

Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

4005 Wisconsin Ave NW, P.O. Box 39105, Washington, D.C. 20016

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2021 Synod assembly report
Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson-Reinhold
Assistant to the Bishop for Candidacy and Mobility and Chief of Staff

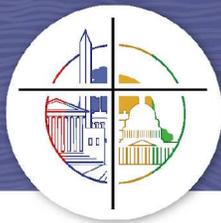
Grace and peace to you from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

It has been quite a year as we've endured an ongoing pandemic, racial strife, political unrest, and work and school uncertainty altering the course of our lives and inviting us to rethink how we engage most aspects of our lives. All of these events have challenged, provoked, and inspired us to do and be Church in new and fresh ways while reflecting and contemplating on what it means to be a follower of Christ in this new time.

As synod staff, we've been praying and reflecting a lot this year. We've been challenged to consider who we are and what it means to be Church. The synod council was convicted by the ongoing racial injustice in our country, and they created a list of initiatives that we are already working on to help foster heightened awareness of how our implicit bias guides our decision making. As a staff, we were convicted by the Holy Spirit that our decisions have to be based in a spirit of discernment that enables us to hear what God is inviting us to do and not make ministry decisions based out of our need for comfort, control, or fear of the future. We've been compelled to listen deeply to God, each other, and others trying hard to align the ministries to meet the needs of our synod and to be faithful followers of Christ.

As I reflect on the last year, I celebrate God's faithfulness and the responsiveness of all of you. Since June 2020, eight congregations extended calls, five congregations are interviewing candidates, one extended a two-year intentional interim call, and two more will start interviewing this summer. It's been a joy to walk with your faith communities as they intentionally and prayerfully discern the invitations God is offering them. When we consider 13 calls were extended last year, this brings us to a total of 21 new rostered leaders in our synod since June 2019. That's a significant change to the make-up of our synod. We rejoice how God continues to bring ministers of word and sacrament and ministers of word of service who love Jesus and love people to do this hard, holy work of walking with communities of faith, building disciples, and sending them out into the world to be God's hand and feet.

A large part of my work involves walking with people in formation for rostered ministry, and we are bearing the fruits of the intentional discernment process we launched in January 2020. Since last July, we celebrated the clarity that members of Cohort D and Cohort E received and faithfully launched Cohort F and Cohort G into their process. We plan to launch two more

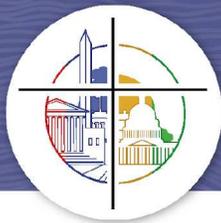


cohorts later this year. We currently have 18 in discernment with 17 discernment partners and five small group facilitators. It's humbling to be part of this Spirit-led ministry. When I reflect on the clarity the participants have received through this intentional discernment process, I'm struck how $\frac{1}{3}$ have said 'yes' to entering the formal candidacy process to become ministers of word and sacrament and ministers of word and service in the ELCA, $\frac{1}{3}$ have clarified calls into other forms of ministry such as entering the academy to become theologians or historians or exploring work with non-profits, and $\frac{1}{3}$ continue to pray and seek God's guidance on their next steps. All of these outcomes are faithful and should be celebrated!

Our candidacy committee continues to be led by Pastor Ben Hogue, and I'm thankful for him and the ways the Metro DC Synod Candidacy Committee is discerning how the Spirit is inviting the Metro DC Synod to be visionary leaders in the candidacy process. Since last June, we positively entranced four candidates, positively endorsed five candidates, and approved two candidates for ministry. We have two more candidates awaiting entrance interviews in June and four in the process of completing their initial paperwork. We have 17 candidates actively in the candidacy process with six more in the wings.

As an intentional way to accompany our newly called ministers of word and sacrament and ministers of word and service in our synod, we launched a first call theological curriculum that included monthly educational opportunities and a colleague/mentor group. We organized, designed, implemented, and coordinated our first virtual First Call Theological Education retreat to address the ministry topics of identity, practical skills, and contextual issues. I'm excited about how this group of leaders is engaging ministry and actively seeking ways to enhance their skills to be the leaders God calls them to be.

At the end of 2020, Pastor Lamar Bailey and I were the recipients of the Foundations of Christian Leadership Grant, Duke University - a grant that encourages leaders to explore how to engage ministry in innovative ways. Through our respective ministry areas, it became clear to Pastor Bailey and myself that God was inviting us to explore an intentional discernment process to help congregations in transition clarify next steps in their ministries. The grant incorporates aspects of spiritual direction, coaching, and game design theory to empower our leaders and congregations to listen to God more deeply and respond boldly and courageously as the holy invitations arise. It's been a delight to watch the Spirit move through this holy experiment reminding us that as we focus our energy listening to God we become the followers of Christ that God calls us to be.



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As a way to care for the health and well-being of our rostered leaders, our synod partnered with Region 9 and offered boundaries training to over 100 leaders across our synod in October 2020. In addition, the mental health and self-care team worked diligently under the care of Pastor Karis Graham. I'm thankful for her and her hard work helping establish this team of leaders across our synod. I look forward to working with them as we discern our next steps.

Finally, it was a year of transitions for the synod office as we moved the physical office from our E Street location to our new home at St. Paul's Lutheran Church. While our files have a new and inviting space in NW DC, like many of the rest of you, the staff realized we can successfully work from home and embrace the concept of being deployed staff. This year we also welcomed Katie Evans as our part-time administrative assistant. I can't express how thankful I am for Katie Evans and Katharyn Wheeler for all their hard work on the move and to our entire staff for all the ways they contribute to making us who we are as a synod staff.

It's been a blessing and a joy to spend time with all of you, hearing your stories, and learning how God is moving in your lives. I'm hope-filled and excited about the future and the ways the Spirit is doing impossible things in the Metro DC Synod. Thank you for joining us in mission and ministry and being followers of Christ together.

Peace and Blessings,
Pastor Erin Swenson-Reinhold