

Rev. Kathryn Skoglund, Synod Minister

2021 Synod Assembly Report

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Synod Minister for Engaging Leaders

It is hard to believe that this is my last assembly report as your Synod Minister. These last six years have been filled with growth, challenges, opportunities, frustrations, but most of all, with joy and bountiful blessings. There are so many things in which I have been involved that have made an impact on me. The Gifts of Grace Lilly Initiative, The Leadership for Faithful Innovation project, the Continuous Growth Pathway program shared with the Southeastern Minnesota Synod and Gustavus Adolphus College have all been an important part of my work, but two in particular are the main areas of responsibility in my role in the synod office.

Of all my responsibilities in this office, the work I've done with congregations in the call process accounts for the largest amount of time spent. The search for a new rostered minister can sometimes be a long and frustrating experience for call committees and congregations but also a wonderful time of discovery as churches examine who they are and how they want to live out their vocations as God's people. This has also been a great opportunity for me to get to know the specific churches and church leaders with whom I work in the five western conferences of the synod. My favorite days in this process have been the days I've installed pastors in their new calls. There is palpable feeling of excitement and expectation as church members and pastors begin their journey together in furthering God's mission in their community that makes all the work, waiting, and praying, worthwhile.

Candidacy is the other main responsibility in my job. It has been encouraging to see how God continues to call individuals to discern their future as rostered leaders in the church. Each person has their own story of how God has been at work in their lives and their own vision of how God might continue to use their gifts in service to others. We have candidates of various backgrounds, experiences, and ages, from those just out of college to those who have discerned a call to ministry in their 60s. My role, and the role of the Candidacy Committee is to walk alongside each of these candidates in their journey of discernment. It has been a privilege to do so. This year we hosted an online retreat to give candidates the opportunity to meet members of the Candidacy Committee, participate in Bible study together, give time for each of those attending to tell their call stories and share their experiences of a time when their church made a difference in their lives. Between our candidates and committee members there were 30 people in the Zoom call; something that would not have been possible if we had tried to meet in person. I would not be surprised if this is a format that we continue to use in the future in order to best meet the needs of the candidates.

These past 16+ months have been an incredible challenge for churches and rostered leaders alike and I grieve the toll COVID has taken on individuals and families the world over, but somehow God has managed to bring about good things even in the midst of these very difficult times. We have had to let go of the old way of doing things and find new ways to do our work. Our candidacy interviews and retreat, our Fall Theological Conference, various workshops, and meetings all needed to take place online, and while at times it may have been less than ideal, we have also had the opportunity for greater engagement with churches and pastors across the synod. Regular check-ins with rostered and congregational leaders allowed us to share information and learn from each other as we adapted to a form of communication we have not widely used before. Our work with Luther Seminary and the Leadership for Faithful Innovation project has given us the courage to experiment and sometimes fail, while all the time asking the question "What is God up to here and how can we get on board with what God is already doing?"

No matter what the challenges and opportunities the Southwestern Minnesota Synod will face in the future, I believe this is a question that will continue to be asked and serve as a guide for the new bishop, staff members, rostered leaders, and congregations across our synod. I look forward to seeing how this question will be answered going forward. Finally, as Paul said in his letter to the Philippians,

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

My deepest thanks for the privilege of serving you as Synod Minister. God's blessings on you all.

Rev. Kathryn Skoglund