

Equipping the Saints Report – Synod Assembly 2023

Joyce: [slide 1] I am hoping at this point that it is common knowledge that we are engaged in the *Equipping the Saints* mission appeal to raise \$2.3 million for innovation and collaboration and leadership. [slide 2] The first collaboration grants have been disbursed and you will be hearing more about innovation grants. The 10% missional tithe on all funds received has been disbursed at the end of 2021 and 2022 to mission partners. [slide 3] Leadership funds are supporting our important diversity efforts and providing grants to rostered ministers. The first grants for professional development, student loan payments, or retirement contributions have been sent to recipients.

[slide 4] Stories of the impact Equipping the Saints funds are making in mission and ministry are available from the Equipping the Saints (ETS) link on the synod website.

Karina Ward and Pastor Aida Muniz, co-chairs of the newly forming racial equity team will share a few words about the impact leadership funds are having on our life together.

(1:00) **Karina:** This time last year, I had just attended the first meeting of the newly forming racial equity team. We met about monthly through summer and fall to talk about the work we wanted to do, never quite getting to the steps needed to activate. All of that changed in December when Pastor Afi came on board. She brought much needed guidance and direction to the newly forming racial equity team.

Pastor Afi played a key role in our team retreat this spring. The Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit hosted us, sharing their sacred space and setting the tone for our time together. More than 30 people came together that day from all corners of the Synod with a wide range of experience and perspective, including those of our Black, Indigenous, and Latinx brothers and sisters. We spent time sharing stories, hopes, fears, and dreams.

The team also began to collectively read *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* at Pastor Afi's recommendation. Through our discussions, we are building a shared language around somatic response that informs our conversations and the way we do our work.

With Pastor Afi's ongoing guidance and support, the racial equity team is equipped to guide and support the transformative change needed as we journey towards Blessed Community.

(1:00) **Pr Aida:** How from attending the Anti-Racism Retreat I ended up being a co-chair? God has a weird sense of humor. I guess that's how God deals with this stubborn child. God lovingly drags me to the places I say I don't want to go to, like Seminary and Wisconsin, far from culture, language, family and friends.

It took seven hours of traveling to officially become “a person of color” and in some cases “the other”, and in spite of my overwhelming European descentance, it appears to not come from the “right” side of the European continent.

This part of my journey has been filled with too many microaggressions. It’s time to accept the Spirit’s invitation to step-up, and be heard. In spite of all the fear and self-doubt that comes from being a minority in this country, I trust that God is cooking something good. So I see this with genuine curiosity and so I will follow. As you can see, the Equipping the Saints funds has had a major impact on my life in supporting the racial equity work of the synod and moving me to become co-chair!

Joyce: We will now hear from our global partners in the Meru Diocese on the impact of the missional tithes. [\[Mt Meru video\]](#)

Joyce: A major focus of this campaign is to explore how to be church in new ways in these times. Dr. Rose Dotson and Pastor Matt Short will share information on how your congregation can receive a grant for innovation.

Rose: Hello Everyone. I’m Dr. Rose Dotson, member of the GMS Mission Table and a Faithful Innovation coach for the past year.

The Mission Table is a group of ordained and lay servant leaders that accompany congregations and ministries in specific, intentional processes designed to enhance congregational vitality. We work with Pr. Matt Short finding ways to renew ministries by listening to God, one another, and to the people we serve and minister to with a heart of love.

As the Faithful Innovation coach of a GMS congregation, I witnessed the guiding team of this church gain confidence and become excited about sharing what they hear, asking questions, and discerning what God is saying when reading scripture and “Dwelling in the Word”. They have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to tell others how God has impacted their lives in specific situations. They designed and conducted small, yet powerful experiments within the congregation and in settings outside of the church. One experiment included renaming their weekly Bible study at a local restaurant to call it “Breakfast and Bibles”, getting to know key persons at the restaurant, and making sure there was an open/available chair and Bible at the table for anyone who wanted to join. They were thrilled to report at the subsequent coaching session that a new person joined and took a Bible home. This experiment is ongoing with little tweaks and hopes of inviting more new people to join.

We have also learned how doing little experiments can help us to behave our way into new ways of thinking and doing church by listening, acting and sharing. We are learning how to discern where God is leading His church. We are discovering fresh and creative ways to share the good news of salvation within and outside the physical church.

As we all know, it is no longer church as usual given we are living in the midst of a cultural shift. We can’t simply open the doors of the church and expect all the people that God wants us to

reach to just walk in the doors. We must take church, that is the message of the Gospel, to the people where they are in our communities and our world.

Matt: So. Dr. Rose and I are here today to make an exciting announcement. Because of the generosity and leadership of those who have already participated in the campaign, (and in anticipation that more congregations will join in to extend the impact) we are announcing today that beginning this Fall, any congregation who wants mission renewal training, and a great innovation coach like Dr. Rose, can get it...paid for by campaign funds. (Applause?) There will be a simple application process that will open in October. All you need is a hunger to reach more people, and a small team of folks at your church who are good listeners to work with a coach. You know, several years ago, I had a BIG idea...I thought, "how great would it be if every congregation in the synod had a team, and training, and a coach, for how to renew their sense of mission?" It would be like a synod revival! Now, because of Equipping the Saints, that is possible. So watch the synod e-news this Fall...we can't wait for you to experience this renewal as well.

Joyce: You can see [slide 6] from the slide that we are making progress toward our goal, and we are now inviting every congregation in the synod to participate!

Pastor John Norquist: WAIT! WAIT! WAIT! I have something say about this campaign!. I am Pastor John Norquist, pastor of Faith in Cedarburg. We volunteered to be a first round congregation and were amazed at the response to learning more about the ministries of our synod and to the generous response of our members! We finished over 150% of our goal, and that's not counting several advance gifts that were part of early synod giving. We have now taken what we learned about how to conduct a successful fund appeal and created our own internal fund appeal to build on our growing connections with our community. It is exciting to experience how vision leads to giving and generosity begets generosity!

Joyce: So, as I was saying, we have already achieved 48% of our goal. [slide 7] Early gifts came from our honor roll of giving of synod leaders, along with five first-round congregations. [slide 8] We have received significant gifts from congregations as they closed, and several congregations have combined the Equipping the Saints appeal with their own capital needs.

Pastor Karen Jost: WAIT! WAIT! WAIT! I have something to add! I'm Pastor Karen Jost from St. John's at Stone Bank, in rural Oconomowoc. We're a thriving but small congregation averaging 40 in worship, so we naturally assumed a big fund drive was not for us. However we needed to pay for some building repairs, and we wanted to contribute to Equipping the Saints, so we recently jumped on board the synod's plan to combine the two. With handholding and wisdom from the great consultant Mike Ward, we just passed our goal of engaging 20 participating households, and with money still coming in, we are already close to meeting our financial goal, 15% of which is designated for Equipping the Saints. That's just in 4 weeks! Doubt it not—the Spirit of the Lord is on the move in the GMS!

Joyce: Thank you for the interruptions on what this campaign means for congregation giving. [slide 9] Our honor roll of congregations continues to grow as congregations learn from our consultant Mike Ward about how to conduct a strong and successful campaign.

Pastor Jamie Larson-McLoone: WAIT! WAIT! WAIT! I have something to add. Gloria Dei is excited that we have made the Honor Roll of Congregations! And I wasn't even part of the "we" when the campaign started. Gloria Dei launched this campaign during an interim time. While they were in the process of calling me as their pastor, they were also spending five weeks being inspired by videos and personal stories about what this appeal means for our synod. I'm so glad I was there to share in the excitement of Commitment Sunday, when our members were inspired to give - and we exceeded our goal! This campaign has strengthened our sense of connection with our synod and the wider church in ways that I believe will continue to unfold!

Joyce: There are many ways for your congregation to join the honor roll. [slide 10] Following the Congregation Manual to conduct a five-week campaign will give your congregation the tools to conduct a campaign to meet any stewardship or capital needs. You can combine the ETS campaign with a capital or stewardship campaign, or you can give a special gift from an endowment or any other special giving. [slide 11] The next leader training is scheduled for Monday, June 26, at 10:00 a.m. via zoom. You are invited to come, receive the Congregation Manual, and learn how to conduct a successful fundraising campaign.

Eddie Gonzalez: WAIT! WAIT! WAIT! I am Eddie Gonzalez, president of Gethsemane Lutheran in Brookfield. We are excited to hear that we aren't too late to join the campaign! Our congregation is looking forward to participating and learning how Equipping the Saints can strengthen our own congregation's generosity and help us connect more fully with our mission and ministries together across the synod.

Joyce: We are able to be church in new ways, touch lives, and strengthen leaders through this appeal—and give every member in each of our GMS congregations the opportunity to hear the message and decide for themselves whether they want to give. [slide 12] To learn more, go to the GMS/equipping the saints website, or feel free to contact me or Bishop Erickson for more information!