear that we wanted to do this together. Our 17 youth and adults came from five of our 12 congregations. They visited other congregations to share about the trip and how they saw themselves as representatives for the whole conference. Through joint fundraising efforts, we were able to cover all expenses.

The desire to do joint youth ministry didn't stop after the Gathering in 2015. Last year we had more than 20 youth participate in a retreat connected to our Missional Gathering, two summer trips, and we're planning our third Amazing Race. Our youth want to be together and connect with one another, and they are leading the way for our congregations of how to be Christ's church, "Better Together."

—Submitted by Laura Carson, who serves as deacon of Peace Lutheran Church, Las Cruces, N.M., and as the co-dean of the Border Conference.



MRA 2: Connecting in Ministry and Witness

Foster new and increased collaboration and connection across our synod.



MRA 3: Equipping All Leaders

Equip leaders and congregations to strengthen vibrant, healthy faith communities.

Summary of goals:

- Strengthen communication across our synod.
- Build connectivity—between congregations, among leaders and throughout our synod—to energize our ministry and witness.
- Facilitate networking and sharing, including with ecumenical partners and new rostered ministers.

Where you will see this in 2017:

- Video series from Bishop Jim Gonia.
- Rocky Mountain Synod app.
- Intentional retired rostered minister gatherings.
- Connecting with Roman Catholic dioceses.
- Mentor/contact person for all candidates awaiting call.

Summary of goals:

- Create a vision for comprehensive leadership development in our synod.
- Develop a spirituality of generosity and abundance.
- Use the resources of the Lilly Endowment grant—Educate, Equip, Enact (3E)—to address economic challenges faced by rostered ministers.

Where you will see this in 2017:

- Evaluation of congregation transition process.
- Rostered minister support through coaching and coaching training.
- Leadership development training and tools.
- Development of the synod's finance team.
- Lilly Endowment grant implementation: Educate, Equip, Enact (3E)—addressing economic challenges faced by rostered ministers.

Equipping All Leaders: RMS receives \$500,000 Lilly Grant

Educate, Equip, Enact (3E) is part of the Lilly Endowment's nationwide project to address economic challenges facing pastors and deacons. This past March, the Rocky Mountain Synod applied for a \$500,000 grant as part of the endowment's National Initiative to Address Economic Challenges Facing Rostered Leaders. We learned in November that we have received the grant.

As part of the application process, our synod carried out research to identify economic challenges faced by our pastors and deacons. Rostered and congregation leaders helped identify specific issues that 3E will be asked to address. One of these challenges is the significant seminary debt that many newly rostered leaders face as they begin ministry.

In addition, while many report that their salaries now fall within synodical guidelines, both pastors and deacons can find it difficult to meet or recover from medical and other household economic emergencies. Research also revealed an important link between rostered ministers' economic health and congregation wellness. Many congregations struggle to pay their pastors and deacons.

Many congregations and rostered ministers could benefit from education and training on fiscal management. The grant provides for a two-part process in which matching grants for congregations and rostered ministers to address specific economic challenges will be yoked with education, stewardship development and skill-building resources.

The ultimate goal is that the challenges we face can become the catalyst for growing a deepened capacity for ministry and wellness for both congregations and rostered leaders. In the end, this is simply a way for us to live out our baptismal identity—the renewal that comes from the dying-and-rising rhythm that leads us to life in Christ and the gifts of the Spirit.

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MRA 4: Accompanying One Another into God's Future

Ensure that synod leadership is engaged in the life of our congregations and ministries.

Summary of goals:

- Acknowledge, support and create new viable models of ministry across our synod, encouraging creativity and experimentation.
- Increase the number of rostered ministers arising from our synod and entering candidacy.
- Intentionally align our organizational structures to support our vision for ministry and witness.

Where you will see this in 2017:

- Review the Office of the Bishop staffing plan and staff goals. Job descriptions and goals will align with strategic plan.
- Facilitate new congregation networks for mutual support and collaboration.
- Support of existing ministries with intentional visitation strategy by staff and synodical leadership.
- Review of current synodical teams and committees to ensure their support of current mission and ministry goals.

Connecting in ministry: New Rocky Mountain Synod app

Is there an app for that? If so, I want it. As a culture that is on the move, accessing email, posting pictures to Facebook or Instagram and relying on Siri for directions isn't given a second thought. Now add in accessing my boarding pass, requesting roadside assistance, paying bills, tracking workouts, logging into a WebEx or calling for a FaceTime chat with my 2-year-old nephew—my phone is now my office, my personal assistant and my access to my community.

And it turns out I'm not alone. From 2008 to 2015, internet usage using mobile phones versus a laptop or desktop went from 12 to 51 percent. In addition, users spend 90 percent of their time in mobile apps compared to the mobile web.

As "Christ's Church, Better Together," how might we use current and emerging technologies to connect for the sake of community, equip our leaders for ministry and share the gospel in new ways?

—Submitted by Erin Power, a deacon and assistant to the bishop for synodical life.



Rocky Mountain Synod app features:

- **Connecting in ministry:** Congregation and rostered minister directories.
- **Worship resources:** Lectionary, New Revised Standard Version Bible and bulletin inserts.
- **Proclaiming the gospel:** Preaching resources, videos and *Living Lutheran* reflections.
- **Synod assembly:** Schedules, documents and electronic voting.