

**2023 Synod Assembly**  
**Report of the Bishop's Associate for Leadership Formation and Congregational Care**  
**The Rev. Kris Totzke**

Let me begin my report this year with an expression of deep gratitude for the sabbatical time which was granted to me for this year. I was blessed with that gift of renewal for the months of December, January, and February. Personally, it was a time for home projects, family visits, and rest. I was able to just worship without obligations for leading or preaching. I spent time along the Gulf Coast riding my bike and hiking. It was very good for my soul.

Professionally, it was a time for me to work through a stack of books and resources related to discernment, which was my project for the sabbatical time. The project was twofold, related to both aspects of my call. The portion for Leadership Formation was the planning of a retreat for those who are considering whether God may be calling them to ordained ministry. I plan to have that retreat offered sometime next fall or winter, so if you are one of those in discernment about call, please watch for upcoming announcements about that. The portion related to Congregational Care was the compiling of books and resources for our pastors who are working with congregations in discernment about their future. I have already shared some of those with our Interim/Transitional Pastors in our monthly meeting time. Others will be used in my work with congregation councils and call committees. If any of these may be of interest to you, please feel free to reach out to me for some conversation.

The discernment for those who are considering a call to ordained ministry is especially important in these times. The **Mobility and Call Process** has become increasingly challenging. At our recent churchwide gathering of Bishop's Associates, I heard the same stories from all of my colleagues. Pastors are in very short supply, especially for rural or remote areas. Even for urban and suburban areas, there are always multiple congregations pursuing the same pastors. The number of available pastors in the ELCA database seeking new calls is much lower than a few years ago. My most recent check of the total number of Ministers of Word and Sacrament seeking a call is 350 for the **whole** ELCA. So I repeat, finding and encouraging those who feel called and gifted for ordained ministry is a critical need. **A question to ask your congregations: *how many pastors have come out of this congregation?* And a challenge looking forward: *Who in your congregations may be open to answering that call?***

Those who feel newly called to serve the church have continued to engage in the **Candidacy** process for ordination. Our number of active candidates has declined a bit this coming year, but I have recently had new inquiries again too. 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.

**First Call Accompaniment** currently involves ten first call pastors, but five of those will have completed their three year accompaniment obligation by the end of the year. We have a few more anticipated ordinations upcoming, so that number will grow again. Our next retreat will be in June, followed by a tri-synodical retreat in September.