

**Report of the Director for Evangelical Mission
Assistant to the Bishop for Outreach and Stewardship
2020**

“I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” [Ephesians 3:18-19]

“The religious landscape of the United States continues to change at a rapid clip. In Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.”

<https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

“The church of Christ in ev’ry age beset by change, but Spirit led, must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.” [ELW #729]

The shifting sands of our times can lead us to feel we are on unsteady ground. Understanding our culture and how cultural attitudes impact weekend worship attendance is a full-time job for some researchers. Recent studies indicate a drop in the number of Americans claiming a Christian faith community with a growing number claiming no faith community or faith tradition. We face a religious landscape new to us – we are in a new religious frontier.

The new religious frontier need not discourage us. Frontiers are met with one of three options: 1) try to turn back; 2) stop and stay put; or, 3) explore the new territory/idea/landscape. Congregations across our synod and throughout the ELCA are becoming explorers and innovators by asking a question, “What is God doing here and now, among us and through us?”

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Northern Illinois Synod have tools to assist explorers to answer the question, “What is God doing here and now...?” It has been my joy to work with congregations to share tools of discovery, identity, and hope in times deemed challenging for our congregations.

The tools used most frequently in the Northern Illinois Synod include the Congregational Vitality Survey, Vitality Workshops, ELCA Vital Congregations Training, asset mapping and others. While using these tools it is always apparent that God has already given our congregations all they need to be vital – I am always glad to assist congregations in planning for ministry for today and tomorrow.

“What is God doing here and now, among us and through us?” Let’s walk together on the path of discovery to see how God is already at work among us!

Respectfully submitted,

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