



Indiana-Kentucky Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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January 2022

Dear People of God,

As you know, when we gather in Muncie, Indiana June 9-11 for the 2022 Indiana-Kentucky Synod Assembly we will culminate the mutual discernment and call process usually referred to as the election of a bishop. ELCA synod bishops serve six-year terms. While a handful of synods have term limits, this synod does not. I was first called to this office by the Synod Assembly in 2010 and then called again in 2016.

Consequently, in coming weeks and during the 2022 Assembly we will again listen deeply to the Holy Spirit, to each other, and to the world around us to discern together where God is leading us and what we need, including in the role of bishop, to follow faithfully.

For many months now I have engaged my own discernment around whether I sense a call to be open to serving another term as this synod's bishop. I have spent considerable time in prayer, conversation, reflection, and listening. Folks who know me well – especially those most directly affected by this decision – have graciously listened to me and shared their thoughts with me. A wide variety of people who provide leadership for the church in many places and positions have offered honest conversation about how the gifts, skills, and perspectives that I bring may or may not be what the church and this synod need in the role of bishop now and into the future. In prayer and reading and other ways, I have reflected on the last eleven and a half years of our work together and explored visions and dreams for the years to come.

This discernment has led me to believe that God is calling me to be open to serving another term as your bishop. With humility and a profound sense of gratitude for your partnership in the gospel, I share this openness with you as we now embark on a journey of communal discernment over the next few weeks.

We Lutheran Christians believe that call comes to us both internally and externally. That is, each of us cross-marked, Spirit-sealed children of God seeks an "internal" sense of what God is gifting and calling us to be and do at any given time. I know, for example, that there may be other pastors who are sensing or discerning openness to a call to serve as bishop for this synod. At the same time, the rest of the body of Christ also seeks a sense for who the Spirit is gifting and calling to a particular role in a particular time and place in its life together. In the case of the call of a synod bishop, this "external" call will culminate in a prayerful process of voting beginning the first afternoon of the Synod Assembly in June.

Synod Vice President Ted Miller will soon begin to distribute the summary results of the bishop election survey that was distributed last fall and is intended to assist in our discernment. Ted will also continue to steward the rest of the process in partnership with Mike Anderson, chair of the Bishop's Election Committee. I trust that over the coming weeks you will join your siblings across this great mission territory to prayerfully, thoughtfully, and enthusiastically look for what God is up to, and then joyfully and together follow the Spirit into God's unfolding future.

Peace be with you,

The Rev. Dr. William O. Gafkjen, Bishop

Empower, equip, and encourage the people of God to make Christ known