



2022 Synod Assembly Report for the Director for Evangelical Mission and Assistant to the Bishop

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Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. I'm excited to report on the activities and ministries from the past year. The past year continued to be another challenging year. Many people in our congregations and neighborhoods continued to suffer greatly due to the ongoing COVID pandemic and harsh economic realities. The weight of the pandemic has increased anxieties and mental health issues in our congregations and communities and is still impacting the ways we do ministries. We continue to navigate the deep historical racial brokenness in our nation, our synod, and the ELCA. In spite of these difficult circumstances, we continue to be rooted in Jesus and share and reflect the good news of Jesus Christ. I have the wonderful opportunity to serve our synod in various ways, and especially by accompanying the New and Renewing Mission Table, the Racial Equity Team, the Stewardship and Mission Support Table, and to serve the wider ELCA. I am honored to share with you some of the synod tables' and team's highlights from the past year as well as some of their future work.

It is a privilege to serve with The New and Renewing Mission Table (NRMT) and its faithful chair, Rev. Shannon Anderson. The table supports new ministries and current congregations that are finding new and creative ways to revitalize their ministries. Like many of you, we are not currently doing ministry as we would like, but we are still trusting God and moving forward. This year the table continued to offer Sabbath Grants to rostered leaders in our synod for much needed rest and spiritual rejuvenation. The table gave nearly 40 rostered leaders the opportunity to recharge and listen to God. To help congregations improve their online presence, we offered technology grants to support congregations' ability to offer a quality online presence and to extend sharing God's love beyond the church building. In line with our synod's commitment to cultural competency, the table in coordination with Pr. Nathan Swenson-Reinhold developed a multicultural competence coaching experience for congregations seeking to grow in this area of multicultural competency.

Moving forward, the table will focus on growing and supporting ethnic and multiethnic ministries in our synod. As a synod and as a table, we are committing ourselves to diligently and equitably forming these new ministries. We will begin by growing and supporting Latiné ministries in our synod. We will invite and support congregations in the synod to build relationships with campuses so that we can grow campus ministries

in the synod. This exciting work will be accomplished in coordination with Pr. David Shank who is a new gift to our synod staff. During this challenging season of ministry, the table members have been faithful and determined, and I look forward to participating with them in God's future work in the synod.

The synod's Racial Equity Team is co-chaired by Rev. Karen Brau and Rev. Franklin Morales. The Racial Equity Team focuses on creating synod-wide worship, worship materials, commemorations, prayer gatherings, and spaces for conversation and reflection. This team created several powerful trainings, events, and resources. This year the team created a space for the synod and the wider church to commemorate the 6th anniversary of the massacre of the Emanuel 9 with a communal Bible study.

The Team gave our synod the wonderful gift of Sacred Ground, a film-based dialog series on race and faith. The aim is that all congregations will take part in this deeply rigorous, transformative training. The team recently created "Journeying into Holy Week - A Vigil for Healing and Understanding". The vigil reflected on healing, understanding, and celebrated the various cultures of our church in this time of immense division. The Bishop and I ask everyone to take part in all the offerings of the Racial Equity Team.

If you think stewardship and generosity is boring, you should sit in on the synod's Stewardship and Mission Support Table meetings chaired by Rev. Darcy Tillman! The table seeks to invite people into relationship with God and our neighbors through the gift of generosity and storytelling. This is a wonderful and creative group of people who deeply believe and have experienced how generosity can transform your faith life, community, and the world. Generosity is vital to being rooted in Jesus and participating in building God's Kingdom today.

Table members have been engaging in relational work to build deeper relationships with congregations. The table contacted the pastors of each congregation in the synod in order to understand needs and challenges and to gather possible points for future work of the table. The table also mailed postcards to congregations and actively prays for the congregations. Budgeting is never fun, but it is an opportunity to share the compelling story of how God is working in each congregation. To this end, the table offered a Bishop's Leadership Academy on Creating a Narrative Budget and Storytelling. Guided by the Bishop's call to faithful cultural competency, the table gathered with the synod's ethnic and multiethnic ministries in a posture of listening, mutual learning, and openness to the Spirit. From this meeting the table is actively seeking ways to serve these congregations and better meet their needs and share their gifts. The table also crafted a powerful training around planned giving and storytelling. The table gave the synod Celebrating God's Gifts: A 2021 Advent Devotional. A diverse group of generous people shared short stories that were combined into an Advent Devotional and shared with the synod. Recently, a small cohort began a practical training named Cultivating the Craft of Asking. This cohort will learn techniques to develop skills in asking donors for financial support and how to share the story of God's work in their community. I am deeply thankful to accompany the faithful and fun work of the Stewardship and Mission Support Table. I thank God for all members of this table.

Lastly, I am very proud of my collaborative work with Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson-Reinhold and with the ELCA. Together Rev. Erin and I developed transition guidance and training for rostered leaders and congregations to assist with pastoral transitions and retirements. We also developed an intentional congregational discernment cohort with the support of Duke Divinity and the synod. The first cohort was a success, and we have started cohort two. With the ELCA, I serve on a directing committee to support the ELCA's Vulnerable Congregations initiative. In addition, I am serving as a member of the ELCA Task Force on Church, State, and Civic Participation. The task force is engaged in a multi-year process to develop a social statement on Church, State, and Civic Participation.

In closing, I want to thank Katie Evans, Julie Hamre, Natalie Cain, Katharyn Wheeler, and Rev. Dr. Erin Swenson-Reinhold. I will miss Rev. Erin's friendship and wisdom. It has been a remarkable and spirit-filled journey with her. A special thanks to Bishop Ortiz for the laughs, her incredible patience and her unflinching openness to the Holy Spirit. Also, I thank all congregations and individuals that have supported the work of the synod. I want to remind everyone that none of this work could have been accomplished without the generosity of the congregations and individuals in our synod. For that I am deeply humbled and grateful. This work cannot be done without your generosity and prayer!