



## Grant us gratitude

### Bishop's reflections

*These reflections were first published on Feb. 18, 2019, on the synod's website.*

I've worked with congregational treasurers in parishes I've served who insisted on publicizing in every bulletin and newsletter how far behind the budget we were. But whenever we edged ahead in income versus budget or expenses, they would insist that we mustn't let people know. They assumed people are motivated mainly by scarcity. I still think those treasurers were wrong. People give because they believe in the mission our giving supports.

So I am delighted to share with you a whole string of hopeful financial news about the North Carolina (NC) Synod, especially since I issued a desperate plea—and you responded—when we were nearly \$175,000 in the hole three years ago. Let's start with Mission Support. The deficit of 2015 has morphed through your generosity into almost a comparable surplus for 2018. Synod staff and the Finance Committee will make recommendations to Synod Council at our March meeting as to how we release that extra stored servanthood (money) for our mission as the NC Synod. **Thank you!**

You may know we are the first synod ELCA-wide to participate in the "Stewardship for All Seasons" (SAS) program that is designed for congregations. Nearly 40 of our congregations have participated, and a majority of them have realized double-digit

percentage giving increases to their congregations. A basic directive of SAS is telling your constituency what you would do if you had more resources. We did that as a synod for our 2019 budget. I mean, what would it have looked like if we had a campaign to share more resources to pursue our new synodical vision but then presented the NC Synod Assembly with a flat budget? No, we asked for more for 2019. A lot more, in fact, and we told you why. And you stepped up. In fact, the 2018 surplus almost exactly matches our synod's 2019 budget increase. **Thank you!**

You may learn more about SAS on our website: [nclutheran.org/congregations/congregational-ministries/stewardship-for-all-seasons/](http://nclutheran.org/congregations/congregational-ministries/stewardship-for-all-seasons/).

As they say on TV, "But wait! There's more!" The Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary *Opening Doors* campaign to fund scholarships for NC Synod candidates to attend the seminary has reached \$1.4 million of its \$2 million goal as of January. We have been invited to apply for a three-year extension to our Faith, Finances, Freedom Lilly Endowment Inc. grant (Lifeline Fund) and are working on that now. And in the past six weeks we have learned that we are receiving four grants that will make possible even more new and much-needed ministry in, through and for the NC Synod.

The first grant, from the churchwide expression, is for \$44,000 (\$22,000 for each of 2019 and 2020) and has made possible our bringing the Rev. CeCee Mills onto our synod staff at 15 hours a week for these two years. She started in February. Her main task will be the highly relational and much-needed yoking process (sharing a pastor) for congregations who cannot afford a full-time pastor with benefits. We already are doing some, but we will be doing more and more. We are grateful to have Pastor CeCee on our synod staff in addition to her ELCA half-time African-descent responsibilities.

We learned also in December that we had received, in conjunction with Lutheran Services Carolinas (LSC), a leadership grant to help train managers (LSC) and pastors who move into more

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complex ministry settings. A large focus of this will be staff supervision and general management skills, which one cannot assume of a pastor since seminaries don't focus on this. Though the grant came to the synod, we have not yet worked out the details of who within the NC Synod/LSC structure will manage this leadership training. This grant is also from the ELCA's churchwide expression. **We are grateful!**

The third ELCA grant is \$80,000 for moving forward our Women in Ministry conversations in the wake of the much-viewed “*Seriously?*” video and in preparation for the 2020 celebration of the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women as pastors in the ELCA. This grant, though it came to us to manage, is really for all of Region 9 and will include a Region 9 women in ministry gathering as well as a number of other projects for which we encourage you to stay tuned. **We are grateful!**

A fourth grant came to us from Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR). You may remember that Deacon GeoRene “Jo” Jones is called by our synod half-time to work in social justice and advocacy. The LDR grant will pay for an additional 15 hours/week of Deacon Jo's time for the next two years. She will work in the area of ongoing LDR hurricane relief in eastern North Carolina in addition to LSC's relief work. **We are grateful!**

I would be remiss not to note that, though our staff worked collaboratively, all three of the ELCA grants were submitted by our director for evangelical mission, the Rev. Danielle DeNise. We are grateful for her work as an ELCA-called pastor deployed here to the NC Synod and for the churchwide/synodical partnership which she embodies.

We consider it a blessing, a privilege and a sacred trust that we have these grants and their translations into needful ministries entrusted to us by our churchwide organization. Things are happening in our synod in the name of Jesus through the work of our church for the sake of the world. **We are grateful!**

—*Bishop Tim Smith*

## The gifts of all God's people

*This mission support story was first published on Jan. 22, 2019, on the synod's website and in “Synod E-News.”*



It's been more than 50 years since Martin Luther King Jr. led the Montgomery Bus Boycott and delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech at the March on Washington. Yet, it doesn't take long to figure out that we still have lots of work to do. Any scroll through today's news offers stories related to racial or cultural inequality.

It follows then that our synod's new vision statement explicitly commits to growing and caring for whole and healthy leaders—which includes the promise to develop culturally sensitive leaders. We stand ready to celebrate and lift up the gifts of all of God's people and to learn together how to best reflect God's beautiful creation in the body of Christ that is our synod.

In collaboration with the synod's director for evangelical mission, the synod's African-Descent Strategy Team is providing opportunities to prepare our leaders for healthy intercultural and interracial interactions for the sake of the world. Since November 2018, seven “Developing Culturally-Sensitive Leaders” training days have been offered at different locations around the synod.

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Several of our synod’s pastors share the impact of this training:

The Rev. Jennifer Ginn, Cross & Crown Lutheran Church, Matthews, and one of the training day presenters, shared: “Studying the course material and co-leading a session brought me lots of new insights into white privilege. I live with advantages I never even think about. I also learned new information that I did not learn in school about persistent attempts throughout our country’s history to keep people of color from advancing. I was ashamed, but also energized to work in my congregation and community to support people of color and minority owned businesses. The course material is dense and challenging, but well worth the time and effort.”

Just a few weeks ago, Epiphany Lutheran Church, Winston-Salem, hosted one of the trainings. Epiphany’s pastor, Russell Peek, reflected on the day: “I appreciated the variety of churches and people that were represented. It helped shape the

conversation throughout the day. It was helpful to have important and needed conversations around race and racism. I left the training feeling like this was a good step in the right direction. It didn’t solve all our problems nor did it offer an easy solution to the complexities of race and racism in our society. To be perfectly honest, there were moments that were uncomfortable, but I am thankful for the discomfort and [!] trust those moments were the Spirit’s movement.”

Before hosting the event at Christ the King Lutheran, Cary, the Rev. Wolfgang Herz-Lane encouraged his staff and congregation to participate. He shared: “We were glad to host. About 10 of our staff and members attended because we saw this training as a necessary prerequisite for our vision of building an inclusive church where ‘all are welcome, no exceptions.’ Bold and deliberate inclusion, especially of the LGBTQ+ community and people of color, is one of our highest priorities, along with engaging youth and young adults under 35. The training helps to

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Our church, the ELCA, will gather in assembly under the theme “We are church,” Aug. 5-10 in Milwaukee. The NC Synod voting members attending this summer will be:

Sylvia Black  
The Rev. Diane Cline  
Josh Copeland  
Hunter Haith  
Susan Harris

The Rev. Dave Keck  
Warren Keyes  
The Rev. Jennifer Krushas  
Deacon Mindy Makant  
The Rev. Adrienne Martin

Jennifer Miller  
Kai Thurow  
The Rev. Greg Williams

Also attending and voting from our synod are Bishop Tim Smith and Diana Haywood, NC Synod vice president. Assistants to the bishop, the Rev. Sara Ilderton, Deacon Tammy Jones West and the Rev. Phil Tonnesen, will attend as visitors, as will the Rev. Danielle DeNise, director for evangelical mission. Please remember to lift these voting members—indeed all voting members of the ELCA—in prayer during the August assembly. Important business includes the election of both a presiding bishop and a secretary.

To watch the business sessions and worship on livestream, go to the assembly website at [www.elca.org/churchwideassembly](http://www.elca.org/churchwideassembly).



Join us for this year's synod assembly held May 31-June 1 in Greensboro.

Our theme is "Vital Congregations," and we will be learning about and lifting up vitality in congregations.

Come in person. Register by May 15 at [bit.ly/ncassembly2019](http://bit.ly/ncassembly2019).

Watch via Livestream at [nclutheran.org](http://nclutheran.org).

Hold the assembly in prayer!

Look for assembly updates on our website and in our September *Living Lutheran* insert.

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prepare our people to not just say that we are a welcoming church, but to behave and live like one."

Six more "Developing Culturally-Sensitive Leaders" training days were offered in February, April and May. Congregation members are invited; NC Synod pastors and deacons are required to attend. Thanks to mission support provided to the synod, there is no cost for the training and lunch is provided at each of the training days.

As the Rev. Russell Peek said, "I continue to think about how I can be an agent of God's reconciliation and justice ... to think about my own 'blind spots' to racism so that I can continue to serve God's people."

Maybe if we all discover our "blind spots," it won't take another 50 years before Dr. King's dream—"that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character"—is realized. After all, isn't that what Jesus commands us to do?

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27).* ✠

A graphic celebrating 2018 giving. On the left, the text "2018 GIVING" is written vertically. The background is a light blue-purple color with various icons representing giving, such as a gift box, a hand holding a coin, a stack of coins, a globe, a dollar sign, and a hand holding a pen. In the center, the words "Thank you!" are written in a large, blue, cursive font. Below this, the phrase "To God be the glory!" is written in a smaller, blue, cursive font. At the bottom, three lines of text provide giving statistics: "\$1,845,318 Total given from NC for churchwide ministries (synod, congregations, individuals)", "\$303,000 Total given from NC Synod for agencies &amp; institutions", and "\$98,965 Total given from NC Synod for domestic disaster relief (following hurricanes)".