

The synod is us

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace to you!

As I begin this work of being bishop, I would like to take this opportunity to offer what I hope to be clarifying words about the role of this office, and the nature of the relationship between bishop and congregations.

First and foremost we are partners in ministry.-

We strive to do the work that Christ has placed before us—together. Just as an individual is blessed to be part of a community of faith so, too, is a congregation blessed to be in partnership with other congregations, and in partnership with a church that is greater than congregational concerns or efforts. We can do more together than any one single congregation can do alone.

And we keep each other on track. Perhaps another congregation is trying something new that you think might catch on in your church. Or maybe

their effort gets you thinking with new creativity and energy. Joy can be contagious. A spirit of courage and willingness to try new things can be catching.

It is important that we are in communication with each other as resources are shared, stories are told and efforts are joined. Together, at our synod assembly in May, our World Hunger offering almost doubled—not because of any one congregation's efforts, but because together every congregation contributed what they could to make a difference to stamp out hunger.

For the past five years congregations have contributed to the success of the synod MARKED! events. Even if congregations didn't send any youth, we still received countless boxes of items needed for the service project each year. Together, the youth who attended MARKED! assembled Lutheran World Relief health kits and baby layettes, school kits and love bundles. No single congregation gave all the soap or nail clippers. But almost every congregation gave something toward the group effort.

Second, congregations and synod leadership each have a role to play.

As you no doubt already know, congregational ministry and synod leadership ministry are very different.

As a parish pastor, my primary concerns were of congregation and community life—planning worship, making vacation Bible school happen, recruiting volunteers, teaching, preaching, pastoral care, etc. But as the assistant to the bishop, and now bishop, my primary concerns are congregational vitality, raising up leaders, equipping people for ministry,



Bishop Katherine Finnegan



Interacting with our friends and partners in Tanzania was by far the biggest highlight of the experience for everyone. The relationships that continue to be developed between our synod and the Eastern and Coastal Diocese are what make this partnership so important. Read about the GT-12 trip on page B.

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A Tanzanian adventure

On June 15 we boarded a plane for Tanzania with 10 young people from the Northern Great Lakes Synod. We were a ragtag bunch from Grand Marais and Menominee, Rhinelander and Hancock, Republic, Rock and Marquette. A year prior, most of us were strangers. None had international travel experience. Many of us fretted over the cost of the trip and what our accommodations would be like. Despite the unknown, we knew our time in Africa would be life-altering and that the Spirit would move in ways we couldn't imagine.

The GT-12, as we called ourselves, went to build relationships with our companions from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Two days before departure, we gathered in Menominee to rehearse our music. We had become a youth choir with just five previous rehearsals. Songs were chosen to represent the variety of U.S. Christian music.

Our first three days in Africa were spent on safari. We stayed in hotels and visited national parks, taking in the unique beauty of God's creation in Tanzania. This allowed us to adjust to the foods, sights, and to hearing Swahili and non-native English. A major highlight was a sunset drive, where we watched elephants interacting next to our vehicles.

We worshiped at Karatu Lutheran Church near our hotel. We were asked to sing some songs and experienced what three-hour services with three offerings feels like! We couldn't help but chuckle when a goat was escorted up the aisle as an offering.



The safari was a great way to begin our experience in Tanzania. Tyler Burgoyne (top middle), Trinity, Rhinelander, shot over 3,000 pictures and videos with his new camera. Jaki Woodrich (bottom window), Faith, Rock, adapted well to Tanzanian culture and formed deep relationships with her hosts.



Singing for our new friends at Mbagala Lutheran Church. Front row, from left: Jacob Jarvis, Havalva Snyder, Julianne Jarvi, and Jamie Dodge. Back row, from left: Logan Stachnik, Tyler Burgoyne, Jaki Woodrich and Amanda Rasner.

The real adventure began after we flew from Kilimanjaro to Dar Es Salaam, our home for the remainder of the trip. We were warmly greeted and whisked away to our host families. We had anticipated being housed in groups, but we were all placed individually with families. As our travelers departed with whispered phrases of "I'm all by myself," I reminded them that these soon-to-be lifelong friends just wanted to love us.

And love us they did! The host families were from four companion churches that were represented by our group: Magagoni Lutheran, partnered with Christ the King, Escanaba; Temeke Lutheran, partnered with Gloria Dei of Hancock; Azania Front Cathedral, partnered with Messiah, Marquette; and Mbagala, partnered with Immanuel, Rhinelander. Our companion churches were all from the Eastern and Coastal Diocese that consists of urban congregations, each with 1,000 people worshiping regularly.

The host families were so excited to get to know us and share their culture and church life with us. Their homes, financial situations, lifestyles and family dynamics were all different, but the love and hospitality was consistent and palpable. By the time our group gathered the next morning, nerves were calmed. Many were wearing new clothes, gifts from their hosts. One participant had her hair braided in a popular Tanzanian style! God's love was shining through our hosts as they extended to us their famous "*karibu*" (welcome in Swahili)—a word we not only heard but deeply felt throughout our stay.

The next week and a half was filled with rich cultural experiences, intense worship opportunities and deepening authentic relationships. We visited museums, zoos, schools and tribal homelands. As we shared music, food, prayer and laughter, we came to know what we had suspected all along—

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shepherding congregations through the anxiety of the times, and leading them through the process of calling a new pastor. Plus a few other things.

As we seek renewal and increased vitality, we know what works in one congregation may not work in another. And the whole synod, all 80 congregations, are always part of the picture. It's not about finding the perfect program that will work in every place—it's about encouraging and teaching congregational leaders to consider what God is calling their church to do and be in their community and for the sake of the world. This will, no doubt, be different for every congregation.

The downside is that not one size fits all. But the glory is that not one size fits all. Each congregation is distinctive. Your community has a unique history, and your church's function in that community has its own potential and challenges. Each congregation is blessed in ways that are singular to that congregation—one might have a guitar player but no organist; a handyman, good cooks, a spirit of hope, youth but no good cooks; generous givers but no youth. I believe it is the work of every congregation to consider what God is calling them to do and be for the sake of the folks who are not part of their community of faith.

- **How will you reach the people in your neighborhood who don't know or care that you are open?**
- **How will you share the love of God in Christ Jesus with each other and your neighborhood?**

The answers to these questions will vary, and those answers may not be ones you write down. Rather, they may take the form of experiments that you are willing to try.

While it can be scary to try something new, take comfort in the fact that we are in this work together. And we are in this work together along with the Spirit of the living and risen Christ, who does not leave us to pursue his mission without him.

As I begin this work, I would ask you to remember that we are the synod. The synod is us. And for reasons that only God knows, our time together

You are invited ...

to the installation service

of Bishop-elect Katherine Finegan

*Saturday, Oct. 31, at 1:30 p.m. (EST)
at St. Peter Cathedral, Marquette, Mich.,
with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.*

*Reception to follow at the Holiday Inn
Marquette from 3-5:30 p.m.*

is now. So together, let us meet this challenge of figuring out what it means to be the church in the year of our Lord 2017. A church in this world that is uncertain, that is politically divided, where tensions surround racial issues, where anxiety runs high and we are worried about many things.

And yet, the Spirit of Christ gathers us together for worship, for prayer, to create a safe space and place of peace, and where we are called to proclaim a word of hope to a world that doesn't even know how much it needs the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May God help us clarify God's purpose for us, God's mission for us, and bless our efforts to serve in Jesus' name.

Yours in Christ,
Bishop Katherine Finegan

Synod calendar

- **Oct. 7:** Fortune Lake Fall Fest, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Crystal Falls.
- **Oct. 8:** *Conference 3* meets at Calvary Lutheran, Minoqua, 1 p.m. (EST) ... *Conference 6* meets at Faith Lutheran, Rock, 4 p.m. (EST) ... *Conference 7* meets at Our Redeemer, Newberry, 4 p.m. (EST).
- **Oct. 15:** *Conference 1 (IGO)* meets at First Lutheran, Ewen, 3p.m. (CST).
- **Nov. 23 -24:** Synod office closed.

our God is alive and well, that Christ calls us to walk in and share his love, and the Spirit steadily moves despite language and cultural barriers.

Each host congregation planned a day of activities for us, sharing the vital parts of their ministry. We learned about their youth groups, evangelism teams, small group studies and *many* choirs—most congregations have six or more. Some of our more memorable times were jam sessions where we swapped music and dance. Participant Renee Anderton said: “No matter where you are from, what you look like, or what language you speak, everyone understands the common bond we share.” That bond? Being connected to the power of music and dance that, most importantly, relates back to the same God we all worship.

As strangers we signed up for a Tanzanian trip. We were changed as together we lived a Tanzanian experience. We sang; we listened. We worshiped; we prayed and we were prayed over. We trusted; we adapted. We were challenged; we had challenges. We laughed; we danced. We cried; we got sick. We loved; we were loved. God brought us together as a tight-knit group and united us with Tanzanian brothers and sisters in Christ. We were lifted in love by a cloud of witnesses who generously made our trip possible.

What will come from this trip? A few speculations:

- **There will be fruits in our lives.** At least one participant is more seriously considering a call to ordained ministry. He plans to return to Tanzania next year to attend a new friend’s marriage ceremony. Another traveler overcame many fears, as she was forced into nearly every uncomfortable situation on her list of things she’d rather not encounter. As a result, she has a deeper sense of God’s provision and presence in her life.

- **Relationships that have been formed will be strengthened.** As Pat Kempf shared: “God’s love was shown to us in more ways than we could ever recount. We were fed, sheltered and some of us even clothed by these lovely people. In this, the Tanzanians

GT-12 and our hosts on the shore of the Indian Ocean in Bagamoyo. This city played a major part in the East African slave trade but was also where the first missionaries landed.



taught me a lesson that comes directly from Scripture—“Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Hebrews 13:1-2).” Invitations have been extended for our Tanzanian friends to visit us. Perhaps we’ll be able to share our homes and churches with them. They showed us such incredible love and hospitality and we long to return the favor.

- **We have a stronger appreciation for our many blessings,** coupled with a desire to work for justice on behalf of those whose most basic needs aren’t met. Julianne Jarvi said: “I believe God called me to be part of this trip so I would be more appreciative of the things I have in life, such as family, friends, church, a strong faith, fresh drinkable running water, electricity, *toilet paper!* I hope to bring the strength of their faith into my life. I would encourage anyone and everyone to go if they have the chance to do so! I feel truly blessed to have had this incredible opportunity, and I thank God every day for sending me to Tanzania.”



Jamie Dodge (left), Messiah, Marquette, and Julianne Jarvi, Bethany, Republic, learn how to do the traditional dance of the Masai women. At this Masai village we learned about their culture and lifestyle.

Preliminary plans call for another youth delegation to travel to Tanzania in two or three years if God wills. Encourage your congregation’s young leaders to consider applying to participate. Keep praying for guidance and provision as we continue to ask: “How can we best be in relationship with these beautiful Tanzanians who we have come to know and love?” ㄥ

—The Rev. D.J. & Amanda Rasner,
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Hancock.