

2019 Synod Assembly
Report of the Bishop's Associate for Leadership Formation and Congregational Care
The Rev. Kris Totzke

Partway through my third year as Bishop's Associate, this call continues to be a joy and a challenge, and an always fluid experience in ministry. Thank you to all who have been with me on this journey and in this ministry.

One of the greatest blessings continues to be the relationships I have been developing and nurturing with congregations throughout NT-NL. I have been able to visit 2/3 of our congregations for Sunday morning worship services. My first thought was "is that all?", but then I realized that meant I have made it to about 70 of our congregations in 2 and a half years – not counting repeat visits to many of those congregations. I also have Sundays scheduled with 5 more in the coming few months. If you count council meetings or other events besides worship at the congregations, there are only 20 that I have not made it to at all yet. Hopefully by next year's assembly I will be able to say I have made it to every congregation at least once.

But it's not just a matter of numbers. What is more important is the relationship growth and trust that is being built. As I work with ongoing **mobility and call processes**, this is critical. If I am going to find pastors who fit congregations, I need to know the congregations beyond their numbers or paperwork. This year, we have three new pastors who have moved into the synod, but we also have had four ordinations. There are also others in the call process currently, and some congregations where pastors will be retiring soon. For those cases, the interim pastors and their work are a vital piece. To support that work, this year we began having monthly gatherings of the interim pastors in the synod – some in person, some participating via Zoom. This has been an incredibly valuable addition to my time as it helps me be aware of what is happening in those transitional congregations, but also how we can best support our interim pastors in these times.

As I pointed out, we've had four ordinations this year, and our number of first call pastors has grown tremendously. In **First Call Theological Education**, we now have NINE pastors participating. These pastors vary from solo to associate, part-time to full-time, and a couple of mission developers. I expect the number to grow even more as we have upcoming pastors who are anticipating ordination this year too.

Which brings me to the last major component of my call – **Candidacy**. This continues to be the most fluid part of the call as the seminaries continue to develop new pathways for candidates to pursue ordination. We have 16 current candidates for ministry, with at least 3 more at various stages of entrance planning. Of those 16, only four have been in traditional residential seminary programs. We have a growing number of candidates participating in the distance learning opportunities from both Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN and Wartburg Seminary in Dubuque, IA. Both programs are Master of Divinity programs but done with flexibility to allow for service in congregations while learning. We also continue to have six candidates participating in Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM,) which provides opportunity for learning and service combined and which leads to ordination but without a Master of Divinity. Watching the growth of all these candidates has been a gift.