

2022 Synod Assembly
Report of the Bishop's Associate for Leadership Formation and Congregational Care
The Rev. Kris Totzke

Ministry in these strange hybrid times continues to be challenging. I have been able to resume a pretty full schedule of congregational visits and meetings but have also been able to take advantage of the things we have learned about meeting via technology. I guess I am evidence that even old dogs can occasionally learn new tricks.

Mobility and Call Process continues to one of the more challenging aspects of my work. Many pastors who put mobility on hold in this time of COVID have begun to discern their futures. We have seen a high number of retirements throughout the ELCA, as well as a growing number of pastors who have chosen to go on leave from call to reevaluate their sense of call to ministry. "The Great Resignation" has affected ministry just as it has many other areas of the work force. As a result, the number of available pastors in the ELCA database seeking new calls is much lower than a few years ago. However, call committees have been able to also resume more of their standard in person visits with pastoral candidates. The ongoing discernment by pastors has also helped those who are seeking a new call to be affirmed in their calling and to have a stronger sense of certainty as they move into these new calls.

Those who feel newly called to serve the church have continued to engage in the **Candidacy** process for ordination. Our numbers of active candidates continue to hold steady, as new candidates keep entering the process even as many of the current list finish their processes. Seminaries continue to develop more programs to enable students to pursue ministry with less debt at the end. This means more learning for our Candidacy Committee as we continue to accompany our candidates in their journey. However, we also have some new members of the committee who are eager to learn the processes.

First Call Accompaniment has continued evolving too. We were planning to have an in-person tri-synodical retreat in the fall, but due to a variant surge in Covid along with ongoing repairs at Briarwood, we moved back to a Zoom version. Our planning team did an exceptional job of planning a truly interactive zoom retreat at the last minute, which ended up being a very good alternative to the original plan. In addition, we have had optional monthly check-in Zoom meetings for this group throughout this year. There are currently seven first call pastors in this 3-year time of required accompaniment.

We also have three west Texas congregations that are completing the process of **Faithful Innovation**, that has been based on the program from Luther Seminary. 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." The program has been well-received, so hopefully the energy generated will carry through in their ministries.

This has also been a time of discernment for many congregations who are currently in conversations about **shared ministry** and what that might look like in their settings. This has been the topic of many more of my visits in recent months. We are learning as we go!