

Vice President's Annual Report (2021)

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whew! Where to begin for a report for the last two years... Since the 2019 Synod Assembly, the Synod Council has welcomed new members, bid fond farewells to departing members, celebrated ordinations, new pastoral calls and much deserved retirements, and celebrated the work of dedicated lay leaders. We received reports detailing the diverse expressions of our church throughout the Central/Southern Illinois Synod—all of our normal business.

At our last Synod Assembly, we were responding to Bishop's sabbatical report and working through and developing responses to those insights. After the Assembly, the Synod Council developed several resolutions in response to the feedback given that were to be presented at the 2020 Synod Assembly. Then COVID arrived and the world changed. The Synod Council didn't want to let the postponement of the Assembly stop the implementation of some of those ideas. We asked you to form new relationships with a Sister Congregation. And we asked you to be more intentional on hearing God's voice through Dwelling in the Word and other faith practices.

Another response to the Bishop's sabbatical report was the addition of two "visioning" meetings to the Synod Council's four regular business meetings each year. This additional time is used to focus on longer range planning.

March 2020 was our first Synod Council meeting via Zoom. We had special Synod Council meetings throughout March, April and May 2020 to work through postponing the 2020 Assembly Synod and associated COVID related concerns. Like many other organizations, the Synod Council learned both the problems and the advantages of working remotely. We learned to keep ourselves on mute, the importance of the raised hand feature, the joy that can be found in a randomly assigned break out session, and the near impossibility of praying in unison in a Zoom meeting. The Synod Council is planning on returning to a mix of in-person and Zoom meetings going forward. And hopefully the Zoom meetings will only be due to Illinois' weather in January and not a global pandemic.

In response to the killing of George Floyd just over a year ago, the Synod Council created the Anti-Racism Working Group, who's work you'll learn more about later. There's much work to do regarding God's work of healing and restoration, and with the persistent human pain and injustices of racism in the world.

In another COVID change, instead of one multi day gathering at ELCA Churchwide each year, the Synod VP's have had monthly Zoom calls. Those meetings have had a lot of discussions about remote Synod Assemblies, dissemination of best practices and technical solutions, the various pros and cons (and expenses) of virtual voting systems, along with providing much needed fellowship and support.

In the past I've talked about how much I've learned about what the "Church Together" can do. During the last 15 months I've learned that "together" can mean a much greater number of situations than I ever imagined. May God bless our work together and each of you!