

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

This is my fifth report to the Synod Assembly, which is hard for me to believe. By far, this has been the most challenging year as well, thanks to the strange circumstances of our world this year. Working from home has hampered my relational approach to ministry, but we have all adjusted and relationships continue to grow – just through technology now. There is hope on the horizon though, as I am now fully vaccinated and beginning to resume some in-person visits.

Mobility and Call Process continues to be active, as can be seen by the report of roster changes. Many pastors who put mobility on hold in this past year have begun to discern their futures. Congregations that have had to slow down processes have adjusted to find ways to have meetings and votes and calls, so those processes are picking up again as well. As much as I miss meeting in person with call committees, it is more efficient for time and travel budget to continue to do orientation sessions by Zoom. Time will tell how this process continues to evolve.

Those who feel called to serve the church have continued to engage in the **Candidacy** process for ordination. Our numbers are just slightly lower this year as all of our TEEM candidates (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) are now finished and ordained (or almost.) We have 12 active candidates, many of whom will be doing their internships this coming year. Seminaries continue to develop more programs to enable students to pursue ministry with less debt at the end. The newest program is from Wartburg Seminary, which is working with Wartburg College for an Accelerated Ministry Program in which students begin seminary coursework while still undergrad students. We have a young man from our synod who is currently in that program at Wartburg College and who will soon be entering the Candidacy process now too. The goal of the program is to help students complete both their Bachelor's degree and their Master of Divinity in far less time than the usual eight years, which means much less student loan debt. This means more learning for our Candidacy Committee as we continue to accompany our candidates in their journey. Recently, the ELCA held an online training course for committee members, which was a helpful tool for a few of our members.

First Call Accompaniment has evolved a bit this year also. We were unable to have in-person retreats in the spring and fall but managed to find a way to do them via Zoom. In addition, we have had optional weekly check-in Zoom meetings for this group throughout this year. What was meant to be a temporary thing became so important to many in the group that we have continued it. There are currently ten first call pastors in this 3-year time of required accompaniment and the majority of them have chosen to be part of the weekly support sessions.

We also have four congregations that recently completed a pilot program through Luther Seminary to learn **Leadership for Faithful Innovation**. It is based on learning how to Listen for God around us, Act on how we hear God calling us to serve and Share the learning that comes from our "Holy experimentation." I will be taking these concepts and ideas to new congregations now, beginning with our Conference Out West. Hopefully we'll see some fruits of the spirit taking root in new and exciting ways.