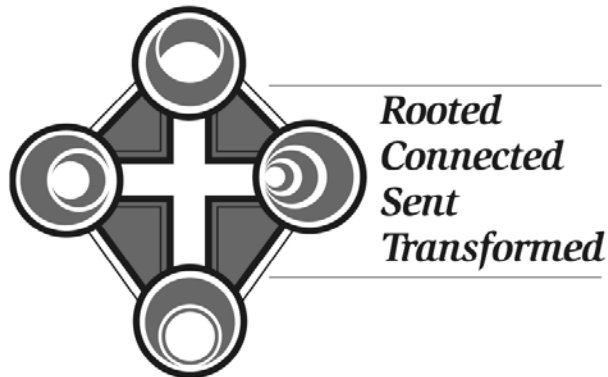


# RE-IMAGINING THE CHURCH IN THE NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD



## INTRODUCTION

In his 1997 report to the synod, Bishop Strobel invited us to follow his example and enter a period of “reflection, revision and renewal.” During that next year he listened to the members of our congregations as they spoke of the challenges and opportunities facing them. His presentation at the 1999 synod assembly called us to re-imagine the church. In September more than 300 people accepted that challenge and gathered to suggest priorities, needs and concerns. The synod council and a Strategic Planning Task Force then worked with the hundreds of ideas that came out of those gatherings.

Throughout this process, reports of these conversations were shared through synodical publications so that more voices could be included. What comes to you today is still not a finished product. It will always be a “work in progress,” changing to meet the needs of the times, and asking each of us how it can become our own. The call before you today is to say, “*These* are our priorities. This is where the church in Northeastern Pennsylvania needs to go today. This is where *I* need to go today.”

## A VISION FOR THE NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD

We live in a new world—rapidly changing, multi-cultural, technologically driven, radically secular. To meet the challenge of being the church in this world, we need to understand who God has always called us to be and what that means for us today.

As God's people we are:



*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20).*

*The Church of Christ, in every age  
Beset by change, but Spirit-led,  
Must claim and test its heritage  
And keep on rising from the dead.*

F. Pratt Green (LBW 433)

We are people with roots. Whether we come from generations of Lutherans or from a more diverse religious background, we have a common foundation. Our faith and life are built on Christ the cornerstone. We treasure a heritage that teaches us that God's purposes are revealed to us in scripture, attested in the Lutheran Confessions and made visible in water, bread and wine. In a time of rapid change, we stand firm, rooted in the Gospel, confident that Christ is at work in and through us.



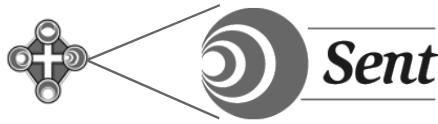
*But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

*Son of God, eternal Savior, source of life and truth and grace,  
Word made flesh, whose birth among us hallows all our human race:  
By your praying, by your willing that your people should be one,  
Grant, oh, grant our hope's fruition: Here on earth your will be done.*

Somerset C. Lowry (LBW 364)

We are people connected with one another. God calls us to live not for and by ourselves but as part of a community, caring for one another and supporting one another. Our

service begins in our local congregations but also reaches into the wider church. Because we are one in Christ, we share our concerns, resources, and talents for the sake of all.



*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).*

*Lord, you give the great commission: "Heal the sick and preach the Word."  
Lest the Church neglect its mission, and the Gospel go unheard,  
Help us witness to your purpose with renewed integrity.  
With the Spirit's gifts empower us for the work of ministry.*

Jeffrey Rowthorn (WOV 756)

We are people chosen by Christ and both blessed and called to a task. Because we are forgiven and led into a new life in Christ, we are called to share that message of God's love with the broken, the wounded and the struggling both within and without our walls. As instruments of God's marvelous light, we are committed to welcoming the unloved, serving the needy and speaking out for the oppressed.



*And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5).*

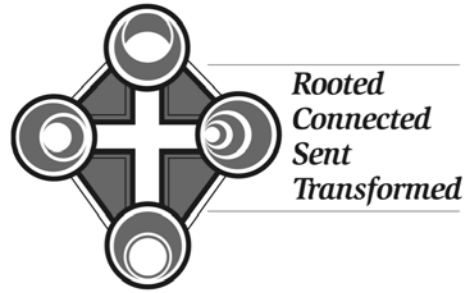
*You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes.  
From the bondage of sorrow all the captives dream dreams;  
Our women see visions, our men clear their eyes.  
With bold new decisions your people arise.  
Spirit, Spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness, calling and free;  
Spirit, Spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.*

James K. Manley (WOV 684)

We are people called to honor our heritage but also to participate in a changing society. The Holy Spirit stirs our churches, summoning us to be active in the world. Our message and our ministry take new forms to bring the message of salvation to a new creation.

## STRATEGIC ISSUES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

**Rooted**  
**Connected**  
**Sent**  
**Transformed**



Yes, this is what God has always called us to be. Now we are called to live out this call in ways that **address the issues confronting the Church** of this century.

As the Church moves from one century to another, many of the people and congregations of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod approach the future focused on the problems confronting us rather than on the opportunities. Too often we think and act out of fear rather than out of hope. The source of this fear is the sense that the world has changed. Faith is no longer at the center of our social fabric. The church has become simply one choice among many. To compete with these options, the church is pressured to satisfy the wants of consumers.

As people rooted in the gospel, however, we are called to live in hope. We are confident that we have a message that needs to be heard, a message that makes an ultimate difference in people's lives. In a world where people increasingly seek spiritual nourishment and meaningful involvement, we can speak a message of both freedom and responsibility. Living in hope, we are enabled to find what God is calling us to be—renewed and transformed.

**Key issues that we must address** include these:

- **We live in a diverse society.**

Races, cultures and experiences that dominated our society for centuries no longer hold exclusive positions. Ethnic diversity is the rule in urban areas and is increasing throughout our region. Non-Christian religions are more and more common. Even family structures are more varied than we have ever known before. We cannot assume a common base of experience or even a common vocabulary when we address those outside—and even inside—the church.

- **Things are changing faster and faster.**

Virtually no aspect of life today is exactly as it was one hundred years ago. The volume and pace of change is, to many people, disconcerting, destabilizing and even threatening. In response, there is a tendency to cling to the known, the trusted, the familiar. For congregations, this may mean focusing on old worship forms or identifying ministry with buildings. The challenge of the future for the church is to free

ourselves from those parts of the past that no longer serve the mission of bringing the gospel to a world in flux.

- **People put their own needs and desires first.**

American culture emphasizes getting, keeping, and using. This attitude is the complete opposite of the gospel of losing, giving and dying. In a society that has lost much of its sense of responsibility to and for one another, the Christian message of self-giving love for neighbor seems foreign and even frightening.

- **Families are experiencing unprecedented stress and change.**

The family structures that we have long thought typical are increasingly the exception. Single parents, blended families, racially-mixed families, and changing gender roles all create both stresses and possibilities in our homes. Parents and children are challenged by a world that asks young people to make choices that are more difficult than those presented to any previous generation. The church is called to help ensure that the gift of the family remains the blessing that God intended it to be.

- **Science is changing our lives.**

Technology in the last fifty years has transformed life in truly radical ways. In particular, the speed of communication, the availability of information, and the explosive progress of medical science have virtually created a new world, at least for that portion of society with access to it. A renewed church must not only learn from and use these technological reformatations, it must enable the world to examine them critically and employ them wisely.

- **Our connections with one another have weakened.**

We can know what is happening across the globe almost immediately without knowing who lives next door to us. Even while technology has made communication easier, the sense of connection with others has declined. This is true in the church as well, with individuals, congregations and institutions losing sight of their place in the wider church.



## SYNODICAL PRIORITIES

Our vision of people rooted, connected, sent and transformed calls us to respond to the issues that confront us. In faithful response to God's action in our lives, we name these priorities in our life together:

- We will **deepen our relationship** with God.

God's gift to us is a relationship of incredible love given first in our baptism. In worship that love is constantly renewed. We yearn to grow in faith and in understanding, expressing the love of God in our daily lives.

- We will **renew our passion** for sharing the good news.

Filled with love for God, we long to share that message in all that we say and do. We are called witness to the Gospel, to be instruments of God's justice, to serve others, knowing that our own survival can never be our first concern.

- We will **strengthen the connections** among people and communities.

The divisions within families, communities and societies must be resisted and overcome. We are committed to strengthening families, encouraging groups to work cooperatively at all levels, and using the best technological means to enable communication among peoples and communities.

- We will **develop leaders** for a new church in a new world.

The complex issues of today's society demand leaders who are both capable and well-prepared. We seek to identify and equip both rostered and lay people to be competent, committed and healthy leaders.



## SYNODICAL OUTCOMES

As people of God who are rooted, connected, sent and transformed, we have affirmed the priority of knowing and loving God, sharing the good news, building connections and developing leaders. **We commit ourselves to achieving the following outcomes:**

### **Priority: We Will Deepen Our Relationship with God.**

In the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, the synodical structures:

- Provide a variety of resources that enable congregations and rostered leaders to plan for spiritual growth
- Encourage and enable congregations to create worship that is contextually appropriate and significant for daily life
- Help congregations to promote and facilitate discipleship development
- Provide the tools to help congregations grow in a Biblical understanding of stewardship
- Support and encourage programs to develop healthier families, youth and children

### **Priority: We Will Renew Our Passion for Sharing the Good News.**

In the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, the synodical structures:

- Work to ensure that populations that may be ignored or excluded hear the Good News
- Provide a forum for moral deliberation and advocacy on issues of justice and advocacy
- Challenge and support congregations in their engagement with their local communities for witness, outreach and social ministry
- Help congregations to participate in and share responsibility for ministry on a level beyond their local settings
- Encourage and assist congregations to be intentionally inviting, welcoming and hospitable

**Priority: We Will Strengthen the Connections among People and Communities.**

In the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, the synodical structures:

- Provide ways for congregations to share resources, learning, challenges and opportunities
- Assist congregations and other agencies of ministry to employ effective means of communication
- Facilitate communication and mutual accountability among the various ministries and institutions of the church and with our ecumenical partners

**Priority: We Will Develop Leaders for a New Church in a New World.**

In the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, the synodical structures:

- Help congregations to identify, equip and support lay leaders
- Identify, equip and support rostered and other leaders for ministry needs
- Intentionally seek out candidates for rostered leadership
- Provide or insure support for the families of rostered leaders