



Report of the Bishop - Synod Assembly 2021

After some time in prayer and discernment, the synod staff and council were lead by the Spirit to construct the following mission statement for our synod:

*By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are called to cultivate
a bold and boundless love for Jesus and for all God's beloved creation.*

As we pursue this mission together, we have, and aim to:

1. Equip and develop healthy leaders
2. Empower and nurture vibrant ministries
3. Encourage and model faithful accompaniment

In alignment with the mission and priorities, we recognized the opportunity for us to be church together not only in theory and theology, but also in practice.

To say that 2020 was a difficult year would be an understatement. We endured loss of significant events, gatherings, accustomed worship experiences; loss of control over our lives and our plans, loss of beloved people who will no longer share a meal with us, but will remain in our hearts and minds always. Some of these people were lost to natural causes, accidents, the pandemic. Others were lost to systemic evil and racism.

After the summer of 2020 where we witnessed Amaud Aubery shot and killed like prey by a father and son, Breonna Taylor shot and killed in her sleep and the bullets in the walls get more legal attention than the bullets in her body, and George Floyd suffocated before our eyes with a knee to his throat while the officer smiled at the camera, my heart broke. As the year went by more and more names were added to this list and my spirit grew weary. It's often the case that people forget that I am a Latina woman not only in a predominantly white denomination, but in a national system that does not value my existence as it values those of the dominant culture. When I drive around the city, I am not perceived as who I am: educated, pastor, bishop, who loves deeply and intentionally. I am perceived and treated as what the world has determined a Latina woman is: uneducated, poor, lazy, freeloader... sub-human. I share all this to say that the events of the past year have not only impacted my

ministry, but my life. With this burden, and as one of 5 bishops of color in our denomination, I thought we had the opportunity to make a significant impact on our commitment to the neighbor. I went to the council of our synod and requested we discern over and write a statement that would ultimately become our invitation to the synod and commitment to the demands of the gospel and matters of justice for all. The council responded and this document <http://metrodcelca.org/councilletter10720> was issued in October of 2020. Since then, we have organized a Racial Justice Planning Team. Vice President, Jackson Droney, will share more about our progress in his report.

In the meantime, the synod staff and I took stock of the many conversations we were having with synod leadership throughout the year and realized there were other ways to move beyond solid theory and theology into practice.

We began 2021, by inviting all tables, committees, and teams of the synod to structure their work around 3 themes: **Sabbath, Cultural Competence, and Transformational Leadership.**

We confirmed time and time again that our leaders were exhausted after such a heavy year. We also discovered that the Sabbath commandment was the only commandment we were often proud to break- somehow busyness implied productivity- but in such a difficult season, the Spirit has stirred us toward faithfulness and rest for the sake of our health, our lives and our life ministries.

We also confirmed that we are unfamiliar with, and really don't know one another, which leads to our falling into the trap of treating one another according to social constructs and labels created for and against us all. Hence our commitment to cultural competency for the restoring and building meaningful relationships that reflect the kingdom of God.

Finally, we discerned that this season of uncertainty was fertile ground for bold, creative and transformational ministry. We understand that we are not called to maintain or go back to what was, but are encouraged and inspired by the Holy Spirit to come alive, to dream, and dare to lean into the newness this season offers. For this reason we are dedicating time and resources into what it looks like and what it means to be transformational leaders for the sake of a world that hungers for healing and wholeness.

One specific way we are leaning into transformational leadership is by engaging in meaningful and innovative partnerships with our neighbor synod, The Delaware-Maryland Synod, and embracing the whole family in their discipleship and faith formation. I'm beyond excited to introduce the newest member of our synod staff, Deacon Julie Stecker,

who will share more about this partnership and what you can look forward to in the coming months.

Deacon Julie's Report

Hi, I'm Deacon Julie Stecker, the Assistant to the Bishop for Youth + Family Ministry here in the Metro D.C. Synod, in partnership with the Delaware-Maryland Synod. I am deeply grateful to get to serve two synods that are brave, bold, and creative in their understanding of what collaborative ministry can look like. Thanks to the imagination and hard work of Bishop Ortiz, Bishop Gohl, and our Synod Councils, we are doing Youth + Family Ministry together. 100% in, sharing this ministry that supports children, youth, young adults, and families.

So what does collaborative Youth + Family Ministry look like? It looks like creating opportunities for young people to take up the mantle of leadership in the church right now, especially through the Lutheran Youth Organization. This leadership development program for students in 9th through 12th grade provides training, mentorship, and the chance to connect with fellow young leaders as they hone their gifts and explore how God is calling them to be in the world. If you are going to be in grades 9 through 12 next year, or if you know a gifted young person who will be, it's not too late to apply! Visit the Youth + Family Ministry page of the synod website for more information and to complete the application by June 15.

Our shared ministry also looks like providing even more networking and professional development opportunities for adults who do the holy work of accompanying young people in their faith journey. Since April, we have been gathering online to discuss the Growing Young research: sharing our best practices, challenges, and ideas for strengthening our commitment to empowering young people in our contexts. Being able to bring together leaders from two vital and thriving synods is a unique gift that helps us learn from an even wider array of voices and backgrounds as we envision what our ministry among young people can look like.

And, as we begin to be able to imagine life on the other side of the pandemic, one of the greatest joys of this collaborative ministry will be the chance to gather together in-person for youth-led, youth-centered weekend events. These events and retreats are a chance to get to know other young people from around our synods, as well as deepen relationships within your youth ministry. Through energetic large group gatherings, meaningful small group connections, service projects, team-building activities, and more, young people will leave knowing that they are deeply loved by God and have a critically important role in the kingdom of God, right here, right now. In that vein, we are also looking forward to the ELCA Youth Gathering, to be held in Minneapolis in July of 2022, where our two synods will have

the joy of gathering together for Synod Day! We'll be hosting some information sessions for group leaders soon, so keep an eye on the synod newsletter for those details.

I hope that you'll find ways to come and see what Youth + Family Ministry is about; to join us in this exciting season of ministry and bring your ideas and hopes and dreams to the table as we create something new.

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Thank you, Deacon Julie. She won't say it herself but Deacon Julie is one of the strongest and most recognized children and youth leaders in our denomination. Her gifts are many but her passion for children, youth, and families are even greater. We are blessed to have her with us.

We are also beyond blessed with the best staff of the entire ELCA. I've often said that after God, Katharyn Wheeler controls my life and determines where I will be when. I thank God for her attention and accompaniment through such an intense year. Kelly Champagne and EVOKE communicate and make us look as awesome as we are as a synod. Katie Evans, administrative assistant to the office, accommodates all our requests and somehow makes it look quite easy. God bless her. Last but not least, Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson-Reinhold and Rev. Lamar Bailey have been invaluable colleagues with sharp wisdom and discerning spirits. I thank God for them daily and pray they know how deeply appreciated they are for all the ways they've shown up for the sake of our being church, together. Thank you.

Friends, last year was one for the books. This year will be its own chapter in the story of our lives and ministries. May we trust in the One who has called us each for such a time as this and dare come alive by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit... with God's help and in Jesus' name. Amen.