



Pastor Elise Rothfusz
Director for Evangelical Mission / Staff Report

Report to Synod Assembly June 2021

June 2021

We all know that 2020 didn't look anything like what we expected it to. The pandemic brought challenges to congregations – and provided plenty of opportunities to rethink what it means to be the Church in a hurting world, and how we best steward our ministries to reach new people with the gospel of Jesus, both through online worship and other ways of connecting digitally. I am grateful to work beside the thoughtful and creative body of Christ in the Central/Southern Illinois Synod.

My role as Director for Evangelical Mission is to support, equip, and serve the synod in areas related to congregational vitality and new ministries.

Faithful Innovation - One of the most exciting things this past year was our synod launch of Faithful Innovation Learning Communities. Five congregation teams come together three times over a nine-month period to be trained in new practices of listening to God, one another and their neighbor, to be more attuned to God's calling and sending - in other words, listening well in order to faithfully innovate for ministry. The teams have met twice on Zoom since November and will meet again in June after Synod Assembly. Each team has a coach to accompany and help them stay focused on the work of faithfully innovating in the intervening months, trying out new practices and behaviors that equip them for quick pivots and adapting to changing realities. My thanks to our coaches Chris Edmonds (Lutheran Church of Mahomet), Deacon Ellen Koester (Advent, Morton), Brenda Lindsey (Lutheran Church of Mahomet), Jane Otte (Our Redeemer, Marion) and Deacon Tammy Devine for their facilitation with this process. I continue to be very grateful for the ongoing work of the Faithful Innovation synod team: Eden Blair (First English, Peoria), Larry Dodds (St. John, Anchor), and Tony Metz (pastor, Luther Memorial, Quincy), and we look forward to welcoming a new group of congregations beginning in August. The first two

years of the Faithful Innovation Learning Communities process are funded in large part by a Synod Vitality Grant from the ELCA.

Area Ministries – Adapting to new realities takes reflection and collaboration. One of the areas in which I am called to work is with congregations who are looking to partner for a particular project or time, or in a shared ministry arrangement like a geographic parish. For the last year I have been meeting regularly with geographic parish presidents and with geographic pastors for resourcing of ideas and best practices, as well as mutual encouragement for this unique ministry configuration.

Stewardship – At the beginning of the pandemic as so many congregations moved ministry online, I was able to provide support and encouragement for online giving resources as well as additional stewardship support.

- GSB Fundraising developed a simple fall stewardship process to help over-stressed pastors and congregational leaders with their fall stewardship appeals. Twenty-one congregations registered for this program, “Beginning a Culture of Generosity,” which was financially underwritten from the synod’s Macedonia Project funds (which was originally granted from the ELCA in 2013). This program will be offered again in 2021 under the revised name “Building a Culture of Generosity.”
- From things learned in that fall program, I collaborated with Peter Reuss, our GSB consultant to develop “Stewardship First Steps,” which is meant to prepare pastors and deacons in their personal stewardship and lay groundwork for a congregation’s participation in Building a Culture of Generosity or a special appeal process.
- The synod is also partnering with Peter Reuss and GSB Fundraising to offer Stewardship for All Seasons, a two-year program of strengthening a congregation’s stewardship practices through intentional planning, visioning, and effective methodologies. Congregation teams meet together and have individual coaching with their consultant to tailor their stewardship practices for their congregation. The synod has received grants from the Stewardship of Life Institute and four synod congregations to help fund the cost of this program for congregations. We are excited to have six C/SIS congregations piloting Stewardship for All Seasons in the 2021-2023 cohort!

Evangelism –I continue to serve on a DEM working group focused on evangelism and the development of new resources for congregations that we hope will be released within the year. This past year we produced a video resource for congregation team discussion and are developing new resources to assist congregations in their calling to reach new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. While some congregations realized there were new people connecting with them when they moved online, the challenge now will be for all congregations to assess their best ways of connecting with new people post-pandemic. I am available to work with congregations or groups of congregations to create an evangelism strategy or host a workshop (via Zoom or in person as circumstances allow).

Word and Sacrament Outposts – Plans for new ministries were put on hold with the pandemic, but it is now time to think of new ways to host/sponsor/start new communities

that share Word and Sacrament with people new or re-connecting to Christian faith. Please contact me with your ideas on where and how we might do this in our synod!

Committees – I relate to two committees and am so very thankful for those on the committees and all they have contributed toward the ministry of the synod this past year. Please take a moment to view their video reports and read their written reports.

I have immensely enjoyed my Sunday visits to your congregations; thank you for your hospitality. 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 – in person or by video conference when appropriate.

Report of the Congregational Resource Coordinator

In addition to my $\frac{3}{4}$ time role as Director for Evangelical Mission, I serve the C/SIS in the quarter-time position of Congregational Resource Coordinator:

- Coordinating with the Administrative Assistant for Media, Communications, and Graphic Design for synod newsletter and web content.
- Making visits to rostered ministers who are new to our synod, providing them with an information packet and familiarizing them with aspects of our synodical life together.
- Assisting Bishop John with congregational situations as requested.
- Serving as a resource person for family systems theory as it relates to congregational leadership. I am concluding my fourth and final year of participation in the ELCA Systems Academy, which strives to resource congregations and leaders with a way of thinking that promotes strength and resiliency. I 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.