

Thank You! I look Forward to God's Future!

A message from Bishop Gary Wollersheim

Friends in Christ, grace and peace be unto you.

I am grateful and humbled by the affirming Synod Assembly vote to reelect me on the first ballot as Pastor of the Northern Illinois Synod. Both Polly and I thank you for your confidence and love. This affirmation is shared with our excellent Synod Staff, Synod Council, and many other leaders across Northern Illinois.

Teamwork is essential for a Bishop's office to be able to meet the needs of an entire synod. I am blessed to serve with a very strong team that works hard and faithfully in our Synod. I give God thanks for our Synod Staff and leaders.

For me, this year's Synod Assembly was one of the most **joyful, inspiring** and **hopeful** assemblies which I have ever attended.

Our Assembly was Joyful because we received a new congregation, ordained a pastor, installed Lutheran

Youth Organization officers, and recognized faithful ministers and ministries and more.

Our Assembly was Inspiring because we reflected on the Faith Practices of the Church from the perspective of the leaders of our agencies and institutions including President James Echols (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago), who spoke on Scripture and Witness, and President Steve Bahls (Augustana College), who spoke on Giving. President Denver Bitner (Lutheran Social Services of Illinois) spoke on Serving and Pastor Diane Dardón (Lutheran Campus Ministry, NIU) spoke on Worship. Executive Director Russ Senti (Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center) spoke on Encourage/Mentor and I preached on the faith practice of Prayer. Dr. Sherman Hicks was an exciting Churchwide representative. And worship, as always, was beautiful and meaningful.

Our Assembly was Hopeful because our attendance was one of the highest ever with over 630 persons registered. The spirit was very cordial and hospitable. Voting members and visitors delighted to be together and celebrate God's marvelous works. And there was an amazing spirit of unity. There was little debate over any of the issues at hand, and the proposed Synod budget of \$2,479,000 passed unanimously! Thanks be to God.

It is clear to me that the Northern Illinois Synod is turning a corner. We are turning a corner from lamenting the painful departure of some congregational members and a few congregations to looking forward to what God has in store for us together in the future. The future is bright because the Northern Illinois Synod continues to do God's work with our hands.

Through all of this we have rediscovered that we are a Church deeply rooted in God's grace in Jesus Christ. **We are a Gospel-centered Church!**

Through all of this we have rediscovered that we are a Church deeply committed to

doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God. **We are a Serving Church!**

And through all of this, we have rediscovered that we are a Church deeply connected in mission, knowing we can be much more together than we can be separately: Congregation + Synod + Churchwide + Agencies and Institutions + Global Companions + Ecumenical Partners. **We are a Unifying Church!**

I conclude with my prayer for every member of the Northern Illinois Synod, the same prayer I quoted from the ELW at the Assembly Ordination service. It is also about our life together as a Synod.

"O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that **your hand is leading us** and **your love supporting us**; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen"

In Christ,



Bishop Gary Wollersheim