



2020 Synod Assembly Report for the Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to
the Bishop
Rev. Lamar Bailey

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

The past year was challenging in many ways for everyone. Many people in our congregations and neighborhoods have suffered greatly. Many have lost loved ones, and their lives have been changed forever. The murder of George Floyd and other people of color exposed the deep historical racial brokenness in our nation. The images of social unrest in the media showed the vast divisions in our nation. The pandemic, economic crisis, and social conflict pushed us to the limits. By God's grace, congregations navigated these hardships to be the church in new ways and revealed congregational creativity, leadership, and gifts. Many congregations in our synod confronted racism in the church and outside the church and committed themselves to work for racial equity. In the wake of these challenges, God was faithful, and congregations in our synod cared for their neighbors and one another. I give thanks to God for all the creative and faithful ways that congregations navigated the past year as well as for the guidance of Bishop Ortiz and the Synod Council.

During the turmoil of this past year, Bishop Ortiz called the entire synod to boldly love Jesus and all of God's beloved creation. She also called all synod tables, teams, and staff to focus on the following three ministry themes: sabbath, cultural competency, and transformational leadership.

I am privileged to be working with The New and Renewing Mission Table (NRMT). The NRMT supports new ministries and current congregations that are finding new and creative ways to revitalize their ministries. The pandemic along with economic uncertainties presented several challenges to the NRMT so we had to find creative ways to support congregations. For example, we experimented with offering small

mini grants to congregations to help support their online capabilities. Through the work of Synod Council, we supported congregations that were severely impacted by the pandemic through the new Disaster Relief Accompaniment Fund.

Coaching continues to be a vital part of our synod culture and a powerful way to grow leaders and strengthen congregations. We are blessed to have Rev. Nathan Swenson-Reinhold serve as the Metro DC Coaching Coordinator. As the Coaching Coordinator for our synod, he facilitated the coaching of four congregational councils and of thirty-four of our synod's ministry leaders. As we look forward to this next ministry year, MetroDC Coaches is excited to offer a congregational coaching module on Cultural Competency coming in July, as well as increased efforts to engage and support our ethnic specific ministries. Coaching continues to support and encourage the mission of our vital synod.

This year the synod staff began to observe the toll of the pandemic on rostered leaders in our synod. The pandemic impacted our rostered leaders in unique ways, leading to fatigue and exhaustion. This prompted Bishop Ortiz to prioritize sabbath as a ministry theme. With the help of Rev. Julie Bringman and other members of NRMT, we offered Sabbath Mini-Grants to rostered leaders in the synod. The grants could be used for sabbath time away. The grants were gratefully received and had a significant impact. One leader reflected, "I saw God time and time again. I felt God nearby. I spoke to God—mostly in the quiet but also as I sang loudly...I [heard] God reminding me that I am beloved, and that this belovedness needn't be earned—it is a gift freely given. It was deeply, divinely, good. Thank you, dear synod, for encouraging rostered leaders to observe a time of sabbath rest, and for helping make it possible through the Sabbath Mini-Grant program." Another leader reflected on their time sitting by a fire, "Fifty years ago, Dr. Joseph Sittler said that the problem with clergy burn-out is that clergy don't do enough to kindle their fires. While I'm not in a season of burn-out, I am grateful for the reminder and image to continue tending my fire within, and to continue to be mesmerized by it all." It was truly inspiring to see the Spirit revitalizing the rostered leaders of our synod.

NRMT will continue to align its work with the three synod ministry themes with a focus on cultural competence and transformational leadership. I am excited and hopeful

about all the ways NRMT will live out our synod mission statement, priorities, and ministry's themes in the coming year. Most of all I am excited to see what God can do! It's been an honor and joy to accompany the Stewardship and Mission Support Table (SMST) chaired by Rev. Darcy Tillman. For several months the table engaged in holy discernment, visioning and planning, aligning with synod ministry priorities, and hosted and funded several events (all events occurred via zoom due to the pandemic). The table partnered with Rev. Mike Ward of GSB Fundraising. Out of this partnership the synod offered a one-hour virtual opportunity to explore stewardship in uncertain times. In partnership with Rev. Mike Ward the table organized a stewardship training program designed to equip congregational leaders with easy to implement materials and strategies so that congregations can grow in generosity even through national economic uncertainty.

One participant shared the impact of the event by saying, "The trainings and class really spurred my excitement around stewardship and that translated to the Stewardship Committee and congregation. Stewardship had not been a focus for a while for our congregation, so it needed some energy and attention. Having the training and the materials really helped us to execute a plan rather than have to brainstorm and develop our own. Generosity, abundance, and stewardship in general has been incorporated [into] the regular life and language of the congregation, which is a blessing!" Recently, the table hosted a well-attended storytelling and generosity event. We were blessed to have two excellent speakers Andrew Steel (Vice President for Development and Outreach at LIRS) and Rev. CeCee Mills (Associate Director of Evangelical Mission in North Carolina Synod).

The table also welcomed Natalie Cain to the table. She serves as the Gifts of Hope Director. We say goodbye and thank you to Rev. Scott Zimmerer and Carolyn Sowinski as they move into retirement. I thank everyone table member for generously giving their time, gifts, talents, and leadership. In the coming year I look forward to working alongside the table, taking input from congregations so that we may meet the needs of congregations in the synod, and living into the synod ministry themes. I am excited to share with you that Rev. Erin and I received an innovation grant from Foundations of Christian Leadership at Duke University. In our short time spent

building relationships with the leaders and the congregations in our synod over the last year, we observed that many congregations struggle to know how to listen to God, their communities, and each other. This inability to listen deeply impacts their ability to understand the movement of the Holy Spirit in receiving their mission and their ability to articulate their unique vision of how to be followers of Christ in their communities. As a result, we crafted a process that centers on discernment, mission, and implementation. We have launched the process with a small cohort of congregations, and we are already excited by the results of this holy experiment. Prayerfully we will expand the program so that other congregations can explore intentional discernment and vitality.

Despite all the challenges of the past year, I am excited to see and participate in God's work in the synod. I would like to thank Katie Evans, Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson-Reinhold, Julie Hamre, Natalie Cain and Katharyn Wheeler. Special thanks to Bishop Ortiz for her leadership, friendship, and humor. Also, I thank all congregations and individuals that have supported the work of synod. This work cannot be done without your generosity and prayer!

Thanks Be to God!

Rev. Lamar Bailey