



Report of the Vice President

“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:27–29).

My siblings in Christ, this reading speaks to me and to our relationship as Christians, Lutherans, members of the ELCA and our relationship with our neighbors. The divisiveness that currently exists within our nation compels us to pursue a life of unity more than ever before. What I have seen during my travels across the ELCA is that our church members have consistently emphasized their unity in Christ as the common identity that we all share as Lutheran Christians. The communities we serve as Lutheran Christians challenge us to live this belief out in everything that we do. When I am with you, I have felt your commitment and passion for social justice, and it has not only inspired me as a member of the ELCA but made me feel proud. I do not pass up an opportunity to tell people that I am Lutheran and to show them what it means to serve your neighbor.

The past three years have increased my appreciation and understanding of how much our church demonstrates how we are church, we are Lutheran, we are church together, and we are church for the sake of the world.

I told you three years ago, when you elected me, that I felt called to be your vice president. I want to share with you a summary of what this call has been over the past three years.

As one who has been a part of the Church Council for nine years (six years on the council and three years as vice president), I have seen changes over the years. One obvious change has been the intentional growth of the Church Council to make sure that its membership includes youth and young adults and people with financial and legal experience, as well as the impact of implementing the triennium Churchwide Assembly schedule. Since the Church Council serves as the board of directors of the churchwide organization, it should be equipped with members who have experience in these areas. Church Council members have shown a greater interest in church governance, a greater concern about making the most strategically important decisions on behalf of the church, and a greater desire to collaborate and partner with the Conference of Bishops and separately incorporated ministries. The Church Council approved a governance policy manual in June 2019 to guide how it does its work and how to better establish and maintain relationships with the churchwide organization. The Church Council is a decision-making body that deepens its spirituality with Bible study and prayer. I believe the Holy Spirit is working through us. With your prayers, the Church Council will make a difference. I have presided over 27 Executive Committee meetings and six Church Council meetings, including one retreat. I have attended six Conference of Bishops meetings, which included one retreat.

I appreciate the leadership and wisdom in the Conference of Bishops. I respect and admire the role the bishops play in our church. My predecessor stated in his last Churchwide Assembly report that the bishops guide the ELCA with their pastoral wisdom and lead their synods with skill. I have seen this firsthand. I have shared this sentiment with them directly when I have attended their meetings; they have given me the opportunity to make presentations and participate in many of their relevant conversations and discussions. The Conference of Bishops respects the role of the Church Council and has made collaboration a key aspect of our joint relationship.

It also has been an honor and pleasure to work with my colleagues — officers of the ELCA past and present. Many of you know that I do not live in Chicago and that I work at the Lutheran Center only when I attend meetings there. I work virtually from my home and office in Clearwater, Florida, where I work full-time as a city manager. The church officers have made me feel as if I am with them every day. We are blessed to have such hardworking and dedicated professionals working on behalf of this church. I am so proud to be working with them.

Every spring brings synod assemblies, which I am honored to attend as a churchwide representative. These visits give me a chance to reinforce what the three expressions mean in our church, to meet with synod councils and to hear and see how the people of the ELCA use the gifts God has given them to make the communities they serve better places to live. In the past three years, I have had the privilege of attending 10 synod assemblies: Arkansas–Oklahoma, Northern Texas–Northern Louisiana, Southeastern Iowa, Montana, Rocky Mountain, Pacifica, Nebraska, South Dakota, Central States and Southwestern Pennsylvania. Not bad for a rookie vice president. I presided over bishop elections in six of the 10 assemblies I attended. I am so proud of how seriously and cooperatively our members elect church leaders; I’m impressed with church servants who are willing to respond to God’s call to serve in leadership positions.

Besides Church Council meetings, synod assemblies and other organization meetings, I served on the ELCA Inter-religious Task Force. This group was tasked with creating a policy statement that outlines the ELCA interreligious commitment for seeking mutual understanding and cooperation for the common good. The Church Council recommends that the 2019 Churchwide Assembly approve the policy statement. The experience and knowledge that I gained as a lay member of the task force was immeasurable. The task force members were a diverse group blessed with many gifts and a great love for and commitment to this church. It was truly an honor to serve with them under the direction of Ms. Kathryn M. Lohre, assistant to the presiding bishop and executive for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations.

I will never forget attending the 2018 Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE), tABLE and the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering in Houston, Texas. It was my first ELCA Youth Gathering, and I was deeply inspired by the 31,000-plus youth, chaperones and volunteers that were there. This faith formation event is done in meaningful and unique ways through worship, service, interactive learning, Bible study and fellowship. The gathering was spiritual, and the Holy Spirit blessed us each day as the youth participated in service projects throughout the Houston area. Each night's fellowship focused on themes that mean a lot to our youth and our church. I was on the arena floor with them most of the time and witnessed firsthand how transformative this experience can be to a young person's faith formation. I realize that not every ELCA youth can attend the youth gathering; however, I believe it is one of the best things we do as a church, and we should keep doing this without hesitation.

Finally, there is an area of witness that I have failed to do and that is to spend time in the Global Mission unit areas. I have not taken any global mission trips due to the nature of my full-time employment. After a period of discernment about work and the church, I am planning to retire from my job as a city manager sometime after March 2020. Keep me in your prayers as I listen to God's call as your vice president.

You have inspired me in so many ways to be a better servant and leader for our church. I have much more work to do, and with your prayers and God's help, I hope to serve the church more broadly and in even better ways. It's an exciting time to be a part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. I give thanks to God for the opportunity to serve God's church.

Bill Horne, *vice president*