

Report to the 2019 Synod Assembly

Report of the Director for Evangelical Mission

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In August I began my call from the ELCA to serve as the Director for Evangelical Mission for the Central/Southern Illinois Synod. This is a position in each synod funded by the ELCA to support synod congregations in the areas of congregation vitality which includes mission planning, faith practices, evangelism, stewardship, shared ministries, and new worshipping communities. In this work I relate to two synod committees: the Mission Support and Stewardship Education Committee and the New and Renewing Congregations Committee. (You can find reports on their work elsewhere.)

Much of my initial work has been getting to know the synod by meeting congregations, pastors, and deacons. Most Sundays I am visiting congregations for worship, and I have attended at least one monthly meeting of each conference to get to know the pastors and deacons and hear more about congregations in that conference.

Last fall, our synod, along with Northern Illinois Synod and Metro Chicago Synod, sponsored a “Discovering Hope” event for small membership congregations. People from ten of the C/SIS congregations participated and a couple congregations are actively pursuing ministry plans that have come from that day.

Also, in the fall, members of three synod congregations and I attended the Stewardship Kaleidoscope Conference in St. Louis. ELCA churchwide provided five scholarships covering registration for this event. Since that time, I have made presentations about stewardship resources at a Southern Conference monthly meeting and at the West Central Conference Assembly.

I have met with a couple congregation councils to have conversation about their ministry and facilitated three council retreats.

The scope of DEM work also includes shared ministry among congregations. This includes geographical parishes and congregations who are looking at ways to do ministry together. The Faith and Grace Parish (Immanuel, Golden; Zion, Liberty; and Salem, Mendon) has completed their parish agreement and is awaiting a called pastor. A few other congregations are actively in conversation about joining together in ministry. Six congregations in Morgan, Cass, and Scott counties – the Seeds of Hope Cooperative - are working together to pilot a new way of raising up and preparing people who may later engage in synodically authorized ministry in those congregations.

The DEMs gather twice a year for conversation and sharing of resources around the topic of congregational vitality. Networking with other DEMs has been a valuable resource as I continue to work with congregations in our synod. I am currently on an evangelism task force that is working on putting together tools for congregations in their work of reaching new disciples with the gospel.

As I look toward the coming year, there will be more intentional focus on how congregations can reach the unchurched and fulfill our calling to make disciples more effectively. More and more, the people around us are not familiar with who Jesus is and the good news and abundant life he offers. Reaching the unchurched is something that proves difficult for most congregations. If we are to engage our calling to make disciples, it will mean some creative and new thinking about how we – together - can do this.

“Evangelism” in a traditional sense of reaching people with the gospel will be one focus. I hope to be able to facilitate conversation in a variety of setting for congregations to think about how we invite,

welcome, and form new disciples. One congregation has already asked about evangelism resources and is planning a workshop to become more intentional about making disciples.

I will also be spending time working on ways that we can initiate new worshipping communities within our synod. One of the ways to do this is with existing congregations developing “Word and Sacrament outposts,” where congregational members and pastors are instrumental in beginning a new site for worship. Some of these may develop into new congregations and some may only serve as a worship site for a period of time. Statistics show that new worshipping communities are much more likely to reach the unchurched than established congregations.

I ask you to prayerfully consider how you and your congregation might participate in such work. Possibilities include a “seed group” from your congregation that commits to gather for worship outside of your church premises, intentional prayer for this effort, and financial partners (both individuals and congregations). Financial partners will be needed locally, but also as we work to establish a deeper pool of synod funds that can support the work of mission sites and their developers.

I would love to hear your thoughts and ideas as we consider our call to make disciples! Additionally, if your congregation would like to engage more deeply in any aspect of discipleship and ministry, I am available as a resource person to help you think, plan, and move forward in what you hear God calling you to be and do in this time and place!

Report of the Congregational Resource Coordinator

Apart from my DEM role, I am also serving the synod quarter-time as the Congregation Resource Coordinator. I describe this as bridging work between a whole lot of areas and people.

- I coordinate with the Administrative Assistant for Media, Communications, and Graphic Design for synod newsletter and web content.
- I make visits with pastors who are new to our synod, providing them an information packet and familiarizing them with various aspects of our synod life together.
- I serve as a resource person for family systems theory as it relates to congregational leadership. I am part of the ELCA Systems Academy and welcome your questions or interest in talking about how an understanding of systems theory can help both rostered ministers and lay leaders navigate the complexities of congregational dynamics.
- I assist Bishop John in conflict situations as they arise.
- In the “other duties as assigned” arena, last fall I helped to convene a group to begin conversation about how we as a synod can consider ways to promote rostered ministry as a viable vocation. This is an on-going priority of our synod.