

Report of the Vice President

Four years ago I was elected as the Greater Milwaukee Synod Vice President. I have decided against running for a second term due to work and family commitments. These other commitments do not mean that it lessens my view of the importance of the Synod and the work that the Synod does. My decision is instead my belief that I cannot continue to put the same level of effort into the Synod position.

Rev. Jeff Barrow ended his services to our Synod on September 1st, but continues to pray for us, and the work that we do. Bishop Barrow presided over our contingent, who were voting members of the 2016 ELCA Churchwide assembly held in New Orleans, Louisiana in August, 2016. The Synod had a farewell to former Bishop Jeff in August 2016 at Our Savior's Lutheran Church on Wisconsin Avenue in Milwaukee.

Since the last assembly, we, as a Synod, have transitioned to a new bishop in Rev. Paul Erickson. Bishop Erickson decided it was important to get to know the congregations, pastors, and lay members of our Synod. He did this by setting up congregational meetings in each of our clusters. A cluster is a regional group of congregations in our Synod. An entire day was spent in each of the clusters to have time for one-on-one meetings with rostered leaders, lunch with pastors, and then an open meal and discussion period for lay and rostered members in the evening. The discussion was focused around five questions from the Bishop. These five questions have become a theme for our Synod to think about the future.

The Synod Council has now been working with the new Bishop for a nine months and continues to hear what he has learned about the Synod. Being an independent Council, we continue to provide advice, pray for, offer ideas, and support the Bishop.

The work of the Council this year has focused on issues raised from the Synod assembly by resolution, annual matters, and new issues that require a Synod focus.

Resolutions:

A separate report has been issued and included in the Assembly materials on the status of the resolutions from the 2016 Synod Assembly. Three of the resolutions were either directly or indirectly addressed by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in August. The three resolutions were on Black Lives Matter, limiting Investment in the Holy Land for companies assisting in or complicit in human rights violations for the people of Palestine, and to affirm the AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) strategy recently presented to the ELCA Church Council. The ELCA Assembly voted and approved resolutions similar to those three passed by our Synod Assembly. The ELCA Church Council was assigned to address the three issues, or assign it to ELCA divisions to address. The Synod Council report on the status of the 2016 Synod Assembly provides a status of actions that have taken place by the ELCA Church Council since our last Assembly on these matters.

The resolution on limiting investment in the Holy Land also called for the Synod to analyze its investments in five specific companies: G4S, Hewlett-Packard Enterprises, HP, Caterpillar, and Motorola Solutions. The resolution specifically stated that the Synod should divest of any direct investment or material indirect investment in these companies, because of their work in the Holy Land against the

Palestinian people. A separate report has been issued by the Synod Council on the analysis of the Synod's investments. The Synod has no direct investment in these companies, and the indirect investment is less than one-half of one percent, or an immaterial amount.

The Synod Council continued to monitor the 2014 Resolution 2 on matters relating to the Synod Assembly. This resolution was moved at 2014 assembly to be worked on by the Synod Council. The Resolution 2 2014 was looking at alternatives for the GMS annual assembly, including fees, number of days, participation, and getting new lay members interested in attending. The Synod Council assigned this task to the Synod Assembly Team, which plans the annual assembly. One of the results of this work is better data on who is attending our assembly. The results of this analysis are included in a separate report issued by the Synod Council.

Annual Items for Synod Council Review:

There are always various issues that come up each year for the Synod Council to address including renewal of the Synod lease, updates from member groups, reviewing and approving the Synod Assembly agenda, monitoring the Synod budget and approving the Annual Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Leaders and Congregational Leaders.

Compensation Guidelines

Our Council has seen many changes in the last four years to the Annual Compensation Guidelines issued by our Synod. Each Synod of the ELCA prepares a minimum compensation guidelines for Rostered Leaders (Pastors). The Greater Milwaukee Synod guidelines attempts to keep them in line with other synods in Wisconsin, Iowa and Northern Illinois. We will continue to monitor trends in compensation and stay within the range of the other synods in our market. The greatest change has been seen in health insurance costs, and housing allowance minimums.

We have seen the focus in the compensation guidelines shift from salaries alone to salaries and benefits. A new full time pastor now requires a congregation to commit, on average, \$90,000 of its annual budget to salaries and benefits. The total compensation package includes salaries, housing allowance, pension and health insurance. Health Insurance increases have exceeded the rate of inflation over the last several years, and are expected to continue to rise in the future. Several of our congregations, who are struggling financially, find it difficult to pay full-time pastors at this level, and maintain the minimum commitments for annual increases in the total compensation package. As a result, congregations fall below minimum guidelines. This places a stress on the pastor and the congregation. Certain congregations have reduced the time of pastors to either half-time or three-quarters time.

Annual Budget

Our council has also spent time focusing on the budget of the Synod. Synod budgets have been tight over recent years due to the decline in congregational giving to the Synod. Congregations give on average around 5% of their receipts to the Synod. Congregational giving could drop below \$2.0 million this year. The trend is believed to be a continuing decline, and thus the Council and the Synod Assembly must continue to address this issue with cuts to either the ELCA mission support, synod program groups or synod staff.

Currently, the Greater Milwaukee Synod provides 55% of its congregational giving to the ELCA. The remaining funds stay in the Synod to provide funding for programs and staff. We have seen a trend in other synods of the ELCA contribution percentage dropping. Of the twelve synods in ELCA region 5 from Northern Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin, 7 are below 55% and 5 are at or above 55%. Our synod has addressed the decline in giving by reducing costs, and putting in automatic reductions to program groups and the ELCA, if we drop below \$2.0 million in annual giving.

I cannot express enough, how blessed we have been to have Dave Groenewald as our finance director for the Synod. He is a dedicated financial person and person of God. Happy retirement Dave.

Member Groups

We attempt to hear from our member groups on an annual basis. This includes the Women of the ELCA, Reconciled in Christ, the Anti-Racism Team, Mt. Meru Coffee, Outreach for Hope, Diakonia, GMS Endowment Fund, Campus Ministry, and others. The goal is for the Council to stay up to date on what is happening with our member groups. We learn how they are serving the Greater Milwaukee Synod, and positive outreach that they have.

Synod Council

The members of the Synod Council include lay and rostered leaders, who devote their time six times a year to hear about the business of the synod. The Council provides advice, counsel and approves the direction for the Synod. The Council held a retreat this year to get closer together and learn more about the Synod. I realized that as Vice President, I should have done this long ago, not only for myself but for others on the Council. I appreciate the different experiences that each of the council members bring to the synod and our meeting. I thank each of them for volunteering their time.

Reflections:

When I ran for Synod Council Vice President, you could probably take my knowledge of the Synod and write it on a single piece of paper. Since that date, my knowledge of the Synod and the ELCA has increased several fold. Each meeting, I learn something new about the positive contributions of the synod and its congregations, and the challenges that we all face in the future. No road traveled is easy. I appreciate the Synod staff, who has been very welcoming of me and my many questions.

This year I struggled with my ability to recognize racism. I realize that I have a long way to go to better understand racism, and its impact. I appreciate that the Anti-Racism Team of the Greater Milwaukee Synod listened to me and allowed me to express myself on this issue. We all have things to learn, and each of us needs to recognize we are not perfect, and can all stand for improving ourselves.

At times, I feel that I have travelled on the road alone. This is simply because, I have forgotten about all of those who have travelled before me, and created the path. I realize when I am in church that a blessing is given each week to the leaders of the church, and that you and many others pray for all of us to continue on the right path. I appreciate your prayers. I also appreciate the opportunity that you have given me to be a Vice President of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. Thank you.