

Staff Reports to the Assembly

+Rev. Heather Culuris
Synod Minister for Engaging Leaders

In 2nd Corinthians 5:20, the Apostle Paul writes: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." Over these past almost 6 months, I have been getting to know the congregations and pastors and call committees and church council leaders and candidates for ministry in our synod. In just the last short 6 months, I have seen how our congregations and our lay leaders, and our rostered leaders are living out this call from the Apostle Paul. You are being ambassadors for Christ in your ministry, in your leadership, in your service, and in your daily lives.

It is an honor as part of my call as synod minister to be working with the Candidacy Committee in the synod and those preparing for rostered ministry in the church. Our synod right now is working with approximately 35 candidates in the various stages of preparation for ministry, from inquiring about the process all the way through to final approval and assignment for first call. Our candidacy committee meets at least 2 times a year for interviews and decisions for these candidates, but we also hope to be in contact with our candidates through the year. This year we hosted an online gathering for the committee and candidates in April via ZOOM. Part of our candidacy work is done in cooperation with our Region 3 synods and churchwide staff for retreats, discernment events, organization, and the First Call Consultation Process. The First Call Consultations happen about 4 times a year to assign first call leaders to the synods they will serve. Candidacy work is important work as together we support and help prepare candidates who will serve our church as rostered leaders, who will continue to be ambassadors for Christ.

A second part of my call as synod minister is to work with those congregations with pastoral openings and in the Call Process. Our synod has close to 50 congregations in the call process, as we work to match rostered leadership with the needs of the congregation. In visits to congregations at various stages in the call process for meetings and for worship, it is incredible to see all the ways that you are serving Christ in your communities and witnessing to Christ. Our staff meets each week to talk about all our congregations in the synod and leaders who are available for call to work to guide the call process forward in fruitful ways. In these opportunities to get to know congregations more fully, I see you being ambassadors for Christ.

I also attend a variety of meetings and serve as a liaison to a variety of committees. This includes attending rostered leaders conference meetings, as possible. I work with the Synod Assembly and Synod assembly worship planning team, as well as the Compensation and Guidelines committee, Scholarship committee, and the Synod WELCA group.

Leading worship in congregations is also an important part of this call to be a synod minister. It has been a joy to be present with an ever-growing number of congregations from Worthington to Hendricks to the College community at Gustavus to Sacred Heart to Pipestone for worship including installations of pastors, First Communion celebrations, and even Confirmation Sundays. Thank you for your welcome and for sharing the ways that you serve in your communities as ambassadors of Christ's grace and love for all people.

I am grateful also for my colleagues on the synod staff, both lay and ordained. They serve with a deep care and concern for the people and congregations of our synod. They are committed to serving Christ in this place and serving all of you. For Bishop Dee, Maggie Berggren, Kristin Bakeberg, Tammy Schacher, Pastor Steve Cook, and Pastor Troy Pflibsen, I am deeply grateful!

In peace,
Pastor Heather Culuris