

Report to Synod Council
September 12, 2020
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Ministry continues in the midst of this pandemic and in spite of it. In my role as the Assistant to the Bishop for Leadership and Administration I have worked with the Synod's COVID 19 taskforce to continue to support congregation's in developing their COVID-19 guidelines and assisting them with plans to return to physically gathering for worship and ministry. Because of the nature of this pandemic the COVID-19 taskforce has offered a variety of resources including videos, webinars and written guidance to equip congregations and their members as each of our four states continues to face the daily changes in how this pandemic is affecting their communities.

I also have been working closely with the SES's Disaster Team as our Synod has faced several potential natural disasters and storms over the summer months, as well as the COVID-19 crisis. Through the Disaster Team, the SES and Lutheran Disaster Response provided \$3,000 grants for COVID-19 Food Insecurity programs to 18 different congregations across our Synod. Through these grants we were able to empower congregations to provide resources for their neighbors in need due to the increased demands caused by the economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Some of the congregations were able to partner with local food cooperatives to provide additional funds and at least one congregation choose to use this grant to encourage their congregation to match the grant to provide close to \$6,000 to their Cooperative Ministry program. Other congregations developed new programs that provided monthly food boxes to assist those in their community and still other congregations partnered with governmental programs to distribute produce and meat purchased by the government and the funds assisted in providing the necessary traffic control. Along with these individual grants in Georgia we were able to provide 9,000 face masks and 30 gallons of sanitizer for these ministries that were secured through a Disaster Team volunteer involvement with VOAD and FEMA.

Our Disaster Team has also been equipping congregation's to develop their own disaster plans to engage their community following a disaster in their local area. Thanks to Pastor Morgan Gordy and John Boettner we were able to train 21 Congregational Disaster Coordinators and to record the training so that other Congregational Disaster Coordinators can watch at a later date. The goal is to engage every congregation in the work of developing a disaster plan, to equip their Disaster Coordinators to develop their own Congregational Disaster Team. At this point we have about a third of our congregations that are either doing this work or already have plans in place. The Disaster Team also is continuing to develop its own structure and building its' partnership with Inspiritus and their work in disaster relief.

Another large part of my ministry is centered around Candidacy and assisting the work of the Candidacy Committee in developing Rostered Leaders for the ELCA. The Candidacy Committee met at the end of August via Zoom. We welcomed Pastor Michelle Kuhlman and Pastor Steven Renner to the team and The Rev. Dr. Justin Nickle, our seminary advisor from the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. While we approved 3 candidates for ordination at this last meeting, we continue to have new candidates to apply for Candidacy and so we continue to have around 90 candidates in our candidacy track. I am grateful for the work of Pastor David Helfrich, chair and Pastor Andrew Lewis, vice-chair of the Committee for their work and for all our members. This committee meet with each of our candidates between their time with the whole committee and this partnership this ministry helps manage the

various individual needs of candidates. Dr. Ruth Hamilton's work for our Region is invaluable to not just our candidates but in assisting me to guide the discernment of our candidates. I am also grateful for the work that Melissa Fuller Sims gives to this team and the support she does administratively to the committee.

Due to the pandemic we had to cancel the 2020 Synod Assembly and the Fall Convocation for Rostered Leaders. Originally we had hoped to have a Synod-wide Faith Formation Day that would be held in a variety of locations throughout the Synod territory. Unfortunately, due to the continued risk with gathering, we have canceled that but are now offering 4 online opportunities for lay faith formation in October. The current plan is to work with the Chattanooga Convention Center to host the 2021 Synod Assembly while also developing an online version if it is unsafe to gather physically in June. The final decision for that Assembly will be made in early 2021. At this point the rescheduled Convocation in January 2021 is also being cancelled due to the uncertain nature of gathering physically.

Finally, I am extremely grateful for the ministry our Dean's provide to our rostered leaders and their congregation, especially during this pandemic. Communication is key during any crisis and they have assisted the work we do together by being that bridge between our rostered leaders and the Synod sharing information and caring for those in their deanery.

The Bishop has often said none of us has ever trained to do ministry in the midst of a global pandemic but I will say that I am grateful for his leadership throughout this and for the incredible faithfulness of our churches. Ministry continues across our four states and for that I give thanks to God.