

Vice President's Report to the 2016 Synod Assembly

One of the duties of the Greater Milwaukee Synod (the Synod) is assisting congregations with mission objectives and pastoral transitions. Therefore, the Synod may not regularly communicate with a healthy congregation if there is a stable membership, good financial situation and long serving pastor. The Synod does regularly communicate with pastors through seminars and updates on changes in ELCA policy.

The Synod Council focuses on many aspects of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. These include the Bishop, staff, finances, service to congregations, resolutions presented at Assembly and policies that impact congregations.

Who we serve:

The Synod advises congregations in need, grows and sustains pastoral leaders, partners with congregations both locally and globally, raises up youth and cross-generational ministry and represents the ELCA in the Greater Milwaukee Area. The Synod staff and the Bishop work together to fulfill these duties daily. The Synod Council receives reports on their progress and sets policies which support both the Synod and ELCA goals.

The Director of Rostered Leadership is responsible for assisting congregations in the call process for new pastors, in addition to developing and continuing to equip the pastoral leadership currently in place. The Greater Milwaukee Synod, along with many congregations, supports the community through Lutheran Campus Ministry, Lutheran School of Theology, Hispanic ministries, anti-racism training, and The Table ministry, as well as congregations in El Salvador and Tanzania. Other relationships include Serenity Inns, Mt. Meru Coffee Project, Zeidler Center for Public Discussion, Outreach for Hope, Synod Endowment Fund and Reconciled in Christ (RIC). The Synod Council reviews reports on all of these local programs, in addition to national ELCA programs, throughout the year.

Our Mission Support:

Starting in September 2014, the Synod Council focused time each meeting on our finances and the decline in mission support to the Synod. At the 2015 Synod Assembly, mission support from congregations was over \$2 million dollars for 2014, but was likely to drop under that amount in 2015 if nothing was done. One of the goals at the Assembly was raising awareness of the decline in mission support for the Greater Milwaukee Synod. There were testimonials from a variety of congregation members to remind people of how contributions to support the missions of the Synod and ELCA are used.

I am happy to report that for 2015, total mission support to the Synod was \$2,039,000, which is above the \$2.0 million our goal. I am also encouraged that as of April 30, 2016, mission support contributions are on target to again reach the \$2.0 million level.

Your support of our mission above the \$2.0 million threshold allows us to continue to fully support the ELCA, Synod offices and local groups.

Focusing on Policy:

The Church, including the ELCA, Greater Milwaukee Synod, and individual congregations are experiencing an increase in operating costs. Congregations are finding it difficult to maintain pay and benefits for rostered leaders at the minimum guidelines set by the Synod.

The Synod Council is looking at this issue and doing an anonymous survey of congregations to compare actual pastoral pay with Synod minimum compensation and benefit guidelines. We are also contacting other synods throughout the Midwest to compare their pastoral compensation and benefit guidelines. In addition, we are considering the individual economic conditions that pastors face serving in different geographic areas within the Greater Milwaukee Synod.

Bishop Election:

The ELCA requires a Bishop election to be held every six years. The Greater Milwaukee Synod will be electing its Bishop during the 2016 Assembly. In a letter to congregations, Bishop Jeff Barrow indicated that he would not be running for another term. This was a difficult decision for Bishop Jeff, and we honor him for his service with prayer and thanksgiving at this Assembly.

At the 2015 Synod Assembly, the voting members approved a new policy for the Bishop election. This policy mandates the formation of a Bishop Election Team, with oversight by the Synod Council. The Election Team has done a great deal of work including establishing a website, holding four forums with questions of the pre-nomination candidates, answering many questions from congregational leaders and now preparing to monitor the election of the Bishop at this Assembly.

We are blessed to have many wonderful volunteers for this Synod. I know that volunteering for one more thing is not something any of the eleven members of the Election Team planned to do, but they have performed their service without complaining. We see the positive results of their work on the Election website and the large turnouts at Candidate Forums.

Final Words:

I am fortunate to work with a great Synod Council and wonderful Synod Staff, making my job as Vice-President much easier. I am also blessed to have worked with and gotten to know the current Bishop, Reverend Jeff Barrow. The Synod has greatly benefitted from his diligent work.