

2024 Synod Assembly
Report of the Bishop's Associate for Leadership Formation and Congregational
Care
The Rev. Kris Totzke

One of my joys this year was participating as a teacher for the **Parish Lay Ministry Academy**. I taught the preaching class for the fall semester, which energized me and gave me great hope for our lay leadership in the congregations. Some of those Parish Lay Ministry students are also discerning a call to enter into candidacy for ordained ministry.

Which leads to a rewarding aspect of this year for me - the **Discernment** retreat which we held in January, following up on my report last year about my sabbatical work. We had ten participants attend the retreat, half of whom are current or recent PLMA students. While some of the participants came away from the retreat affirming their call to continue to serve their congregations as strong lay leaders (also much needed!), some are beginning to research seminaries and entrance into the candidacy process. This retreat was incredibly helpful and will hopefully be repeated each year.

Candidacy also continues to be a joy in my call. We currently have 11 candidates for ordained ministry at various stages of their preparation. There are also a few more who have begun the entrance process. The role of the candidacy committee is to discern, along with the candidates, who is ready to be entered into the process for ordination. It is important that we are finding candidates who are gifted to become healthy, effective pastors for the church. Applying is not a guarantee that the committee will agree that they are truly called to serve our church, nor do all candidates follow through to ordination. But the committee accompanies them along the way to help in the ongoing discernment with the goal being good, strong pastors who will serve for years to come.

That continues to be a vital need and the frustrating part of this call. The number of available pastors for **Mobility** continues to decline. As of my most recent search, there are a total of 317 pastors in the ELCA looking for calls, and only 20 of those have indicated openness to the NT-NL Synod. In reality, as I have had conversations with many of those 20, they actually are not in a good position to relocate here for various reasons. Thankfully we continue to raise up many good pastors from within our synod, as can be seen by the number of recent ordinations. Those pastors continue to meet regularly and participate in retreats for our **First Call Accompaniment**. Currently we have six pastors in that group, who meet monthly via zoom and in person for a synod retreat once a year as well as a tri-synodical retreat each fall.