



Region 5

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Report for 2016 Synod Assembly

Dear Partners in Ministry,

As regional coordinator, I support the work of synods to address *mission and leadership* needs in your synod and throughout the region. Much of this work is spent working with synod candidacy committees. "Candidacy" is the term used to describe our process of forming and preparing people to serve as a rostered leader in the ELCA. We gratefully receive those who are considering their calling; help them in their continued discernment, and walk with them as they are formed to faithfully serve this church through a ministry of Word and Service or Word and Sacrament.

It will likely come as no surprise to you that the number of people preparing to be a pastor has been steadily decreasing. Our current enrollment in M.Div. programs at the eight ELCA seminaries is about 40% lower than just 10 years ago and more congregations are without a regularly called pastor for long periods of time. Although there are a multitude of factors that likely contribute to this situation; we know that as a church, we need to work together to identify, encourage, and equip people to become rostered leaders-both ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service.

In the Lutheran tradition, a call to ministry is understood as both internal and external. That is, the individual inwardly senses "God is calling *me*" and other people recognize "God is calling *you*" to a particular ministry. Oftentimes those who are called to rostered ministry first hear the call from another person-it is the external call that prompts prayerful reflection and recognition of the inward call. It is not unusual for one who is entering candidacy to share that the call to rostered ministry first came from encouragement at a young age, and that it was met with initial resistance or doubt-not unlike some of the call stories we read in scripture.

As you prepare for your synod assembly and make report back to your congregation, I invite your reflection on raising up possible leaders for rostered ministry. Who are the good encouragers in your congregation? Who are the people that you envision as ministers and how could you encourage them to think and pray about it? In what other ways can you create a culture of invitation and support for ministry leadership in your congregation?

Like the many faithful volunteers that serve on your synod candidacy committee, I am honored to accompany candidates for rostered ministry, help them develop as leaders, and explore with them how God is calling them to service in the world. Thank you for your synod's participation in this shared work and for the privilege to serve among you.

In Christ,

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