

## Report of the Synod Council

Saturday, June 2, 2018

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As a Report of the Synod Council, I will briefly highlight the work of the Council this past year, but will largely focus on our work as a Council and a synod for the coming year.

As your elected representatives to serve as the governing body of the synod, I would like to invite the members of the Synod Council to stand and be recognized. The work of the council between assemblies includes review of financial reports, approving synod calls, receiving reports of the work of synod staff and synod ministries, establishing policies, and serving as a sounding board for areas of deliberation by the bishop. With this past year being a year when half of the synod council was new to the role, it was a year to get to know one another, share our gifts with one another, and begin dialogue on where we see God calling us as a synod.

I think in terms of academic year, so as we begin this 2018-2019 year of the synod with a continuing synod council, we have the opportunity to engage in sustained discussions of who we are as a synod and where God is calling us to be as God's people in this time, and this place.

We are a unique synod with rich diversity within a relatively small geographic area. We are rural, urban, and suburban, with people of a spectrum of racial and ethnic backgrounds and gender and sexual identities. We are rich and poor, old and young, liberal and conservative, abled and people with disabilities—with a range of individualities in each identity. We embody the wonder and joy of difference, and yet we share a sameness in our identity as baptized, redeemed, children of God. We do not lose our differences within that sameness, but rather find greater reason to keep on talking as we work to discern our mission as a synod.

Our current mission statement was accepted in 2009 and states “Ignited by God’s Love, Burning for Justice, We Embrace the World.” While it has served the synod for its time, developing a new mission statement can serve as an impetus for us collectively to wrestle with who we are, what we do, and how we have an impact in our communities and world. We live in challenging times as many norms and traditions are shifting. Many of our institutions—agriculture, industry, health care, higher education, and churches—are experiencing fundamental changes. We see churches close and memberships decline, as more people identify their church affiliation as “none.” We seek to be more multicultural as we remain embedded in white cultural norms and practices. We see conflict erupting more quickly as we live in a climate of divisiveness and either-or thinking. We struggle for justice as the gulf widens between the very rich and the rest. And so we ask, who are we as a synod in these times, what we are called to do, and what is the impact we seek to have? In a few minutes, we will begin to explore those questions.

When I contemplate call and mission, a passage that resonates deeply with me is Jesus’ call to “take up your cross and follow me.” My hearing of that call, however, is always translated in my head as “take up your courage and follow me.” Understanding of “cross” can take many different directions, but “courage” challenges me to stand up, to speak up, and to take action. It calls me out of myself into something larger . . . into something with meaning; something that isn’t easy. It is the hard stuff that Reggie Jackson talked about Thursday evening. The way of the Gospel requires courage. It takes courage to follow Jesus in the ways of justice and love and peace.

Bishop Erickson and the staff have focused all of us in this assembly on Curiosity, Compassion, and Courage, with significant conversations during Friday's breakout sessions. With that, I have also started to contemplate what it means to "take up your 'curiosity' and follow me." What are we being called to question? How are we challenged to think critically and to dig deeper? What do we need to be asking—and pressing others to ask—in order to come closer to finding where God is calling us?

And what does it mean to "take up your 'compassion' and follow me?" How do we turn our focus onto those who need it most? What stories do we need to carry on our hearts to deepen our understanding of others and broaden our perspectives and to see differently? In a time of bullying and name calling and being OK with holding whole groups of people at arm's length and casting them as "other" – what does it mean to have compassion?

As we begin to define our mission as a synod, I would add a fourth word of "community." Through my years as an Associate in Ministry in a congregation, as Executive Director of Lutheran Human Relations Association, and now as a Senior Administrator in higher education, my mantra has always been, "relationships, relationships, relationships." We can work around one another or alongside one another and sometimes against one another, but we work WITH one another when we are in relationship. When I sit with you and hear your story, I see you in a new way. We may still disagree, but now I can begin to understand where and how your perspective was shaped and formed. And if you hear my story, you can begin to understand how my perspective came to be—and together we can find new pathways through troubling issues. The synod council members have likely picked up by now that building community is essential for me as I find some way to invite sharing as part of my report at each synod council meeting. What we do together will move more quickly and be stronger if we have taken the time to build community.

So now, as part of my report, I will invite each of you here to be part of the process of building community as we engage in a first step of exploring and shaping our mission as a synod. On your tables are note cards and markers. We will work within our table sections to take up three different questions as part of the mission-building process. I ask you first to discuss your assigned question with one other person. Write your response(s) as a pair on a note card. Then as pairs, share your response to the question with the others at your table. Take another card as a group and label it as "TABLE CARD." On that card list the response(s) that have emerged as patterns or similarities that speak for you as a table group. The steps in the process are on the screen.

The pink section will look at the question of "who are we?" This will involve defining people and place. What defines us a synod? Are we worshipping communities, congregations, communities of God's people? Are we limited to synod geographic boundaries? Who do we seek to touch? Who are we called to serve as people of curiosity, compassion, and courage? List and describe who we are.

The green and yellow sections will look at the question of "what are we called to do?" What are our actions of curiosity, compassion, and courage? What is our purpose as a synod? How do we serve; how do we show up for others around us? List and describe our actions—what we do.

The orange and blue sections will look at the question of the impact we seek to have; what change do we hope to create? What do we hope to see as a result of our actions? If we have been people of curiosity, compassion, and courage, and we have been taking actions that exemplify those qualities, how will people and realities within the synod—and beyond—show that we have been at work? Describe the impact that you see we as a synod seek to have on the world.

Take about 4 minutes in pairs to share your individual responses and write those on a card. Then take about 8 minutes as a table to discuss your responses. Write those collective responses on a TABLE CARD. I will call us back together in about 12 minutes.

When time is up, one table group from each question will share their responses to the whole assembly.

Thank you for your time and participation. Will you please hold up all of the cards from your table for the pages to collect.

You are now part of our process as a synod to develop a mission statement that can clearly speak to the world about who we are as God's people in this time and place, what we do, and how we have an impact on our communities. We will take all your notecards here today and work with them as a synod council to begin to draft a mission statement. We will come back to you through cluster gatherings, the February Congregations in Mission event, and other possible gatherings to continue the dialogue to seek to discern our mission as a synod as we take up our curiosity, our compassion, and our courage to follow where Christ leads and where the Spirit blows.

Thank you.