

Rev. Stephen Cook, Synod Minister

2021 Synod Assembly Report

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Synod Minister for Equipping Congregations

A friend put this up on their social media over a year ago.

Dear Everybody- Since I've not pastored people thru a pandemic before, I don't know all the answers. But I'm paying attention to science and praying for wisdom. Together, we'll take courage, be patient, consider the least of these and press forward while loving our neighbors.

PS – Wash your hands!

I have adopted it as my own vision. This has been a strange year with unexpected challenges, yet the work of equipping congregations and their leaders has continued and even increased. We have continually adapting in near real time as the situation changed. Here are examples of that work.

Interim Ministry Collaborative - The current reality of clergy supply will be addressed elsewhere in reports and in the agenda. I will focus on the work of the Interim Ministry Collaborative that quickly moved online. We continue to sharpen our skills for working with congregations in transition. The Congregational Assessment Mission Planning process continues to be our preferred tool to help congregations develop their MSP. We have adapted it to the situation of fewer interim pastors. One experiment, currently underway, is for a consultant to work with a congregation on the study while other arrangements are made for weekly worship and ministry.

Ministry Basics – Planning was well underway for a day long workshop on lay visiting ministries for April 2020. This was quickly repurposed to a seminar on COVID-19 with a public health official, a hospital chaplain, and Bishop Jon. We adopted Ministry Basics as monthly hour-long presentation of the sort that you would find on Equipping Congregations Day.

The Congregational Resource Team has engaged with eight (8) congregations to help with a structured listening process. We have also worked with Congregation Councils interested in best practices, as well as individual coaching for rostered and lay leaders.

Synod Endowment Fund awarded \$26,470 in Congregational Mission Grants which funded thirteen (13) projects to assist congregation to serve in new and expanded ways. The deadline for the next round of grants is July 1. You can find more information by [clicking here](#). In addition the Endowment fund supports seminary education and the two mission congregations in our synod.

Finally, a personal note. I began this Call in November of 2018. It is a fast-paced ministry which requires creativity and flexibility – which is right up my alley. As Bishop Jon ends his ministry, I am grateful for this opportunity to support his vision for the ministry of the congregations and people of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod. In the coming weeks I and the rest of the Synod Staff will focus on transition and continuity of ministry.

Respectfully submitted,
Stephen W. Cook