

## Vice President's Report to the 2019 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly

Once a year we gather in Assembly as voting members of each of our 121 congregations and three synodically authorized worshipping communities of the Greater Milwaukee Synod. Our work is visible, energizing, and engaging as we participate together in worship, debate, and dialogue.

Less visible is the work throughout the year, between assemblies, of the Synod Council, which serves as the governing body of the synod. The Synod Council reviews financial reports, approves synod calls, receives reports of the work of synod staff and synod ministries, establishes policies, serves as a sounding board for areas of deliberation by the bishop, and discusses and takes actions on initiatives for ministry within the synod. The published Report of the Synod Council for 2019, written by the Synod Secretary, highlights the actions of the Synod Council for the past year. Those actions include recommendations on a statement of vision, mission, values, and practices and recommendation for a proposed mission appeal, both of which will be voted on separately by this assembly.

In 1987 as the ELCA formed and the Greater Milwaukee Synod took shape, I was a member of that first Synod Council and a member of the Executive Committee. In those early years, the elected leaders and their work in shaping a new synod and its purpose and direction were more visible than they may be today, but the level of responsibility and direction is no less real now than it was then. Your elected leaders on the Synod Council meet every two months to provide guidance for the mission and ministry of the synod and to deliberate on the direction and meaning of our life together.

This assembly will be considering two key motions brought forward from the thoughtful deliberation of the synod council related to our mission and direction. In the coming year, the synod council will be considering changes to the structure of the synod in its mission clusters. Our life as a synod has been evolving over the past 32 years. At this point in time, we are poised to reaffirm our vision and identity as God's people in this time and place, to commit ourselves to growth in mission and new ways of being church, and to explore how we strengthen our relationship in partnership and mission across the geography of the synod.

The work of our synod is carried out by each of you in our congregations. It is supported and made real by the daily work and interactions of Bishop Erickson, his three assistants, and the five members of the synod staff. And it is governed by the work of the Synod Council between assemblies.

It has been an honor to serve with the members of the Council for the past two years. As we elect nine new members, we recognize and say thank you to those whose terms are expiring: Amber Davis, Rev. Kevin Kretzmann Farrar, Rev. Lindsay Jordan, Jerry Key, Rev. Pam Lange, Anja Logan, George Monis, Claire Zautke, and Rev. Tim Tahtinen.

While most of the retiring council members have served four years, I have had the honor of serving with them the past two years. Each of these members has brought insight and understanding to our meetings. I appreciate their active participation in the Council and their contributions to deliberations and decisions. In choosing to serve at the synod level, each of them has demonstrated a commitment to the larger church and to our collective ministry. We have a gift for each of these retiring members as a sign of our appreciation.

I would now like to recognize Matthew Brockmeier. Let us take a moment to consider the eight years of time and the impact of Matthew's service as synod secretary. As an educator, I enjoy active

engagement. So to make Matthew's impact visible, I invite everyone to stand who has served on the synod council at any point during the past eight years of Matthew's terms. Stay standing, and I invite everyone to stand who has served on a Reference and Counsel Committee during these years. Next, you may need to do some quick thinking and reflection on the year of your latest congregation constitution revision; I invite everyone to stand who has been part of a congregation who has consulted with Matthew in revising your congregation's constitution, bylaws, or continuing resolutions. Finally, I invite everyone to stand who has read Matthew's highlights of synod council meetings as posted on the Synod Listserve. Thank you (you may be seated).

Your standing not only reflects the extent of our thanks to Matthew for his service, but also reflects the breadth and depth of the work of your elected synod leaders. For those of us who have served with Matthew, we know and appreciate his attention to detail, his understanding of the language of resolutions and memorials, his knowledge of representational principles and terms of office, and his ability to cite section and verse of the synod constitution, along with the model congregation constitution. Matthew, I have only served for two of your eight years, but I deeply appreciate your knowledge and support. It has been a gift to serve in leadership with you and to know your commitment to justice and equity. With thanks for all you have given, we have a special gift for you.

We will now look at one area of significant work of the Council this past year. At the Synod Assembly last year, we began the process of reviewing and articulating our synod mission. As a reminder, the current mission statement has been: "Ignited by God's love, Burning for Justice, We embrace the world."

During table conversations at last year's assembly, those who were present addressed questions of who we are, what we are called to do, and the impact we seek to have. I transcribed that large stack of note cards, noting common themes that fell into four areas of 1) Know Christ/Share the Gospel, 2) Build authentic community, 3) Treasure diversity/Connect across difference, and 4) Outreach and service. These themes identified by the assembly have informed each iteration of the statement that is coming before us.

The assembly responses were part of the input for a day-long Synod Council retreat in November that focused on shaping a first draft of the synod's vision, mission, values, and practices. That first draft was presented at the February Together in Mission event, with two workshops led by Bishop Erickson for feedback and responses. The process for gathering feedback was open until March 5<sup>th</sup> with numerous responses submitted online.

All of the feedback on the first draft was instrumental in shaping a second draft, which was considered by the Synod Council at the March meeting. The small group discussions and thoughtful deliberation at that council meeting was reflected in needing additional time for revisions to that second draft before it was approved by the Synod Council. The second draft was posted online at the end of March and was open for comments until May 9<sup>th</sup>. All assembly participants were invited and encouraged to read and comment on that draft.

Fifty-seven comments were posted on the second draft and led to several additional important changes, including adding the Practice of Invitation. The draft that is now coming before you is significantly different from the first draft because of the extensive input and engagement from many of you throughout the synod. This has been a year-long process of engagement and reflection to bring a statement of vision, mission, values, and practices that reflects the view of being church in the Greater Milwaukee Synod.

The deep level of engagement speaks to the care and commitment of this synod to speak to who God calls us to be. As we prepare to hear the statement and to deliberate as an assembly, I would like to do that with Paul's prayer from Ephesians 1:17-19: "I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power."

To cultivate "eyes of the heart enlightened" we will need to see and live out this vision and mission in a more expansive way, recognizing where our current vision is limited. We have to see with more than our eyes and minds. We have to see with the eyes of our hearts enlightened. This new, deeper, more expansive way of seeing requires our curiosity, compassion, courage, and collaboration. It requires walking with trust into a new way of being church and being willing to listen and follow where God is leading. There will be much more to come as we pray and listen and discern what this vision, mission, values, and practices mean for the new ways God is calling and the new places to which we are called.

With the background on the deliberative work of this past year, I invite you to turn to page 15 in the Assembly booklet or to click on the link to Vision, Mission, Values, Practices Statement in Booklet Resources in the Guidebook app. You can follow the statement as it is read by members of the Synod Council.

Presentation of motion for approval of statement.

Joyce A. Caldwell, PhD  
Vice President  
Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA