

Staff Reports to the Assembly

+Rev. Stephen Cook

Synod Minister for Equipping Congregations

We are – pray God! – transitioning out of COVID times and into... what next? Who knows what “next” will look like? It won't be like the “before time.” Too much has happened. The murder of George Floyd. Growing partisan polarization. Continuing pressure of clergy supply issues.

This has been a strange year after a strange year with unexpected challenges, yet the work of equipping congregations and their leaders has continued and even increased. We have continually adapted as the situations change. Here are examples of that work.

Transitions and adjustments have been a theme this year. We prayed blessings and Godspeed on Bishop Emeritus Jon Anderson and Synod Minister Kathryn Skoglund at the end of September. Bishop Dee Pederson began her ministry on September 1. I am so grateful for our Transition Synod Ministers for helping with the western side of the synod which had been Pastor Kathryn's area.

New team colleagues – It has been a pleasure to welcome Pastor Troy Pflibsen as Director for Evangelical Ministry and Pastor Heather Culuris as Synod Minister. In the short time since, we have settled into a rhythm which I find rewarding.

Meeting New Congregations and Leaders – When Pastor Heather began her ministry, we reorganized geographic relationship. I now relate to the northern five conferences. This gives me that chance to do one of my favorite things – meet new pastors and congregation leaders in the Glacial Ridge and Lac qui Parle Conferences.

Call process and roster leader challenges – The market balance between pastors looking for calls and congregations looking for pastors is unlike any time in my ministry. The simplest way I think about it is that, in the past, the congregation chose among several pastors. Now it is the pastor who decides among several congregations. The immediate effect of this is that call processes have slowed down. The temptation is for Call Committees to “settle” for a pastor, instead of waiting for one who has the chemistry, competencies, and commitment that “fits” for the congregation and the community.

I also will point out that congregations that embrace the gifts of a LGBTQ2++ pastor, or a pastor of color, or a pastor whose first language is not English not only increases the numbers of available pastors but also brings pastors with gifts they hadn't imagined when they began the search.

The Congregational Resource Team has engaged with six (6) congregations to help with a structured listening process. We have also worked with Congregation Councils and Pastors interested in best practices, as well as individual coaching for rostered and lay leaders.

Equipping Congregations in old ways and new. A new series of Ministry Basics begins in the autumn, some of which will be in person. We also plan to bring back a new continuation of our annual Equipping Day in 2023!

Respectful submitted,

Stephen Cook
Synod Minister for Equipping Congregations