

Update on Synod Ministry  
Saturday, January 23, 2021  
Bishop Paul Erickson  
Greater Milwaukee Synod

Please note that this is not my full annual report, as that will be presented at the next regular synod assembly. As I noted in the orientation before we began today, the synod council has voted to hold that assembly on our original dates of April 30 and May 1, 2021 on a digital platform. We just do not believe that we will be in a position to gather 400 people at the Italian Community Center by then. The ICC has agreed to move all our deposits forward to 2022, and we are currently planning on holding that assembly on May 20-21, 2022.

I'd like to share just a few comments on three areas of our synod work: staff, finances, and ministry. When it became apparent that the pandemic would cause us to change where and how we worked and did most everything else, the synod staff pivoted to work remotely, as many of you have done, as well. Our office remains closed to the general public, and most of our staff continue to do most of their work from home. It's a lot of email and a lot of Zoom. I'm proud of the ways that our staff have adapted and collaborated in the face of these challenges. Our partner in ministry, Outreach for Hope, welcomed a new Executive Director, Pastor Chris Manke, who began his work with OFH in August, and we look forward to continuing our strong collaboration with this ministry for years to come. If we were in person, I would invite the staff to stand and ask that we thank them with applause, but we'll have to imagine your applause for now. Deep, deep thanks to Pastors Kristin Nielsen, Jennifer Arnold, and Matt Short, as well as Mary Romskog, Phil Smith, Lee Johnston, and Robyn DiGiacinto, who, along with Pastor Chris Manke and Pastors Matthew and Jennifer Rose, are all working hard here on the various tasks of making this digital assembly happen.

I'd now like to share a few comments on how we are doing financially. As was announced in recent communications, we are mourning the death of our synod treasurer, Tom Gauthier, who died on January 13 after a brief battle with cancer. Tom was a member at Grace Lutheran Church in Thiensville, where the family held a small, private service yesterday that was recorded, and which will be made available for viewing in the coming days. A larger, more public gathering will be held at some point in the future. We will miss Tom's joyful spirit and generous heart.

Our governing documents indicate that the bishop, with the approval of the synod executive committee, can arrange for someone to serve as acting treasurer in these situations until a new treasurer can be elected at the next synod assembly. I am grateful that Bob Reinders from Living Faith Lutheran Church in Racine has agreed to serve in this interim capacity. Bob has served on the synod council since 2017, he serves on the Outreach for Hope board of directors, and serves as his congregation's treasurer, as well. What follows not a full, financial report, as Bob will share that at the regular assembly, just a few highlights.

You may recall that the synod's fiscal year ends on January 31, allowing congregations to send in their final mission support contributions. Our synod budget anticipated receipt of \$1.8 million this year, and at the end of December, we had received just over \$1.5 million. Based on receipts so far this month, we believe that we will come very close to reaching our budget projections, and I encourage all congregations to submit their mission support contributions before the end of the month. We also applied for and received a Paycheck Protection Program loan from the federal government in the amount of \$163,000, which we expect to be fully

forgiven. This will most likely result in our ending the year without using any of our reserves as had been budgeted, but to instead add funds to our reserves. You may be aware that organizations are eligible for a second PPP loan if they experienced at least a 25% decrease in income for any quarter of 2020 in comparison with the previous year. Thanks to the strong support of our congregations, we did not experience that size of a decrease in any quarter of the year. Thank for all your support.

I would also like to share that the synod and Outreach for Hope partnered in a special appeal last Spring, and together we raised over \$90,000 for COVID-19 ministry grants and to support Project Lunchbox which provided additional food for various food ministries in the synod. In addition, the ELCA conducted a COVID-19 appeal, and the Greater Milwaukee Synod applied for, received, and distributed over \$65,000 in grants from our churchwide partners for congregational support, emergency relief, and technology upgrades. We are deeply grateful for the generosity, partnership, and innovation demonstrated by so many folks across this marvelous synod. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Lastly, I'd like to share just a brief update on some of the ways that we have worked to accompany congregations and leaders in this very challenging year. Just as so many of the congregations and leaders of the synod had to pivot and find new ways to worship, connect, and serve, I'm grateful that we've been able to offer weekly zoom meetings for our rostered ministers, provide pre-recorded worship services for congregational use for eight different Sundays, and offer a number of other opportunities to explore and discuss relevant topics throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, I had no idea I would be called upon to write so many letters offering reflections and guidance as we sought to respond with wisdom and courage to the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic, racial injustice, and political turmoil. Through it all, I'm pretty sure that I and we didn't always get it right. I'm grateful for your prayers, your partnership, your patience, and your support. We're in this together, and regardless of what this next year or any year brings, I'm glad to be in it with all of you, and I am grateful and proud to be able to serve as your bishop.