



Northern Illinois Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



## **Report of the Southwest Conference**

The Southwest Conference is comprised of 16 congregations that stretch from Kewanee to Aledo, and from Knoxville to Stronghurst. We are prairie towns and railroad hubs. We are communities with changing demographics, and we are historic settings. Historic peoples like Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, and even Wyatt Earp (born in Monmouth, IL) once roamed the same streets where today immigrants and refugees now drive to work alongside century-farm families. This is where our 16 congregations come to life.

Our congregations are led by dedicated rostered ministers and SAMs, our congregations are full of faithful lay members. The call to ministry that unites us all is the command from scripture to love our God and to love our neighbor. We celebrate our shared call, even as we struggle with how to live this call during times of great societal change. We are filled with hope, even as we deal with the heaviness of overstretched personal lives, over-functioning leaders, uncertainty of tomorrow, and more.

Over the past year, our conference has sought to renew the connection between congregations as a way to share the burden of struggle and heavy hearts. We have sought to strengthen connections to enhance our sense of shared ministry and hope. Two congregations began a new shared ministry; two other congregations just completed a three-year shared confirmation ministry. This year, our conference restarted its annual Spring Assembly with a presentation on shared ministry and giving congregations an opportunity to think about how sharing ministry can enhance ministry within our communities.

As our small towns continue to change around us, how ministry will be accomplished moving forward will be very different from how ministry was accomplished in years past when the then arriving European immigrants built our now historic church gathering places. Today, these gathering places are in the midst of new arriving immigrants from Africa and Latin America. But the ministry that we are dedicated to remains the same: love our God and love our neighbor. What will our ministry look like in one year ... five years? That is a path yet untrodden, and yet a direction we head knowing whose hand leads us, the hand of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Respectfully Submitted,  
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Dean, Southwest Conference  
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