The constitution and bylaws of the Greater Milwaukee Synod provide for 10 geographical clusters linking various congregations together to carry out several specific mandates on behalf of the synod. The cluster congregations together are to nominate on a defined schedule members from their cluster for positions on the Synod Council and the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The clusters were laid out geographically so that their close proximity might foster a relationship to work together as well as being a means to provide persons for synod elections that fairly represented all geographic areas of the synod. “The purpose of such groupings shall be to foster interdependent relationships among congregations, institutions, and synodical and churchwide units for mission purposes.” (GMS Constitution S12.01)

The Task Force held “Listening Sessions” at Our Savior’s-Milwaukee, St. John’s-Brookfield, Mount Pleasant-Racine, Christ the King-Port Washington and at the Congregational Leader’s Event at Mount Zion-Wauwautosa. In total only 20 people, other than task force members, representing 17 congregations and 8 clusters attended these sessions. We also met with the cluster deans. From this very small sampling some themes did emerge:

- The purpose of cluster is not clearly understood
- Beyond determining representation on Synod Council and Churchwide Assembly, cluster currently functions primarily to provide mutual support for rostered leaders
- There is a desire among the laity for a means to connect with people with shared interests who belong to congregations other than their own
- There is no consensus on the need for change in the current cluster structure

The resolution brought to the 2013 Synod Assembly by All People’s Church sought to bring diversity to the clusters with the hope that non-geographic groupings would lead to opportunity for discussion throughout the synod of hard issues such as racial justice and economic division and that these discussions might result in building relationships based on mutual interest and support. It is not clear to this task force how a different alignment of congregations would achieve these ends or necessarily increase the level of participation in cluster meetings. Attendance would continue to be self-determined without penalty or accountability.

Although this task force does not recommend re-organization of the cluster structure at this time, there is some interest in continuing the conversation around the possibility of cluster becoming a lay lead venue for increasing lay involvement in synod and churchwide ministries.

Respectfully submitted,

Esther Rusch, Chairperson

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