



**Southwest California Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

To the pastors, deacons, and people of the congregations of the Southwest California Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

Grace to you and peace, in the name of the Triune God!

Dear siblings in the Lord Jesus, I write to you today with a mix of strong feelings to tell you that I will be laying down my responsibilities as your bishop at the end of next month, on the last day of July. On the following day, I will assume the presidency of United Lutheran Seminary in Pennsylvania, to which I was elected by its board of trustees yesterday.

Just a year ago, I would not have predicted this turn of events. When I was elected to a second term as bishop last summer, I entered into it with fresh enthusiasm for the work I have been called to do, and a deep sense of gratitude for the trust and faith you as a synod have shown in me for seven years now. I have always tried to do my work with integrity, and to witness to Christ and our Lutheran faith as strongly and consistently as I can, both within our church and to the city and world around us. There has been no greater joy or honor in my life than to be able to serve you in this way. So I don't end this chapter of our life together lightly or without considerable prayer.

I was approached by United Lutheran Seminary just before Holy Week to begin an exploratory conversation with them about the presidency, and entered into the conversation in earnest after Easter and through the weeks that followed. In this time of pandemic and quarantine, of course, everything had to be done remotely. But since I have served on ULS's board for two years already, I felt I knew the institution well, and in turn I was known to them to some degree. The final decision was reached last week and formalized only yesterday. I wanted you to know as quickly as possible.

In some ways, I am returning for this late chapter of my career to what I know best and what I have done the most. I expect you know that before I was elected bishop in 2013, my career had been mainly focused on teaching and theological education. I started as a seminary professor in the 1990s at Yale Divinity School, then came to California to teach Lutheran theology and church history at Cal Lutheran in Thousand Oaks twenty years ago. All through that time I worked part-time in congregations, so in a sense moving into the bishop's office was an extension of that—full time in administration and every weekend in a church. I think it will be easy for you to imagine that the call to return to the academic setting was strong for me, and ULS is a distinguished institution anyone would be proud to lead.

Your synod is in good shape and in good hands: the synod Vice President, Randall Foster, is going to serve another year, until we can hold a Synod Assembly in June, 2021. The Synod Council is full of energetic leaders. Financial resources are sufficient for our needs this year and next, and our Treasurer, Mike Metzger is competent and hardworking, as is our Secretary, Pastor Keith Banwart. I have discussed this transition with them, and they will play important roles in the months ahead.

What happens next, is that the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA will appoint an interim bishop (normally a retired ELCA bishop from another synod) to do those things that only a bishop can do, as the synod goes through the process of discerning who to choose as the next permanent bishop at an Assembly—most likely next June. Our very capable synod staff will stay in place through that interim year, and possibly beyond—I think they are the best staff any bishop could ask for, and they will continue to serve you and the interim bishop well.

I know that this news will disappoint many of you—it has been wonderful for me to be able to serve as your bishop, and I hope that my ministry in this role has helped some of you do your ministry in the world. You made history by electing me, and I am confident that our synod has more history yet to make, as it moves into an unpredictable but exciting future of preaching the gospel and building beloved community in the territory of our five counties and especially in Los Angeles. Rob and I will find it hard to leave our beloved LA, pack our Dodgers caps, and move to Philadelphia this summer—but the hardest part is that this quarantine lockdown will probably make it impossible for me to say goodbye in person.

These are complicated days for us right now: the virus, the political atmosphere, and the strains that accompany our necessary and important work against racism in our land and in our church. But we know that we can do what we need to do. We know that the church of Christ stands firm in all winds. And we place our trust in God, without whom none of our undertakings can prosper and in whom all will be well. I give thanks to God for you, our synod, and the whole ELCA—and I look forward to continuing to serve the church we love in a new capacity.

God bless and keep you all!

Bishop Guy Erwin  
June 9, 2020