

**2020 Synod Assembly**  
**Report of the Bishop's Associate for Leadership Formation and Congregational Care**  
**The Rev. Kris Totzke**

As I write this report, we are in the midst of a pandemic and life is anything but normal. I've been working from home, as has the rest of the Synod staff. Nevertheless, ministry continues to happen. Relationships are still a vital part of my work. While I'm not able to be physically present in our congregations on Sundays, one of the blessings of this work-from-home time is that I can "visit" for Sunday worship in multiple places via their online services. I'm grateful for the creativity, resourcefulness, and faithfulness I am seeing in our congregations and among our pastors.

The **mobility and call process** continues even with the challenges. In the fifteen months since our last synod assembly, we have seven pastors new to the synod in addition to five more who were ordained. We also have three more anticipated ordinations on the schedule for September, October, and November. There are other congregations currently in the call process and a couple more where there will be retirements yet this year. Change is a constant in the church as it is elsewhere. Our interim pastors continue to serve well in many congregations, and we have continued to have monthly meetings in person and via Zoom. It has been incredibly valuable to me in staying abreast of what's happening in our congregations that are in transition. Those pastors have also been deepening their relationships and sharing of resources as well.

As I pointed out, we've had five ordinations so far this year and will have one more by the time our Assembly meets, so our number of first call pastors continues to be strong. In **First Call Accompaniment**, we now have thirteen pastors participating, which includes the three TEEM candidates who will be ordained this fall. These pastors are a source of joy for me in my work. During this pandemic time, we have also been having Zoom meetings weekly to allow for support and sharing.

Which brings me to another 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 17 current candidates for ministry. Of those 17, only three 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. Luther Seminary also has a new opportunity called MDivX, which is an expedited program that covers a complete 4 year plan in 2 years. It's difficult to get accepted in that program, but we now have one candidate who has begun it this year. We also continue to have two 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. One of those two has been approved for ordination and one is almost done with his final steps. Watching the growth of all these candidates has been a gift.