



Bishop's Report to the Assembly, 2016

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Revisiting Foundational Questions

Many of you are aware that I have urged congregations, Synod Council, and synod committees to consider three foundational questions:

Who are we?

Why are we here?

What then shall we do?

Feedback that I have received suggests that there has been fruitful discussion around the synod on these three questions. I'm grateful for the extent to which these three questions have helped congregations visualize their identity, mission, and ministry.

However, I think that it is time to revisit and revise the three foundational questions. To introduce this, let me lay a little groundwork before suggesting reworded foundational questions.

St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* is his guide to interpreting Scripture. Augustine begins by stating the goal of all biblical interpretation: biblical interpretation, in keeping with the nature of the Scriptures themselves, ultimately seeks in all of its study to honor, to glorify, and to know God.

According to Augustine, the true object of enjoyment is the Trinity: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is our highest good, our greatest delight. The triune God is the only thing to be loved for its own sake. Love of anything and everything else is to be a lower order of love. All the lower loves are truly loved. But they are loved not for their own sake; rather, they are loved for the sake of God, our truest and highest love.

The order of love immediately below love of God is love of ourselves and love of neighbor; however, we are not to love ourselves for our own sake or to love our neighbor for our neighbor's sake, but rather to love ourselves and others for the sake of God who is the true object of enjoyment.

The third order of love is the rest of God's creation: all the created beauty in the earth and the heavens: animals, plants, everything.

There are, then, says Augustine, "four kinds of things that are to be loved,—first, that which is above us; second, ourselves; third, that which is on a level with us; fourth, that which is beneath us." The two great commandments encompass the first three of these four kinds of things: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

Quoting further from Augustine (and please forgive the non-inclusive language of this dated translation), "Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally."

Here is my point for making taking this brief excursion into Augustine's discussion of ordered loves. The foundational questions (Who are we? Why are we here? and What then shall we do?) while fruitful, may bend our focus to ourselves, and not directly bind our answers to God. So, I am going to start asking three foundational questions differently:

Who is God?

Why has God put us in this place at this time?

What then do we do to live out our God-given calling?

I expect that, in part, we as individuals, all of our congregations, and all of us together as the synod (and the ELCA) will all begin with the same answers. For example,

Who is God?

God is the triune God who, incarnate in Jesus, has rescued us from sin, death, and the power of the devil in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Why has God put us in this place at this time?

Wherever we are, God has put us in this place at this time to love, glorify, honor, and delight in God - first and foremost; moreover, God has put us in this place to love ourselves, our neighbor, and all of God's creation, in proper order, so that we, our neighbors, and all creation can delight in God.

What then do we do to live out our God-given calling?

We worship and serve, responding in Christ's name to our specific, local circumstances, and to our global opportunities.

Of course, we will expand our answers to these three foundational questions to emphasize aspects of our confessional commitments and to address our specific contexts for life in the body of Christ.

My hope is that conversations over these three restated foundational questions can help us with perspective and direction in all sorts of areas: stewardship, evangelism, engagement with our community, social ministry in our community, what it means to be a church community, self-care, spiritual direction, ecumenical relations, shared ministry, and on and on.

Our Assembly speaker, Pastor Doug Cox, and the ELCA Churchwide Representative to our Assembly, Ms. Dana Dutcher, will draw us into further reflection on living out our God-given calling.

I will continue to visit as many of you as I can, in your congregations and in your communities. I find great joy in worshiping with you, joining in your special gatherings, celebrating congregational anniversaries, installing your pastors, dreaming together about Christ's ministry in this place, and exploring creative ways to turn challenges into God-given opportunities wherever Christ is sending us.

Synod Council

The Synod Council meets four times a year. Among its responsibilities, the Synod Council tends to be the vision and purpose of the synod, acts on recommendations regarding the rosters of the synod (for example, "on leave from call" requests and "retirement status" requests), oversees the ministries of our synod committees and synod staff, recommends budgets to the Synod Assembly, and advises the bishop. You can peruse the minutes of the Synod Council meetings in the Assembly Reports (available on the synod website: www.csis-elca.org).

I encourage us as a Synod Council, as an ongoing exercise, to look at our purpose and goals as a synod and as a Synod Council. This began with lifting up three foundational questions: Who are we? Why are we here? What then shall we do?

I reported to the Synod Assembly last year that our Synod Council had identified basic guiding values/priorities/goals coming out of our discernment in response to the three foundational questions:

Being, underpinning all we do:

1. Discern and articulate the Spirit of Christ.
2. Remind us of who we are (Lutheran, evangelists, spiritually empowered) and who we are not.
3. Envision our Mission for sustainable growth and discipleship.

Doing:

1. Support and encourage effective congregational leadership by putting pastors in the pulpit and providing leadership in time of crisis.
2. Facilitate collective decision making by convening and gathering the gifts of the synod.
3. Communicate connectedness and caring with congregations and our broken world.

These value/priorities/goals give guidance for what we attend to first, what we take particular care not to neglect, and how we engage in everything from youth ministry to candidacy committee to companion synod relationships.

Now, I have asked the Synod Council to use these priorities lifted up by our vision and mission conversations to assess the ways the synod is currently engaging these priorities. Let me suggest that we look at our committees, organizations, and programs – and look at them together with the people involved with these committees, organizations, and programs – that we candidly evaluate their effectiveness vis-a-vis our identified priorities, and that we assign each of them to one of four categories: grow, hold, remold, fold. Then we act according to those determinations.

Please join me in thanking these members of our 2015-2016 Synod Council:

Ms. Jeanne Rapp, Synod Vice President	Mr. Ken Finkle, Treasurer
Pr. Pamela Mitcham, Secretary	Mr. Broden Wileman
Mr. Mathew Spencer	Ms. Kim Alberts
Mr. Terry Goff	Mr. Henry Harms
Ms. Deanne Holshouser	Ms. Tiana Montgomery
Ms. Helen Pagel	Ms. Debbie Peterson
Mr. Steve Rapp	Mr. Larry Saler
Mr. Don Swan	Pr. James Davis
Pr. Laura Kamprath	Pr. Robert Rasmus
Pr. John Rothfusz	Pr. Michael Thomas
Pr. Glen VanderKloot	Mr. Daniel Simmons, Legal Counsel

It continues to be a joy to work with these faithful, highly-motivated disciples, who come from every Conference in the synod. In addition to participating in the four meetings the Synod Council has each year, each member has an additional responsibility with a committee or group in the synod.

I will say these few words about Jeanne Rapp at the assembly banquet, but I include them here as well for the record. I met Jeanne when I joined the Synod Council in 2006. By that time, she had already been Synod Vice President for five years. I caught immediately her heart for Christ and for Christ's church, her sharp mind, her attention to detail, and her effervescent vitality – as well as her dogged determination: when she asked you to serve in some capacity, she meant it. Fast forward a few years to when I became bishop; words cannot express the depth of my appreciation for Jeanne as my teammate during this time: her steadiness, her wise counsel, her faith-filled optimism in our ability to meet the endless challenges in the synod, her capacity for joy in the work of the church, and her never-flagging friendship. I know that all of us consider Jeanne a gift to the synod. But let me tell you that we the Central/Southern Illinois Synod have been blessed through Jeanne to a far greater extent than is generally known or can be generally known. "It takes a synod to raise a bishop." – do you remember that line from the Assembly when I was elected? Beloved synod, a major contributor to the raising of this bishop has been Vice President Jeanne Rapp.

2016 Pedal for a Purpose – Educational Debt Reduction Plan 2016-2020

The following plan was endorsed by the Synod Council at its March 2016 meeting. A rostered leader in the first seven years of her/his ministry, serving in a not-less-than-half-time position in a congregation or shared ministry of the C/SIS, may apply for a grant of up to \$1,500 per year for up to four years to repay educational debt incurred while seeking the terminal degree corresponding to his/her call. Therefore, in total, the rostered leader can receive up to \$6,000 over four years. If the rostered leader is called to a congregation or shared ministry with an average worship attendance of 70 or fewer at the time the call is issued, the rostered leader may apply for a grant of up to \$2,000 per year for up to four years, up to a total of \$8,000 over four years. Rostered leaders coming into the C/SIS from other synods during the first seven years of their ministry may apply for a grant of up to \$1,500 per year until they finish their seventh year in ministry or for up to four years, whichever comes first. If the rostered leader is called to a congregation or shared ministry with an average worship attendance of 70 or fewer at the time the call is issued, the rostered leader may apply for a grant of up to \$2,000 per year until she/he finishes her/his seventh year in ministry or for up to four years, whichever comes first.

2016 Bishop's Report to the Assembly

This is a 5-year plan that would fund educational debt reduction grants for rostered leaders receiving calls in the C/SIS in years 2016-2020. (This plan would not reduce educational debt reduction grants currently made to rostered leaders receiving calls into the synod prior to 2016.)

Funding sources:

\$ 30,000	2016 Pedal for a Purpose
\$ 50,000	C/SIS Lutheran Men in Mission (repurposing existing funds to a compatible purpose)
<u>\$ 20,000</u>	5 years of income on the Student Loan Restricted Fund
\$ 100,000	Total funds available for distribution

According to my calculations, there would be sufficient money to fund grants to two-three new recipients per year for five years of new recipients, a total of between 10 and 15 recipients. This plan would be administered by the Leadership Support Subcommittee of the Professional and Lay Leadership Committee and the Assistant to the Bishop assigned to this subcommittee.

Let me add a thought, looking further into the future. The Student Loan Restricted Fund (roughly \$202,000) was established such that the income from the fund is paid out to first call pastors toward their student debt. I wonder if at some point we could aim higher and grander. For example, what if we got that fund to \$2 million and then used it to fund loans to first call pastors at, say, 2% to 3% annual interest, with 60% of the loan forgiven after five years of service in the C/SIS, 80% forgiven after seven years of service in the C/SIS, and 100% forgiven after nine years of service in the C/SIS? We would set a cap on the amount of the loan. Since the new Candidacy Manual has a financial readiness and planning piece as part of the entrance process, the cap on the C/SIS loan could be aligned with the maximum debt load advised by the Candidacy Committee. There could be creative variations on the plan; for example, congregations could offer to pay the interest on the loan so that all of the pastors' payments would be applied to loan principle. For year #1, that would be \$1,000 on a \$50,000 loan at 2%, \$1,500 at 3%. (P.S. 2%-3% per year would see to the fund's stability and would slow the erosion of "buying power" to inflation over time.) Of course, the fund would also need to receive gifts, because we would hope to forgive a high percentage of the loans. Just a thought.

Staff

It also continues to be a joy to serve with the faithful and gifted people on our synod staff. Let me take this moment to thank them:

Pr. Robert Dealey, Director for Evangelical Mission/Coordinator of Communications and Networking
Ms. Cindy Koonce, Office Manager
Pr. Wayland Middendorf, Assistant to the Bishop
Mrs. Barbara Purple, office volunteer
Pr. Jim Reents, Assistant to the Bishop
Pr. Ken Sandlin, Assistant to the Bishop
Ms. Glenna Senters, Bookkeeper
Pr. Maureen Stein, Assistant to the Bishop

Synod Notes

My report includes the statistical information on the synod that you will find available on the synod web-site: www.csis-elca.org The statistical information includes the current number of congregations in the synod and the transitions of rostered leaders over the course of the past year.

As I write this, we have sixteen active call processes in which a full-time pastor is sought and a Ministry Site Profile has been submitted by the congregation council; I anticipate that three of them having called pastors by the time you read this. Of the remaining thirteen, five are interviewing nominees. One additional congregation in an active call process is working on submitting its Ministry Site Profile.

Companion Synod Relations – Malagasy Lutheran Church

We relate to two synods (or dioceses) of the Malagasy Lutheran Church, which is the Lutheran church body in Madagascar: the Ambovombe-Androy Synod and the Ft. Dauphin Synod, both of which are located in the southern region of Madagascar. Thanks to voluntary contributions, we continue to support the regional seminary in Bezaha, the Manatantely Bible School in Ft. Dauphin, and the Mahavelo Bible School in Ambovombe-Androy. In addition, the C/SIS Women of the ELCA made a significant contribution to the Women's House in the Ambovombe-Androy Synod. Also, seminary students in both companion synods have received funding from contributions within our synod. Our companion synod relationships continue to be vigorous and yet still developing.

Lutheran Social Services of Illinois

As most of you are aware, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) announced in January that it is significantly downsizing. I have attached as an appendix to this report the letter sent by the three ELCA synod bishops in Illinois to our synods, explaining LSSI's situation, stating our support for LSSI, and offering hope for the future of our social service agency. I will not repeat that here. Let me simply emphasize that these heart-wrenching reductions in services came about only after painstaking efforts to see to the best interests of our clients and employees, and after prayerful consideration for the viability of LSSI in the future.

Ministry With Ecumenical Partners

The first resolved in Resolution 03.2014, adopted by the 2014 Assembly of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod reads as follows: "RESOLVED that the Bishop of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod as the Synod's Chief Ecumenical Officer, appoint an Ecumenical Committee and Chairperson to oversee development of an expansive vision and strategy for how the synod as a whole can develop a deeper cooperative ministry with its ecumenical partners to possibly include joint convocations, assemblies, committees, and the like, and report on this strategy to the Synod Council in 2015 and the Synod Assembly by 2016".

The report fulfilling this order from the 2014 Synod Assembly was presented to the Synod Council at its September 2015 meeting and is included in the reports for this Synod Assembly.

"We are Church for the Sake of the World"

As we gather in assembly, the promises of God continue to guide us, our prayers continue to form us, and the Spirit poured out at Pentecost continues to empower us. Thank you for being here to tend to the work of Christ's church. May you be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit!

It continues to be a privilege to serve Christ by serving you. The more I get to know the congregations and individuals of our synod, the more grateful to God I am for the Holy Spirit at work in you. As I have done in previous years, I will conclude my report with a slide show of some of the places where I've been over the past year: scenes of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod.